

THE PIONEER



A YEAR WE WILL NEVER FORGET

A HUGE TEAM OF VOLUNTEERS FROM BICESTER HAVE SACRIFICED THEIR TIME TO TAKE PART IN A NATIONAL PROJECT TO FEED NHS WORKERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY WITH OVER A MILLION MEALS



Front Cover

Lt. Col Billy Dilkes looking rather fetching in his hi-viz

Picture: David Thrower



Back Cover

Captain Tom - not a Pioneer however what he symbolises one of the best memories of 2020

Picture: Chloe Buckett

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EDITORIAL

FELLOW Pioneers, what a year it has been. I can only hope that you are managing to stay safe in these unsettling times and that you have enough support around you to continue to make a difference. It's extremely sad to see so many of the events, that I know you love and cherish, be cancelled due to COVID. Our weekend and AGM, the Officers' Club dinner, Field of Remembrance, the Cenotaph - to name but a few.

I would encourage you to reach out and make contact with your friends and mates. Sometimes the isolation is extremely lonely and I know from having spoken to many folk over the last few months that a little thought, or gesture, can go a long way.

As ever my thanks go to the Council for helping me keep things on track and in particular Norman who is busy behind the scenes as ever. God speed to you all and fingers crossed that we can meet again in the not too distant future.

May I wish you and your families a very merry Christmas and a prosperous (and covid free!) New Year. All the best.

Brig David Clouston MBE

GREETINGS once again to all members in what must be one of the most extraordinary years since World War 2! Cancel, cancel, cancel was the common word throughout the year. It started with the 39/93 Club meet, quickly followed by the Army v Navy game at Twickenham (we had ordered 225 tickets – these arrived the day it was announced the match had been cancelled). The Pioneer Reunion Weekend was the next to fall then the Past and Present Officers' Dinner. I have not included local Branch events which had also been cancelled.

We had 105 members wishing to march at the Cenotaph this year only to be advised by the British Legion that each Association was limited to 8! The lucky names were drawn out of the hat, I hope they do us proud on the day. UPDATE: this has now been cancelled.

The key is to stay safe and well if we can, and to look after those who have been unwell or who need to isolate themselves from the risks of Coronavirus.

I have been in touch with a large number of our members since March who were all well at the time I contacted them, although a few had survived after contacting the disease. Fingers

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|---|---|

STOP PRESS

■ I hope we have a reunion in June, hopefully June 2021! Again in Bicester!

STOP PRESS

■ Recently, in-pensioner Roy Palmer met David Beckham at Chelsea Hospital

STOP PRESS

■ Have we got your email address, we would like to keep in touch with you.

■ We now have 3 Pioneer flags (old and new badges and crossed axes). £30 each, this includes postage!



crossed that everyone is still OK and weathering the storm.

Once again I have to publish a long list of members who we have sadly lost in the past year – among them some “Corps Characters” i.e. Stuart Travis, Jimmy Atkins and John Atkinson (who last year made a wonderful speech in front of HM The Queen at the 80th Anniversary of D Day) to name a few.

Hopefully 2021 will be an improvement. We are going to try to arrange a reunion in Bicester in June – normally we would send out a booking form with this newsletter however we hope to send this out with the March Association update.

In every issue of the Newsletter I ask members to inform me of a change of address and after distribution I have between 40 and 50 newsletters return “Gone Away” or “Not known at this address”. Please let me know when you have moved.

This is equally important if you change your email address, when I send out a “Round Robin” Association update I also get a few emails bounce. If you do not receive these Association updates please let me have your email address by sending details to:

royalpioneercorps@gmail.com.

Once again I am enclosing tickets for the Christmas Draw, this is one of the few ways the Association has to generate funds so please give this your fullest support.

If you can manage to sell more tickets please let me know. Because of the late distribution of this newsletter the draw will now take place in January.

The opening pages of the Newsletter contain details of the help given to the NHS by Lt Col Billy Dilkes and his team of volunteers, many from the Bicester Branch of the Association, this team managed to pack 1,000,000 meals for the NHS in a very short time - quite an achievement. I must apologise for the front cover, I hope it does not scare you too much (we know that Halloween is over!)

Articles are always required for the Newsletter, I must thank Tony Lunn for the wonderful photographs of the First Gulf War he sent in.

We have produced quite a few of them. Please send your photos/stories to the RPC Association, don't worry we will edit them for you if required.

Norman Brown



Can you spot the mouse?



The winner of “Find the Cuneo Mouse” was J E Raynor.

A prize will be on its way to him. It was on page 13 sitting on the metal barrier in front of the blond lady

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 31st January 2020.

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

PLEASE SUPPORT THE CHRISTMAS DRAW
Tickets are enclosed with this newsletter



Meals for the NHS



The ambition for this charity is to ship 1 million nutritious meals to the NHS frontline over 11 weeks. In order to achieve this goal, hanger 113 at Bicester Motion has been commissioned from scratch, as a fully functioning pick, pack and shipping facility.

In late March 2020, HQ Bicester Garrison was in the process of welcoming the new Garrison Commander, Lt Col Alex Atherton RLC. Although new in appointment Col Alex knew the Garrison very well having spent a large percentage of his career with 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC.

On the 2nd April 2020, The Commander 11 (Inf) Brigade requested that Col Alex supports (where possible) a project that would hopefully allow "One Million Meals" to be prepared, packed and delivered to Hospitals across England in support of our NHS Doctors, Nurses and Support Staff working within the COVID-19 Wards.

Multimillionaire and former F1 Chief Ron Dennis along with his anaesthetist daughter, Dr Charlotte Hall decided they would launch a project that would deliver

one MILLION restaurant quality meals to the frontline NHS staff amid the coronavirus crisis. This would allow our brave NHS workers the ability to work, sometimes up to 18 hours without worrying what meals/snacks they would need to prepare. 'Meals For The NHS' would deliver either a 24 hour Boost Meal Box or a High Energy Snack Bag which would be provided directly to their ward. Additionally, any NHS worker suffering from COVID-19 and, as a result was isolating either at home or within their Nursing residence would receive a 5 Days Home Meal Pack that would hopefully assist them during recovery.

Whilst Bicester Garrison were busy collating logistical support for the planned location in Bicester Heritage Site, Ron Dennis very quickly persuaded some large-scale commercial business leaders to come

on board. In a matter of only 24hrs, he had the full support of TESCO's, YODEL and ABSOLUTE Taste, with some local catering icons such as Nigel Harris and Lyndy Redding (Owners of ABSOLUTE taste) project managing, plus some experienced helpers from Maclaren F1 Racing Team...

Everything seemed to be in place, the ideal location, the logistics support and the food. All that was missing now was the volunteers to come in and pack the urgently needed meals.

On Sunday 4th April 2020, the Garrison Commander knew that Lt Col Billy Dilkes had just returned home after 7 months on Operations with the United Nations and, as the Chairman of the Bicester Pioneer Association, he would possibly be able to influence Bicester Pioneer Veterans to come into the Heritage Site at short notice and

help deliver the initial outload of approximately 175 meals a day for the two local hospitals, The John Radcliffe in Oxford and The Horton in Banbury. Lt Col Billy Dilkes came on board immediately and arrived early on Mon 5th April 2020, with 15 Pioneer Veterans. They soon got to work and achieved the initial deliveries but it was clear, as the hospital numbers started to increase then so would the meals in order to sustain them.

Amongst the Pioneer Veterans they discussed options on how best to increase the volunteer force required to meet the demands at such short notice. Lt Col Billy Dilkes set up an initial Facebook Page calling it the "Bicester Pioneer Volunteers" and used the Bicester Pioneer Association membership to share the page with local relatives, friends and work colleagues hoping that volunteer numbers would start to increase as the week went on.

Within a space of only 3 days, the Bicester Pioneer Volunteers had evolved with approximately 500 volunteers from the local Bicester community and surrounding villages, all prepared to give up their free time in support of this worthy cause; word soon spread with the volunteer force quickly becoming a huge beast and after only 14 days, numbers were fast approaching the 1,500 mark. Col Billy

quickly arranged a Mobile Phone App that allowed people to pre-book which shifts they were available to attend which allowed the Pioneer Veterans the ability to manage the roll out of meals far, far better.

The Bicester Pioneer Volunteers had moved on at pace from one simple Production Line, out-loading approximately 600 Boost Meal Packs a day to six high intensity Production Lines delivering on average between 16 – 18,000 meals a day. We had expanded in size from approximately 30 volunteers per day to 160 per day. The local Bicester Community were continuously spreading the word via the Facebook page and the App and by the end of May 2020, we nearly reached 2,500 volunteers.

This Pandemic brought a lot of uncertainty to the Country, one being the obvious isolation through lockdown. However, without initial acknowledgment or thought that some of the Bicester Pioneer Volunteers lived alone or were experiencing other issues that could/would have become more severe if it wasn't for the opportunity of allowing them to join this huge team of volunteers, it could have been much worse. Volunteers came together, all from completely different levels of society that bonded as a team on an equal footing in order to achieve one goal,

to support the NHS! It was amazing to see personalities change, grow and become far more confident.

On Mon 6th June 2020, at 1030hrs, everyone involved in the project 'SalutetheNHS.Org' was there to witness the "One Millionth Meal" making its way down the Production Line for the final time, this included the likes of Ron Dennis, senior representatives from TESCO, YODEL and ABSOLUTE Taste plus other organisations who supported 'DreamChasing', part of 'TheDennisFoundation'.



When Ron Dennis had a family Zoom chat in which his doctor daughter revealed that exhausted NHS staff were “living off cornflakes” moved former Formula One chief Ron Dennis CBE to launch the SaluteTheNHS campaign to deliver a million meals to health workers.

Dr Charlotte Hall, who works in intensive care, explained to her family that after gruelling shifts treating Covid-19 patients, health workers were either finding supermarket shelves stripped bare by panic-buyers or were simply too fatigued to make anything nutritious for themselves.

Charlotte went on to say that doctors are working through ‘unprecedented and uncharted times’.

The issues are that this is unprecedented and uncharted time everyone is working incredibly hard’.

That moment prompted Mr Dennis, who has had a successful decades-long career at the top of McLaren, to create an operation from scratch to deliver healthy, fortifying meals to the nurses and doctors battling on the front line of the pandemic then engulfing hospitals.

This has been a truly memorable project that required huge amounts of kindness, determination and teamwork.

The Bicester Pioneer Association demonstrated once again the Pioneer spirit

required to make something work out of nothing.

Through their hard work, approachability, great management skills and ability to bring people together, they, collectively have made a great community even greater.

Mr Dennis said there will be sadness among the hundreds of volunteers, many of whom have made new friends through the thousands of hours they have dedicated together to support NHS workers.

“No one should not look back on this without a sense of pride,” added Mr Dennis. “I was a facilitator but it was the volunteers that really made it all happen.”

Amongst those volunteering are men and women from 1 Regiment Royal Logistics Corps (RLC) and 241 Signals Squadrons volunteering. There are also veterans from Pioneer Regiment (now RLC).

The following member of the Pioneer Family should be CONGRATULATED on their hard work:

- Lt Col Alex Atherton**
- Maj Matty Barton**
- Matty Webb**
- Wayne “Robbo” Roberts**
- Stevie Haynes**
- Anthony “T” Taylor**
- Steve Earnshaw**
- SSgt Baz Rogers**

- Jon “Chambo” Chamberlain**
- Danny “Spud” Parker**
- WO1 Al & Debs Batchelor**
- Kev & Jeanette Foster**
- Jonny Dau**
- Mark Stapes**
- Jo “Paddy” Johnson**
- W02 (CSM) Lee Payne – MPGS**
- W02 (SSM) Janine Crowdy – Royal Signals**
- Mrs Ellisa & Leaha Orrell** ■





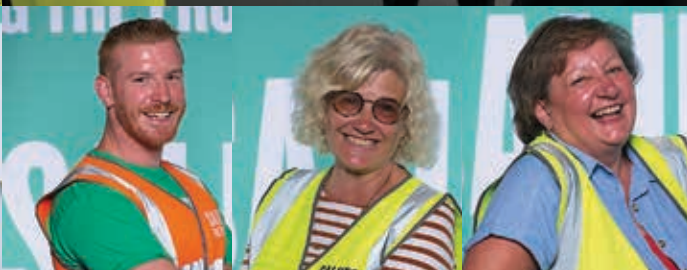
















■ A SNAPSHOT of the lives that thousands of UK military personnel who served in post-1945 Germany led has been unveiled at the National Army Museum.

The "From Foe to Friend" exhibition charts the history of the British presence in the country, from the days when it was the interface with the Eastern Bloc to the eventual scaling down.

An array of photographs and memorabilia show a story of contrasts, ranging from huge NATO exercises to espionage, as well as the day-to-day routine of families.

Entry to the showcase, which is running until July next year, is free, but a booked time slot is required. For more details see: www.nam.ac.uk

■ THE NATIONAL Memorial Arboretum has been elevated into the top ten per cent of worldwide visitor attractions after winning a 2020 Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Award.

The multiple award-winning 150-acre woodland and garden site in Staffordshire has been recognised by the world's largest travel platform for its collection of some 25,000 trees and nearly 400 memorials and tributes to the fallen.

Kanika Soni, chief commercial officer at Tripadvisor, said. "Award winners are beloved for their exceptional service and quality and they should be proud of this distinguished recognition. Not only are they well deserving, they are also a great source of inspiration for travellers as they begin to venture out again."

■ **VETERANS RAILCARD** - for those who will benefit from the Veterans Railcard, please purchase before 31 Mar 21, for the discount price of £21; thereafter it goes up to £30 per annum.

Order online at www.veterans-railcard.co.uk. It's a simple application form and provides you with further details on usage but in essence it's up to 33% discount.

■ **NEW EXHIBITIONS AT DUXFORD** - to mark this year's 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain, two new exhibitions at IWM Duxford - Battle of Britain: Ops Block and the transformed Battle of Britain Exhibition in Hanger 4. Ops Block enables visitors to walk through the nerve centre of RAF Duxford, with accounts from those who worked there and a multisensory recreation of the events on the ground on 15 September 1940, when the Battle of Britain reached its climax. Rooms dedicated to 'people stories' are also new, and there is more on the role of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. The updated Battle of Britain Exhibition features iconic Second World War aircraft and interactive displays, and explores Duxford's historic links with the Supermarine Spitfire, as the base of the first operational Spitfire Squadron.

And if you can't visit in person, why not try IWM's free virtual-reality experience, detecting and identifying incoming raids from the Luftwaffe and reporting back to Fighter Command.

Simply visit <https://observercorps.iwm.org.uk>

■ The Princess Royal, Colonel-in-Chief of the RLC was promoted to the roles of General in the Army and Air Chief Marshall in the RAF on her 70th birthday (15 August)

VJ Day at Chelsea Hospital

While VE Day (Victory in Europe) marked the end of the WW2 in Europe in May 1945, thousands of Armed Forces personnel continued fighting in the Far East. Victory over Japan Day (VJ Day) marks the day Japan surrendered on the 15 August 1945. Although a large number of celebrations were cancelled to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of VJ Day, our In Pensioner Roy Palmer donned his town criers outfit and made the following declaration



Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!

Victory in Europe
Was on the Eighth Day of May
Now it's August fifteenth,
So what on this day.

Japan's now surrendered
and told to "Lay down it's arms.
Go back to your factories,
Offices and farms."

But in Singapore, Thailand
And Burma, no less
Our 'Forgotten Army'
Still had to clear up the mess.

We mustn't forget
The war in the Far East,
Or the lives which were lost,
Before the battles were ceased.

Three quarters of a century
Have passed since those days
And life has moved on,
In so many ways

So August Fifteenth
Became a day of celebration
As Japan agreed
To the Potsdam Declaration

An on September Second
At last it was done.
The World War was over,
The battle's been won.

VJ Day,
Is a day to be cherished
When we remember
All those who have perished.

Stand proudly my country,
Stand proudly with Britain
Do well on this cry
So proudly written

This Kingdom never gave up, and it must
never forget!

God
Save
The Queen



■ Just a small selection of Sallys amazing Pioneer face masks

Pictures: Sally Jane

Pioneer face masks

Sally at Knitterbugs Creations has been doing an amazing job creating face masks. Her Pioneer ones are excellent and for every one sold 10% goes to the Association.

WHAT A YEAR this has turned out to be. Did we ever think in our wildest dreams that the wearing of face masks in public places will become compulsory this year!

Normally we stop anyone selling Pioneer items on the Associations Facebook site, but alas one person in particular is selling such an item that could actually save your life.

This person is Sally Jane, who has been doing an outstanding and essential job in creating some extremely high quality face masks.

As you can see these are not just any old face masks... these are Pioneer face masks!

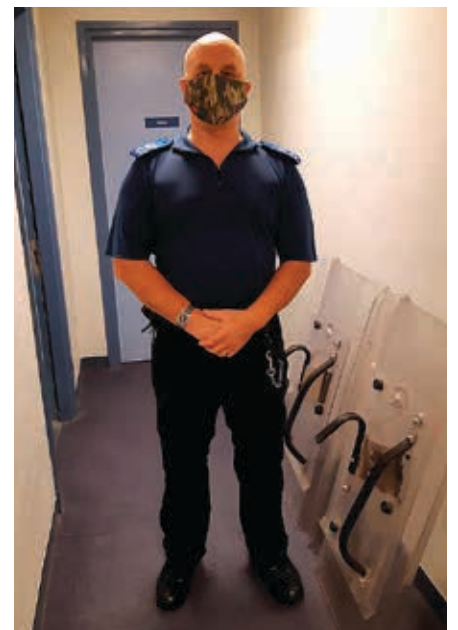
For everyone sold 10% goes to the Association. Prices start from around £5 or so but the more badges you want, obviously the more they will cost.

To order, contact Sally through her Facebook Knitterbugs Page at www.facebook.com/knitterbugs.creations/ and quote **PNR20** when ordering to obtain your discount!



■ Nigel Alan Smith

Picture: Nigel Alan Smith



■ David Kerr

Picture: David Kerr



■ **THE HORSEPOWER** for Veterans Polo Project (V-Polo) is run by Veterans and delivers activity to improve the health and wellbeing of Veterans.

It could be that you wish to have a social membership and a sense of belonging so that you can gather again with your fellow veterans and other Armed Forces Community individuals at events and occasions in the beautiful surroundings of Tedworth Park. It might be that you may have never ridden, you could already be a polo player or may have heard or read about the mental benefits derived from the unique bond between human and horse. For more info contact Colonel Dickie Winchester at info@tedworthparkpolo.com

■ THE MOD plans to overhaul its property portfolio will see a number of military bases closed down in the coming years. The following is a list of Army closures:

2021

Cavalry Barracks (Hounslow)
Deverell Barracks (Ripon)
Kneller Hall (Twickenham)
Middlewick Ranges (Colchester)

2022

Catterick Town Centre Parcel (Catterick)
Harden Barracks [Duchess of Kent Psychiatric Hospital] (Catterick)
Parsons Barracks Donnington (Telford)
Venning Barracks (Telford)
St George's Barracks North Luffenham (Oakham)
Kinnegar Logistic Base (Holywood)
Defence Support group (DSG) (Colchester)

2023

Claro Barracks (Ripon)
Commander and Staff Trainer [North] (Catterick)

2024

Prince William of Gloucester Barracks (Grantham)
Chilwell Station (Nottingham)
Queen Elizabeth Barracks (Strensall)
Sir John Moore Barracks Winchester (Winchester)
Towthorpe Lines (Strensall)
Aldershot Distribution Centre (Aldershot)
Cawdor Barracks (Haverfordwest)
Leighton House (AOSB Westbury) (Westbury)

2025

Clive Barracks (Market Drayton)
Redford Cavalry and Infantry Barracks (Edinburgh)
Southwick Park (Fareham)
Sennybridge Storage Compound (Sennybridge)

2027

Fulwood Barracks (Preston)
Dale Barracks (Chester)
Brecon Barracks (Brecon)
Beachley Barracks (Beachley)
Invicta Park Barracks (Maidstone)

2028

St David's Barracks (Bicester)
Vauxhall Barracks (Didcot)
Woolwich Station (Woolwich)

2029

Buckley Barracks [Hullavington Barracks] (Chippenham)
Dalton Barracks including Abingdon Airfield (Abingdon)

2031

Azimghur Barracks (Chippenham)
Carver Barracks (Saffron Walden)
Dishforth Barracks Airfield (York)
Impfal Barracks (York)
Robertson Barracks (Dereham)

2031

Fort George (Inverness)
Glencorse Barracks (Penicuik)

The RLC Museum

Hopefully sometime in Spring 2021, the museum Director Simon Walmsley will welcome us when it opens



THE RLC Museum has successfully relocated from Deepcut to Worthy Down. This has been a mammoth task which involved moving the main museum, four archive stores, two objects stores and a vehicle collection.

The new museum building is simply outstanding. It allows us to gather all of our outlying stores into one place and gives us a greater amount of floor space for the main exhibition hall. The museum is more than doubling the number of display cases, so we can now tell the story of the RLC and its predecessors in far greater detail.

Rewriting the whole exhibition has been another major task, first establishing what stories to tell and then deciding how best to tell them. This has not just been achieved by written text alone. A story can also be told using images, film, objects, uniforms and vehicles. Why describe a battlefield when you can show it as an illustration. Consequently there are many new and hitherto unseen objects now on display, including some wonderful Victorian uniforms, vehicles and fabulous early photographs and letters.

Modern museums make much more use of people stories, telling a tale through the eyes and recollections of one who was there. Bringing stories to life in this way makes them more relevant and personal. Why explain the siege of Ladysmith as a historical event, when a young soldier can describe what it was like to be there and how he had to continue to repair field guns during a prolonged bombardment.

Currently the museum team are emptying pallets and boxes to put everything away into the storerooms. This is important because shortly the new display cases will start to arrive and be erected. After Christmas, the objects being shown will have to be placed into their new display cases and specialist mount makers, along with mannequin designers are ensuring we show the collection at its best. The audio visual displays including bespoke short films clips are used both in the museum cinema and around the museum. These films have

been produced using both existing film footage and images purchased by the museum and by commissioning new content, filmed on location in Worthy Down.

Specialist museum grade lighting, often set within the display cases, has been designed to show the collection at its best, yet without causing fading or damage to the objects. The museum has extensive environmental monitoring equipment and can control, temperature and relative humidity, thus preventing fluctuations of both. Regardless of the changes in outside temperature, a stable and constant environment within the museum and its stores will protect the collection for future generations.

The new museum contains many interactive displays, allowing visitors to engage with the collection in a hands-on way. These range from defusing an improvised explosive device, to sitting in a First World War driving simulator. There is also a life size reconstruction of a 1704 "Marlborough Cart", the first ever logistic vehicle, which was produced using photographs taken from a tapestry at Blenheim Palace.

The RLC Museum will be displaying a considerable number of medals both in the main galleries and in a new medal corridor, representing both the RLC and all of its Forming Corps. However, one of our major new attractions will be the co-location, within the museum, of the RCT Medal Collection.

This unique collection held in its own room, will display nearly every British medal from the Battle of Waterloo until 1993, including countless gallantry awards. This collection also holds all five of the Victoria Crosses attributed to the Forming Corps of the RLC.

The exact date of our opening has yet to be fully determined and naturally Covid restrictions may still affect how we operate. However, open next Spring we will and a warm welcome will await all of you that can come and see us.

Picture: Stephen Wainsley, Director





■ SIX OF us from the Northampton branch of the Royal Pioneer Corp Association formed up this morning to wish Patrick Willis of Reynard Way a very special ex soldier a happy birthday. Happy Birthday Patrick.



■ IT WAS a happy occasion for Eric Sanders, his friends, family and local community as they gathered to celebrate a special 100th birthday.

Eric's incredible story, experience and life so far was celebrated on Friday, 13 December 2019 at the Yaa Centre in Chippenham Mews, London.

Eric, born Ignaz Erich Schwarz in 1919 was the son of Jewish parents who were forced to leave Austria during the Anschluss in 1938 and arrived in the UK with the Kindertransport.

Although a talented musician, his life has taken him along many paths including joining the British Army Pioneer Corps and then Special Operations Executive (SOE).

It was while in the SOE that he permanently changed his name to Eric Sanders, to give himself a chance of survival should he fall into enemy hands.

His service led to Eric being awarded the Austrian Cross of Honour for Culture and Science from the President of Austria in 2018.

Following his time in the military, Eric undertook teacher training in Weymouth where he met his wife Margaret, also a teacher!

He then relocated to teach history at North Paddington Secondary Comprehensive, based in Paddington, London, during the 60's and 70's.

All in all, Eric is a much-loved and highly respected teacher and has kept in contact with many of his former students.

Even after over 45 years, his past pupils are coming together to celebrate his 100th birthday.

Another interesting fact about Eric is the books he's written, in fact he's published at least three books since the age of 97.

His autobiography Secret Operations cracks along at a good pace and is entertaining from first to last.

His peacetime experiences as a teacher are just as well detailed and interesting as his wartime ones.

His two thrillers followed, Mazes 1: Murder In Munich and Mazes 2: Conspiracy In Vienna.

(Ed note: these books were reviewed in the November 2019 Newsletter)



211 years young

Two Pioneers celebrate their birthdays within a week of each other, Lesley his 105th and Eric his 106th birthday



THE Association has sent presents and personalised birthday cards to 2 Pioneers who celebrates their birthdays within a week of each other. Their combined years is 211!

Pioneer 13058567 Lesley Howard Felix Henry celebrated his 105 Birthday.

We spoke to Mark from Cuffley Manor to see if our 105 year old received his card. He replied...

"Yes. On behalf of everyone at Cuffley Manor from myself personally and of course Howard. Thank you so much for what you did. Howard was thrilled to have the personalised card, the tie and pin he

wanted to wear right away and it really did make his birthday. Thank you so much

Here he is cheering to the Pioneer Corps. Thank you so much.

If we could arrange a salute to honour the fine age he has reached and serving in the Pioneer Corps he would be truly honoured"

We had many Pioneers saluting him on Facebook!

Nearly a week later, Pioneer 13035808 Eric Francis Joslin celebrated his 106th Birthday.

Eric served from 27th June 1940 to 22nd January 1946.



High Memorial

In August when lockdown 1 was over, I was lucky to get away for a week when the lad was on leave. We pay our respects at Britain's Highest War Memorial - Ben Nevis, Scotland

Picture: Paul Brown

PAST EVENTS



■ THE header above should say Non Events! The following events were due to take place in 2020 and all had to be cancelled because of Covid restrictions, I hope things improve for 2021.

39/93 Club Meet

Due to be held at Bournemouth on 26 Mar 20m this was the first event of the year to be cancelled - see future events for the 2021 Meet.

WW1 Battlefield Tour

Due to start on 17 Apr 20 - hopefully this will take place in 2021.

Army v Navy

Due to be held on 4 May, 225 tickets had been ordered, this meant, of course, that 225 refunds had to be made.

Victory in Europe Celebrations

Many members had arranged to celebrate VE Day (8 May) unfortunately this was another casualty.

Sherringham Jolly

Due to be held on 5 Jun 20, normally held bi-annually it has been decided to hold this in 2021 - see future events.

Pioneer Reunion Weekend

Due to be held over the weekend 12/13 Jun 20. A large number of members had booked in for the Reunion which had been planned to take in Bicester (the first since 2014). We hope to hold it in June 2021 again in Bicester. We hope to announce the date in the next few months, full details will appear in the Spring Association update.

Victory over Japan

Again many members were intending to celebrate VJ Day which was also the end of World War 2, again only low key celebrations took place.

Past & Present Officers' Dinner

Due to be held on 16 Oct 20 (it was hoped to celebrate the 80th Anniversary of Pioneers serving in Bicester). This would have been the 74th Past and Present Pioneer Dinner, the first was held in 1946.

Field of Remembrance

Due to be held on 5 Nov 20 - the RPC Plot will still be at Westminster Abbey. I hope a few of our members managed to view the plot.

London Lunch

This normally follows the Field of Remembrance and allows members a chance to catch up and chat.

Cenotaph Parade

Due to be held on 8 Nov 20 - this year 105 members had requested a ticket (note: I have already received 72 applications for next year, if you have not already applied and received a reply please let me know. I think we will, once again be restricted to 110 tickets).

I HOPE TO SEE MANY OF YOU AT NEXT YEAR'S FUNCTIONS, LET US HOPE THINGS IMPROVE AND WE ALL GET THROUGH THIS TERRIBLE PANDEMIC

The Menin Gate

Every evening at 20:00, buglers from the Last Post Association close the road which passes under the memorial and sound the "Last Post"



■ Tom Appleyard and two of his granddaughters Carys and Erin

Picture: Tom Appleyard

TOM APPLEYARD writes: During the course of our family holiday in August combined with our 50th wedding anniversary we had decided to visit the Menin Gate to pay our respects to the fallen in the 1st world war and lay 2 wreaths one for the Royal Pioneer Corps and one for the RAF which I had arranged with the Last Post Association ahead of our holiday.

Two of my granddaughters Carys and Erin

said they would like to attend the ceremony with me, Carys wore my service medals and Erin wore her RAF cadets T shirt and my wife's Uncle Ernie's RAF medals, the three of us marched down to the gate to lay the wreaths in front of hundreds of people and the rest of our family.

The event which took us 5 minutes will remain with two 15 year old's for the rest of their lives along with two very proud grandparents.

Congratulations...

Thank you to members for purchasing Pioneer Grand Draw Tickets. The Association made a profit of £1750, this helps the Association to carry out its work. The results are...

1st £1000

Padre M Rutter - 42584
1 Regt RLC

4th £100

K Gladdin - 07359
K Gladdin,
Swadlincote

2nd £500

Mr MV Bradley - 39459
Mr MV Bradley, Kinver, Staffs

3rd £200

Mrs G Scragg - 36394
Bournemouth

5th £50

J Latimer - 25833
Northampton



■ Padre receiving check from RSM 1 Regt on winning Draw

Once again with this issue you will find

Christmas Draw Tickets

Please do your best to either buy them or sell them to others. If you can sell more please do not hesitate to ask for more. This is one of the few ways the Association can raise money to keep the Association going.

We have extended the draw until **6th January 2021** and not the date published on the tickets, due to this bumper newsletter taking a lot of time to produce.





Cenotaph Parade 2019

Seems like a lifetime ago but in 2019 we had over 102 marchers in the Royal Pioneer Corps contingent at the Cenotaph Parade at Whitehall on 10th November 2019

ON 10th November 2019, 102 Pioneers marched in the Pioneer Contingent at the Cenotaph Parade in Whitehall. Members had travelled from all over the country to achieve this record attendance, many staying in London from the previous Thursday (attending both the Field of Remembrance and the Cenotaph Parade). Other Pioneers were marching in other contingents i.e. Aden Veterans, Not Forgotten Association and our recent In Pensioner Roy Palmer marching with the

Chelsea Pensioners.

Once again the contingent was led by a sprightly Brigadier Charles Telfer (the last Director of the RPC) and our parade marshal was Mr Peter Thomas (ex RSM) who managed to keep most of us in step! As is usual after the Parade we met for a chat (and a beer) in the Civil Service Club, Whitehall and, once again, took over the whole garden area. (Luckily the heaters under the large umbrellas kept away the cold.

Unfortunately due to Covid we could not

march this year, however hopefully we can meet up again in 2021!

If you wish to march in 2020 please let me know soonest to enable me to bid for the required number of tickets. A large number of applications have already been received. I expect we will be allocated the same number as 2019 - 110 so please get your application in early. The Northampton Branch will again run mini-buses from Northampton, if you wish to travel with them (at a very reasonable cost) please let me know.





Our in-pensioner Roy Palmer wrote the following for Northampton Borough Council on Remembrance Day

Oh' what a year, Coronavirus has stopped the World.
Northampton Borough Council, in thought! will their Standards unfurl.
This Remembrance Day, they have had another thought.
How we must honour, all of those that fought.
The names on the Memorial, will be remembered, by us all.
Wherever we hear, the Last Post, by Bugle Call.
That haunting sound, which gets you in the throat.
While remembering those, whose lives, they did devote!
This year will be so different, from the rest.
But in our thoughts, they must all be blessed!
Let us not; forget the ones, who! still live.
They that served, survived, lost pals, but time did give.
Who come to march and honour them who died.
Mainly in Northampton, but also those Worldwide.
This is a Remembrance Day; the World will never forget.
Quietly standing alone, thoughts in turmoil! with tears of regret.
We will Remember Them.



■ Pioneers pay their respects in Garth Park Bicester

Picture: David Heaton



Lockdown Remembrance

Sunday 8th November 2020 we were in another lockdown, the Cenotaph Parade was a massively scaled back affair, however Pioneers everywhere exercised at the same time!

SUNDAY 8th November 2020 marked the day of Remembrance Sunday. A day that is held in the United Kingdom as a day to commemorate the contribution of British and Commonwealth military and civilian servicemen and women in the two World Wars and later conflicts. It is held at 11am on the second Sunday in November.

However Remembrance Sunday this year was a very different affair.

The Country was in another Covid lockdown and various commemorations

were massively scaled back.

The Cenotaph Parade itself normally attracts over 10,000 marchers - only a total of around 30 marched!

I spoke to the old man (Norman!) and he informed me that this year it would of been his 30th consecutive Remembrance Sunday at the Cenotaph. And there's me thinking that it was his 100th!

However, various local commemorations did take place up and down the country and the smell of shoe polish, aftershave and Pioneer Port was in the air, particularly

around the Bicester area.

Pioneers everywhere decided to take their morning exercise at the same time (just before 1100!). Some stayed on their doorsteps and some strayed a little further to local parks and local War Memorials.

I went to my local memorial and I'm sure I'm not the only person who was saddened to have to walk past the closed pub on the way back home! (photo on gallery pages).

On these pages and overleaf we feature a few Pioneers taking their socially distanced morning exercise! ■



■ Al Batch and Pioneer Mitchell



■ Alan Spearman and Steve McDonald



■ Alan Tyson Carter, paying his respects to Pioneers and planting Remembrance crosses



■ Barney Tharby



■ Phil Metcalfe, behalf of 282 MC Sqn RLC



■ Charlie Wood by Phil Metcalfe



■ Chris Gilbert



■ Christine and Taff Thomas



■ Damian Leavitt - God speed lads



■ Daniel Crawshaw



■ Daren Nicholls



■ David Ferguson



■ Daz Pettit



■ Geordie Hindmarsh raised over 11k !



■ Frank Home



■ Garth Lancaster



■ Graeme Russell



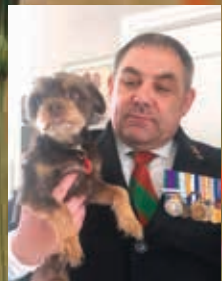
■ Ian Morewood



■ Jed Bourne



■ Ian Stopford



■ Jeff Maine



■ John Allen



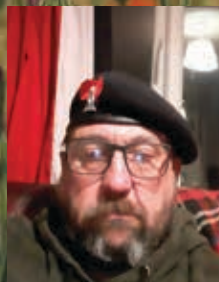
■ John Waring



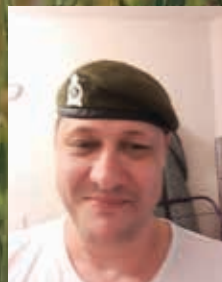
■ Jonny Robinson



■ Kenneth Hood



■ Kevan Anderson



■ Lo Larsson



■ Mark Cox



■ Mark Lines



■ Martin Thomas



■ Matt Wharton



■ Mick Hollinsworth



■ Micklethrate and Kev Hilton



■ Kev Hilton - laid the Pioneer wreath at the Cenotaph



■ Kev Hilton, Garden of Remembrance



■ Kev Broome, Wayne Howard & friends



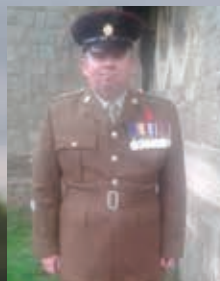
■ Nick McSweeney and Chris Lucas



■ Natty Almond



■ Paul Casey



■ Peter House



■ Philip Davidge



■ Pte Walls 518



■ Robert Jackson



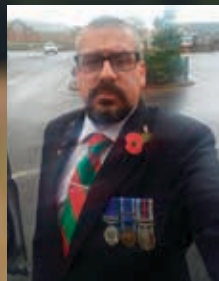
■ Ruthie Cox



■ Sarah Jane Ward



■ Shane Ransom



■ Dougie Durrant and Ricky McCracken, showing off their Beards!



■ Chris Oram and Kate Clark (Clarkies Mum!)



■ Stevie Ibo and Jim



■ Taff Powell



■ A blurry Ted Kewley



■ Archie Goode



■ Stu Que



■ Paul Keogh, Steve Bone Darren Burton at the Pioneer Grove, National Arboretum



■ Steph Whitford



■ Kev Digger Young (right)



■ Our in pensioner Roy Palmer (left) - Chelsea Hospital



■ Wayne Howard







Lt Colonel Billy Dilkes

Ed note: whilst Billy was organising “Meals for the NHS” shortly after his return from a tour, I was having a beer with him in the Officers’ Mess, Ambrosden and he started to tell me about his service. With his permission I taped part of the conversation and the following is his story

BILLY Dilkes was a Leicester lad who joined the Royal Pioneer Corps (RPC) as an Infantryman, part of the Queens Division in April 1986, at 17yrs of age. He started his 23 weeks Basic Infantry Training at Bassingbourn Barracks, Royston, and although originally known as Wayne Broughton, he later changed his name (Family reasons) to Billy Dilkes. After being awarded the Best Soldier at Physical Training, he left Bassingbourn for Bicester in October 1986, and started his long and fruitful career at St David's Barracks.

Billy started his "Trained Soldier" career at pace, quickly settling into 521 Coy. He attained his 3-2 Upgrading and 2-1 Defence Course and attended both the All Arms Physical Training Instructors Course (Aldershot) and HGV3 (Cat C) at Leconfield. On his return, he moved to Bicester Garrison Gymnasium as a Physical Training Instructor (PTI) and worked hard on bringing out the best (physically) from 23 Pioneer Regiment, Officers' and soldiers.

Billy had become an exceptionally talented runner often seen out with Taff Peach and later Leroy Brown, pounding the streets of Oxfordshire, but his prowess as a footballer was already starting to develop amongst a very talented RPC Team, largely concentrated within 521 Coy. He remembers his first OC (Maj Ferguson), who was completely focussed on winning everything the Army had to offer in football. Billy, although very junior at this stage, had vast experience amongst the Pioneer squad, not least the RSM, (Geoff Wilcocks) who, thinking back was the only player we knew would be in the starting 11. Billy went on to represent the Army at every level in football from Regimental to Combined Services and played at a commendable level at Non-League.

Postings after 521 Coy in 1990 included 13 Signals Regt, Germany, and then 216 (Parachute) Signals Sqn in Aldershot. As a young PTI on Pre-Parachute Selection, he continued to enjoy the physical aspects of the Army but the regular Tactical Exercises

within the Lead Parachute Battalion Group (LPBG), really enhanced his abilities as an Infantry soldier. The opportunities to work alongside the best soldiers in 5 Airborne Brigade was such a game changer thinking back; the Parachute Regt Recce Platoons and Pathfinder Platoon are immense soldiers, and he learnt so much going forward.

His 3yrs with 216 (Parachute) Signals Sqn was probably his busiest period thus far but so rewarding. Winning GOLD on the Cambrian Patrol in Wales, awarded the White Trophy for outstanding efforts in the field and breaking the P-Coy Assault Cse record, which stood until 1995, when P-Coy moved from Aldershot to Catterick.

He moved to ATR Pirbright as an Instructor (Cpl) having been selected on the RLC Instructors Cadre to lead the first ever RLC Platoon through ATR Pirbright. He moved back to 187 (Tancred) Sqn in 1994, deploying straight on Ex LION SUN, before returning to Bicester and being moved into 144 Sqn (Trg Wing). Billy became part of a successful Trg Team for over 3yrs, running Junior Promotion Courses, Upgrading and Assault Pioneer Courses. Paddy Haddock, Mark Staples, Tony Sheehan, Junior Sear, Micky Moir, Tam Rutherford and Billy Stout (amongst others) were great people to work with/for.

Billy continued to move up the promotion ladder in 144 Sqn, after successes on Junior Brecon, Senior Drill, CBRN and most notably Senior Brecon, achieving the highest results by a Corps man in some 12yrs. He deployed on Op BANNER, (Antrim) NI, with 9 Tp, 518 Sqn, as the Pl Sgt in 1995, and subsequently took Command of the Troop in 1996. He deployed to Canada as an Armoured Infantry Pl, part of the Worcestershire & Sherwood Foresters Battlegroup, and in typical 518 (Globetrotter) fashion, they returned for a short period before deploying at Sqn level as the Divisional Defence Coy to the Metal Factory, Op RESOLUTE, Banja Luka, Bosnia. On his return, he became SSM 518 Pioneer Sqn for a short period before being posting to 170 Pioneer Sqn, HQ ARRC Sp Bn as the SSM. As an independent Pioneer Sqn Sergeant Major, outside 23 Pioneer Regt, it

was an absolute joy because it gave him the ability to "do stuff" with the soldiers that ordinarily you could not do in Bicester. Most soldiers used Sp Bn as an opportunity to enjoy Germany but more importantly, to have a short break from constant deployments; that said, they did deploy on Op AGRICOLA - Kosovo (Film City - Pristina) where, funny enough, 23 Pioneer Regt arrived on mass, some weeks later.

Billy subsequently selected for WO1 (RSM) and was posted to the Defence College of Medical & Rehabilitation (DRMC) Headley Court, Epsom, in 2001. The Pioneer Trade managed to tie this appointment for some years after WO1 (RSMs) Taff Peach, Al Drew and Tony Avant followed in Billy's footsteps. In November 2002, Billy received a request from CO 23 Pioneer Regt (Lt Col Peter Jones OBE) inquiring if he would be interested in deploying on Op TELIC 1 (Iraq) as Regimental Sergeant Major (23 Pioneer Regt); he obviously agreed and moved back to Bicester in February 2003, joining the Regiment in Kuwait some weeks later. Billy went on to say it still remains his greatest achievement, to go to War with his Regt was one of the proudest moments of his career and the reception he received from the guys on arrival into Theatre will stay with him forever.

Billy selected for a Queens Commission in May 2005, and was posted to the 16 Air Assault Brigade, Colchester as both the Admin Officer (AO), 63 (Airborne) Squadron and OC Pre-Parachute Selection for the RLC. He remained there until 2007 before returning to 23 Pioneer Regt as AO 518 Pioneer Sqn.

As a Captain and then an A/Major, he remained in Bicester from 2007 - 2013, employed within 23 Pioneer Regt as the following:
AO 518 Pioneer Sqn - 2007 - 2008 (Deployed Op HERRICK 8 - Afghanistan)
Trg Offr/2IC - 144 (HQ) Sqn - 2008 - 2009 (Deployed Op TOSCA - Cyprus)
RCMO - 144 (HQ) Sqn - 2009 - 2011 (Deployed Op TOSCA - Cyprus) MTO - 144 (HQ) Sqn - 2011 - 2013

In January 2013, Billy selected on the Beige List (Capt-Maj) and was posted as the



Bicester Garrison Quartermaster/OC Support Company. This appointment allowed Billy to not only look after Garrison business but also play a huge part in the Pioneer legacy within both Bicester Garrison and Bicester Town for some years to come. In early 2014, the imminent departure and removal of both 23 Pioneer Regt and 168 Pioneer Regt, from both the RLC and the Army Orbat was a travesty. It was inevitable that many Pioneers would choose Bicester as their home if they had not already done so. Billy, with help from WO1 Al Batchelor, Capt Kev Jessop, Steve Mitchell and Mark Staples, established the Bicester Pioneer Association (BPA). The BPA would hopefully assist in times of need but more importantly, carry on the Pioneer spirit amongst a community that had already been accepted and remained very proud of what Pioneers had achieved for the local Town stretching back some 5 decades. The BPA started with approximately 60 members and soon reached 125 and continues to grow both in numbers and support. Housing estates, Shopping Centres, Garrison Buildings and main roads all named after Pioneers are examples of how well the Pioneers sits within the community.

Billy summarised by saying how proud he is to be a "Pioneer". He misses his Pioneer Family and everything the Regiment stood for; comradery, loyalty, banter, but more important, that Regimental ethos and esprit de corps that other units admired. Officers' and soldiers transiting through the Regiment soon became encapsulated. Billy joined at the very start of the Pioneer transition period where redundancies were about to take place with the loss of so much experience. That said, a new breed of Pioneer started to evolve and arrive at the gates of St David's Barracks. The Regiment became sporting champions in a whole range of areas. Pat and Tony Sheehan continued to bring boxing to a whole new level; whilst Athletics, Orienteering and Football flourished but most notably was on the rugby field. The arrival of our Fijian brothers in the late 90's, with the likes of big Joe Kava mixed with a number of capable Regimental players like Rob Bieron, meant the Pioneers dominated supreme.

Billy remained hugely proud to be a part of such a multi-cultural and diverse Regiment that encouraged a brotherhood like no other.

In addition to our sporting success, the Regiment continued to produce quality Officers' and soldiers. Billy went on to explain about the increase in numbers of those who decided to try and improve their own portfolios by either transferring to other specialised organisations or Pioneers successfully applying for a Direct Entry Queens Commission from the ranks. We soon had large Pioneer numbers in the Royal Army Physical Training Corps (RAPTC), the Army Air Corps (AAC) most notably, Matt Kovacs becoming an Apache Pilot, the Small Arms School Corps (SASC) again, Stevie Hanson who transferred as a Sgt making it all the way to (LE) Lt Col, is absolutely amazing.

In the Special Forces, we had Officers' and soldiers successfully attending and achieving success with the Special Reconnaissance Regiment (SRR) Selection, but by far our biggest achievement was the first Pioneer to Pass Special Air Service (SAS) Selection and serve with 22 SAS. All these Officers' and soldiers continued to achieve great things and regularly returned to Regimental Reunions to re-engage with their Pioneer Family.

Military success was a regular theme, not just with soldiers returning from Courses with Top Grades but also the competitiveness the Regiment installed.

The Cambrian Patrol, Gore Trophy and the Commando Speed March became an annual success story during the latter years. Both team and individual success continued right up until the Regiments final weeks especially at Spear Bridge, taking both individual Male and Female honours as well as Best Team.

23 Pioneer Regiment became very well respected amongst both 3 Commando and 16 Air Assault Brigades for their achievements.

Deployments changed; the Pioneer capability was also evolving but we had reached a new but extremely dangerous stepping-stone. Since the first Gulf War, 23 Pioneer Regiment became used to

deploying as a unit that could set up and control the Theatre Reception Centre, as demonstrated on Operation TELIC 1 (Iraq) under 104 (Logistics) Brigade. However, Operation HERRICK would bring these changes to the forefront.

The Regiment started, as they did with the Theatre Reception Centre, then we grew in size to provide independent Force Protection Pioneer Troops (Platoons) to Logistic Regiments for Logistic resupplies to the Forward Operating Bases (FOB's), plus providing full Pioneer Squadrons to Kabul and Kandahar (Afghanistan) as the Divisional Defence Company. Our profile continued to grow with success.

Honours and Awards for Bravery and Outstanding work continued before our final role in the British Army. 23 Pioneer Regiment were now tasked in a new role in support of the Royal Engineers (RE), of Explosive, Ordnance, Disposal (EID) Search. Pioneers became trained as both EOD Search Advisors (Ofrrs/WOs/SNCOs) and Search Operators (ORs).

This role continued until the demise of the Pioneer Regiments.

Billy became the only Pioneer to have served in every rank from Private to Major within 23 Pioneer Regiment but admits this does not come close to the successes achieved by the above Officers' and soldiers.

In recent months, the Pioneers (still serving) continue to be successful with Honours & Awards, MSM's, MBE's (Capt "Lenny" Henry) and success at LE Commissioning for (WO1's Rob Aspinall and James (Taff) Hildreth). Absolutely amazing!

Billy subsequently was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in June 2020 and was posted as SO1 Trg Standards & Accreditation at the Defence College of Logistics, Policing and Administration (DCLPA) at Worthy Down for his final 3yrs. He becomes only the 2nd Pioneer in 30yrs to have reached Lieutenant Colonel after Lt Col (Rtd) Davie Finnigan. A great achievement....

Acknowledged the help and support from so many within the Pioneer trade both young and old and gave special thanks to his wife Jill and children, Keira, Emily and Asher. ■



PASS

REGT. PNR. CORPS

No. 13070162

Rank SGT.

Name BAKER

E. G.

has permission to be absent from his unit

from A/P 12 JAN '44

to 23.59 HRS

13 JAN '44

*

LONDON ET.

Commanding

1. From London District

YES

COMMANDING 128 COY, P.

4. Reporting C

2. To London

YES

5. Eire/N. Ire

Valid only wit

3. Through London

YES

6. Nearest Hosp
Unit

* Items not applicable to be deleted and initialled subsequent amendments.

STAMP

(pads of 100)

(with unit or formation identification number or letter blanked out).

**13070162 Sgt
Edward George
Baker**



7. Ration Card Issued

13070162 Sjt Baker E.G.
128 Company, Pioneer Corps,
The Transit Camp
Wid
22

Letters Home

Dear Mother,

Enlisted in London and joined 11 Centre Pioneer Corps (then located at Oldham) for training on 15 Aug 40 and served until 19 Jan 46. Following basic training he was posted to 128 Coy PC and served with this unit throughout his career - for many years he was Chief Clerk of the unit from Glasgow on Saturday night, and shall therefore arrive at Euston at about 7.00 Sunday morning, so you can expect me home between 8.00 and 9.00 on Sunday.

If there should be any hold-up in these arrangements I will send a telegram, but I don't think there will be. The mob is due back on Friday so I shall allow myself quite a good time for handing-over, etc.

seen two fairly good films this week - "The Colour of Paradise" and "The Colour of Paradise". They are your sweetheart", the technician based by the colour. They

SGT Baker enlisted in London and joined 11 Centre Pioneer Corps (then located at Oldham) for training on 15 Aug 40 and served until 19 Jan 46. Following basic training he was posted to 128 Coy PC and served with this unit throughout his career – for many years he was Chief Clerk of this unit.

Brief History of 128 Company Pioneer Corps

14 May 40 – Formed at Huyton
20 May 40 – Proceeded to Southampton for embarkation orders but they were cancelled on arrival.
1 Jun 40 – Moved to Gailles, Ayrshire
13 Jun 40 – Moved to Strombess, Orkneys. Working for RE, RASC and Ordnance and other miscellaneous tasks. Men exposed to much wind and rain, camp consists of wooden huts and bell tents.
31 Oct 40 – Working on camp construction – days now very short. Fortnightly film show
20 Dec 40 – Returned to mainland (Aberdeen) and proceeded to Fraserburgh
30 Jan 41 – 30 miles of road cleared of snow by Coy and again open to traffic
31 Mar 41 – One or two severe air raids but no Coy casualties
30 Jun 41 – Moved to Cowdenbeath – detachments at Stirling and Perth. Coy working on coastal defences
18 Aug 41 – Moved to Galashiels, detachment at Kelso, all on defence works
1 Sep 41 – Moved to Hoddum Castle near Ecclefechan – working on camp construction
3 Apr 42 – Moved to Lockerbie
31 Jul 42 – Coy in scattered detachments., Half on camp construction and half at CAD and CSD
7 Oct 42 – 3 sections move to Knock (to complete urgent stabling for Indian Cavalry Corp.
2 sections to Beaulieu near Inverness – on ammunition and Nissen Huts
15 Oct 42 – Moved to Inverness for dock work. Detachments at Cromarty and Invergordon (on same work) and Stornoway. Detachment at Beaulieu still on stabling.
28 Feb 43 – Strength of Coy 339 ORs (12 Sections including 4 un-armed sections)
29 Dec 43 – Moved to Marchwood, Southampton – port construction
30 Apr 44 – Part of Coy training, remainder working at docks
16 Apr 44 – Entire Coy training
24 Jul 44 – Landed in Normandy and moved to Audrieu
14 Aug 44 – Commenced work at 14 AOD
26 Feb 45 – 3 Sections commence work as PW escorts, remainder of Coy at 14/16 AOD
12 Mar 45 – Moved to St Aubin – training
30 Mar 45 – Moved to Oosterwijk – located at Haare (Part of 1st Canadian Corps)
9 Apr 45 – Moved to Nijmegen
12 Apr 45 – Moved to Elst p unloading bridging material and bridge construction
19 Apr 45 – Moved to Aynhem – handling bridging material

30 May 45 – Moved to Zeist – petrol and guard duties
22 Aug 45 – Moved to Deelan – working at the Canadian Demobilization Depot and maintaining runways and camp duties.
30 Sep 45 – Still at Deelan, Holland
No diary for October 45
1 Nov 34 – Located Wishaw and working at Glasgow Docks
18 Dec 45 – Moved to Guards Depot, Caterham

Nearly every week during his service he wrote a letter home to his Mother who lived at 85 Chestnut Avenue, Forest Gate, London E7, Although the RPC Association hold all these letters, we are publishing a few which highlight the main points of this Company. Both he and his mother enjoyed the theatre and the cinema and most of the letters contain details of shows/films they have seen.



His daughter, Elizabeth, very kindly donated his letters to the RPC Association. She also sorted them in order and gave the following notes, including attaching stickers when he mentions something of relevance:

She was surprised by how often he went to the cinema, it sound like there were film units giving frequent screenings everywhere he went.

A lot of reference to the London Blitz in covert terms, also Court Martials and his involvement as a witness.

There is very little mention of his father, he died in 1927.

LETTERS HOME

Dear Mother, Thank you for your postcard. Here I am, now, a rough soldier, in Battle dress already. I did not have to change at all as they sent a special train for us soldiers (Ha!). I am with crowds of other fellows, all of whom are as new as me. My address is: 1307162 Pte EG Baker, 'A' Company, 11th Centre AMPC, Earl Mill, Oldham, Lancs. Love to all, Ted.

From: 13070162 Pte EG Baker, A Company Section 4, 11th Centre AMPC, Earl Mill, Oldham, Lancs 16 Aug 40

Dear Mother, I hope you got my postcard. As you can see, I made rather a mess of it as my original card to you gave my wrong address, so I had to rub out my card to Kathleen and send it to you first.

I am going to send you all my surplus clothes which is practically the lot, as soon as I can which will probably be tomorrow.

Well so far I am settling down OK I have (Ed note next page of letter missing)

21 Aug 40

Dear Granddad and Auntie, Having just been inoculated on each arm and

consequently excused duty for 48 hours and also confined to barracks, I have at last got time to catch up with my correspondence.

Thank you both for your good wishes before I left. I am glad to say that I am liking the Army quite well, although of course it is taking some time to settle down. However, I am with a fine set of fellows and our NCOs are all very likeable too.

We are housed in an old cotton mill. There are 415 men on the floor above. In the ordinary way we rise about 5.30. Reveille is at 6.00, after which we have to wash and shave (in cold water) and make our beds ready for breakfast at 7.00. At 8.30 we drill route march etc until 12.0 when we have a very inadequate dinner. In the afternoon we drill or march until 4.0 (our last meal). After 5.0 our time is our own, and we can go out if we like – as we usually do. "Lights Out" are at 11.30, but we must be in barracks by 10.45. On Saturdays and Sundays we are free by 2.0 pm.

Except for the food and washing arrangements it is all quite good fun. My feet were painful at first owing to the weight of the boots and the fact that the streets of Oldham are all cobbled, which makes marching very uncomfortable. I have full uniform and kit, which felt strange at first, but to which I am now quite used, except the forage cap, which is difficult to keep on.

The whole district here is very drab and remarkably cold, as cold as November in Essex. The people are very kind to us though, and there is plenty to do. Hoping you are both quite well. I am yours affectionally Ted. PS As soon as I can I intend to get in touch with Uncle Arthur

20 Aug 40

Dear Ma, Thanks for your letter, with Sailor Makeham's (Ed note: a friend from his schooldays) enclosed, I have written to him, thanking him.

I have seen the QMS about the allowance which is OK, although it may be a week or two before you hear anything, although I am deducted already.

I have just been inoculated, one shot in each arm and so have no duties for 48 hours, although confined to Barracks. The weekend was much pleasanter than I expected. We were free after 2 o'clock on both days. On Saturday I saw Arthur Askey in 'Charlies Aunt' (very funny – see it!) and on Sunday which rained like hill, we went to a free concert in the town which was also very good.

Incidentally the soldiers (us!) are public pets here. One gets coppers knocked off everything one buys in the shops, and besides the YMCA, the WVS run a really grand affair for the forces, where we go nearly every evening. There is games, which don't interest me, a lounge where you can hear the wireless or read (books provided) or even sleep, and a canteen where the meagre army grub can be supplemented. There is fine coffee at 2d, a huge mug (called 'pots' here, they come round asking 'Any dirty pots 'ere!'), sandwiches, tea, cocoa etc etc at very reasonable prices.

Today I had a real hot bath (3d) at the local baths where we were marched in the purposes of cleanliness.

We are having plenty of drill and marching miles and miles. It is very amusing here, funny things are always happening. At present the blokes are suffering from a diarrhoea epidemic (which has not touched me yet). Last night I work up and saw so many fellows getting up and running out I thought it was an air raid and started getting up myself.

The previous night we had two real warnings and had to get up twice and still rise at 6 the next day.

I am glad you are getting around a bit. Keep it up. Tell everyone I will write as soon as I can get around to them. I hope all my clobber got back OK.

Will you send me Uncle Arthurs telephone number? I am able to make a call there as I believe I get 2 days in about a months' time. As soldiers we do a lot of hitchhiking which saves our fares.

Please look after enclosed as I shall feel happier without it. Use it if you need it.

Infectious blokes are passing out all round me, as I write. Don't worry, I'm OK. So are my feet, although a little swollen. Love Ted.

The day after Still OK, the left arm a little swollen but that's all. Hit the rat for me (Ed note: The rat was his pet cat Bing)

Your letter has just come, so am adding this PS. I am still all right, except for the swollen arm and slight headache. Some of the blokes have taken it very badly, am glad to hear you are getting around all right.

Re the vest, we are not supplied with these so I am wearing my own. Most of the fellows wear pyjamas so I am keeping them as well. I am slowly catching up on my correspondence. Thanks for the photo. I am quite pleased with it.

It seems funny that the air raids should start as soon as I leave the ARP.

You should have seen the Jewboys here fainting when the needle was struck into their arms.

One thing, we are all now enjoying a much needed rest. Hope everything is still OK. Hit the rat. Love Ted.

28 Aug 40

Dear Ma, I have just had my second dose of inoculation and am consequently CB again, this time for 24 hours. Except for a rather nasty cold I am quite OK as I hope you are. We have been hearing the alarming tales of air raids over London and have been wondering how Forest Gate has come off. We had a raid here last night, a warning at 1 am until 2, then later in the night (or early in the morning) we heard guns going all round us. I don't know yet where it was, probably Manchester.

We went to Manchester on Sunday. It is a large city, very Londonfied, even to the names of the streets – Oxford Street, Piccadilly, Cannon Street etc. We even had eggs and chips for tea in Lyons. After tea we went out of the city to Belle Vue. They have a zoo there, which we went round. It is not so large not so well kept as the London one, the cages are tiny and old fashioned, but they have a lot of lion and tiger cubs, monkeys, elephants, giraffes, llamas, etc, etc.

In Oldham here, there is a very fine park with palm and cactus houses and very nicely laid out gardens.

We have now started rifle drill, it is all night, but they get so blasted heavy on a route march. The marches are getting

longer and longer, but I more able to stand them now. We are having plenty of drill now, unless one is pulled in for fatigue duty. Yesterday I was on cookhouse fatigues, on Saturday I was room orderly (which meant I had to stay in all day) on Monday I was in the dining hall party, so you see I get my share. Monday evening I saw that film, such a fuss was made about "Dark Rapture". It was interesting in a travel-film sort of way, but these sort of documentary are either dull or childish fantasies, However I suppose I mustn't be too critical.

Re vests and pyjamas – I propose you send me one clean pair of each. As soon as I receive these I will return the dirty ones, as there are no facilities for washing here and the Army laundry only takes Army articles.

From your last letter you seem to have had a good old run round for which I am very glad and hope you keep it up,

Have you heard anything of the allowance yet. They are stopping me one shilling a day for it here.

On Sunday we went on Church Parade to Oldham Parish Church, very musty with candles, scarlet cassocks. The parson was a hoot. Finished up his chow by reminding us how much his church needed funds and the collection box was therefore at the door!

Remember me to the 98s (Ed note: the Helmores, his aunt and uncle) and thank them for the stamps for me. I haven't yet had much time to write to them as I go out nearly every evening and the rest of the time I seem to be cleaning (3 times a day) washing and shaving or polishing brass buttons (there are 13 on my overcoat and 2 on my forage cap). I have written to the Berts and Mauds, Mervyn and Ken (Ed note: aunts, uncles and cousins).

Well, cheerio till next time and don't have too many air raids! Love Ted

25 Sep 40

Later This afternoon I was detailed for fatigues at one of our officers messes, a big house called 'Oakwood; in the better part of Oldham. I had to peel potatoes etc, but was given my tea there, which was sausage and mash, tomato soup, plumduff cake etc, the best meal I have had since I have been in the Army. These officers know how to live!

My toffee arrived this morning. So far your letters have always followed your parcels, the toffee is OK. We are doing more tyre stacking tomorrow.

Thursday. I have just had your letters about your windows being blown out. Thank God you are safe and I hope everyone else is too. Fortunately the shutters will have protected the front room to a certain extent and I hope there has been no other damage.

I have a casualty to report as well. I am sorry to say that down at the tyre dump today I lost my watch, how or when I do not know. I would rather have lost anything else I have here.

However, it is no use regretting anything, we can only be glad that we have been spared so much. Love Ted

Sunday

Dear Mam, Just back from Church parade, and if lucky, have the rest of the day to myself. According to this mornings papers London seems to have had a pretty bad bombing yesterday and hope Forest

Gate wasn't shaken up too much. I hear from local lads that Leytonstone Church and station have copped it. We are still catching it here. We had 6 day and night raids yesterday but only heard bombs in the distance.

I had a very pleasant surprise earlier in the week, a letter from IF Post, presenting me with a fountain pen, they had subscribed for, also paper and envelopes. It is a really good pen – a Blackbird – and I am very pleased indeed. I have written off thanking them all. Incidentally, at the time of writing they had had 86 raids. My first consignment of 50 cigarettes from the Wardens Service Fund has also arrived, so I am doing well out of the ARP.

Yesterday on our half-holiday I and another bloke went out on the Pennines. We took a bus out of the town to a place called Grotton and walked and walked and walked, right out on the moors. It's marvellous country, a bit like the Sussex Downs only wetter, more like the Penrith district of Cornwall. There are great ranges of blue hills, behind each other and a vast expanse of sky. We climbed high above the towns which are in the valleys and like Cornwall, you suddenly find yourself looking miles down onto the chimney pots. The fields are divided by little low walls of stones just piled loosely. One could make a marvellous rockery! We enjoyed it very much as it is completely new country to me.

I have a rough fatigue last Thursday., It was ration party and we rode around in a lorry to various depots collecting food and delivering it to different barracks in the district. The lorry part was all right, although we ran a dog over, but the humping part was tough. We had to carry sacks of potatoes, carrots, beans, barrels of apples, chunks of meat and great quarters of beef. I felt all in when the day was over. It was wonderful quality of food. I can't understand however the cooks manage to ruin it so. Enclosed is a specimen of our diet. We are sometimes supplied with these dog biscuits instead of bread.

We had a dental inspection early in the week. I was OK and also had a chance to see my Medical Papers. At the top there was the glad words "Grade 1 except for reflective vision"! So that's that.

We have had our rise. This week I drew 10/- as against 5/5 last week. First thing I did was go out and buy a nice meal – fried plaice and chips.

We are still busy on the rifle and they threaten next week to let us use real ammunition. At present we use dummy and play soldiers. First we fire five rounds standing, then rush forward to about a hundred yards and fire another five kneeling on one knee then on again to fall flat on our tummies and fire the last lot. Just like acting for the films!!

I have quite got over my inoculations and feel OK. Love Ted

Undated

Dear Mam, I was overjoyed to receive your anxiously awaited letter this evening. We have heard such terrible tales of the awful time you have been having that I was getting pretty worried. However, I hope everything is a bit quieter now. Sorry to hear about the "Spotted Dog". A pal of mine here who loves at Leytonstone, tells me that Leytonstone Church and Station are

now missing and that his sister's flat at "The Shrubberies" was flattened. One of the blocks near Snaresbrook Station was wrecked by an aerial torpedo, also the block between Raneleigh and Steele Rd. Another fellow I met from Stropford Road says that Queen Mary's hospital at Stratford is wrecked. This, you will remember, was in my sector when I was in ARP, so you can bet I'm not sorry to be in the Army after all.

We are still left alone here, except for about 3 alarms per night, when we have to get up and dress. Yesterday we went on the rifle ranges for the day, the whole Company let very early in four motor coaches and we went right up into the hills into Yorkshire to a very remote range about ten miles off. It was a lovely place, high hills all around, many steep with great boulders and a little stream with waterfalls every few yards falling down into a lake in the valley. The range was built up like steps up one side of a hill into 16 firing platforms. We fired right across the valley at 200 yards range, first 5 rounds careful fire and then 5 rounds rapid fire. Considering my bad eyes I did not do too bad. Got one bull and several inners. The rifle did not kick much, only jarred a bit at first. I enjoyed it and would have liked to have done a bit more. Unfortunately it began to rain like hell about 10.30 and when it rains here it rains solid water. Fortunately, we had out ground sheets and sheltered in some sheds when we were doled out with our days rations – one cheese sandwich. The rest of the blokes went on firing until about 3.0 pm, when we pack up and plodded miserably through little lanes and pouring rain across the moors to where our coaches awaited us and were brought back to Earl Hill and had a hot dinner. While I was firing, by the way, an air raid warning sounded miles away. The noise and echo of the rifles among the hills was terrific.

The other day a small squad of us were sent as orderlies to the Drill Hall in the town. As the Corporal in charge was taken ill, I had the job of taking charge and marching them back at dinner time, giving orders an' all!

This morning we had some Physical Training, not bad it seems a little easier now.

If I could get 48 hours leave I would try to dash back and see you, but all leave is cancelled. In fact we have had quite a lot of deserters, blokes are so worried about their people. Nearly every day somebody gets a telegram to say his house has been bombed. There is no hope for any long leave until one has served 3 months so we must hang on to that, unless I get moved nearer to London.

Bob Smith is right about the allowance. None of the other blokes people have heard anything yet. We storm the QMS's office from time to time but it takes a hell of a lot to move the Army!

Last night we had a warning whilst at the WVS and had to spend 2 hours in their cellar before we could get our grub!

Our own food is either improving a bit or I am getting used to it. The latter I think.

We have been out in the country quite a bit, having exhausted the town. It is really lovely out on the moors, but abnormally cold. I hear you are having a heat wave in town. Well, up here the people have had fires on since we came, and today we went

out in our greatcoats.

Saturday. I had a horrible morning today washing duties, but everything passes and I am now free again. Your parcel arrived only this morning, a week after it had been posted. Thank you for the sweets I will see what I can do about washing. We have the Army laundry, but I am allowed only five articles a week but I think I can manage with a bit of interchanging. Love Ted

30 Aug 40

Dear Mam, Thanks for you note re allowance I have been in to see the QMS and have filled up another form, which I think will do this time. In the meantime sign nothing until you hear further I understand you will receive a visit from an investigator UAB, who will try to find out the state of your finances. Remember I have been contributing to your upkeep since I was 14 (that is for the last 13 years) and that for the last 6 months I have been allowing you £2.10 per week.

By now, you will have had my crossing letter. The arm is now OK. It need be, for I have had fatigues all day.

I hear rumours that we are moving from here on Thursday. Where I do not (letter finishes here)

Wednesday

Dear Mam, We are now gradually being sorted out. All the A1 men are being drafted out tomorrow and we are taking in 700 more recruits from London. Things are moving!

Tomorrow night our band is being broadcast in the Forces programme. I wonder if you heard it. Some of our fellows are catching it rough. Several have had their houses bombed and people missing

Thursday. I was not able to finish this yesterday, as, at the last moment, I was able to scrounge a ticket for the Broadcast programme which I hope you were able to hear, although they say it did not come through very well. We had an air raid in the middle of it.

It is hopeless for me to try for 48 hours leave, as even fellows whose houses have been bombed have difficulty in getting it. So I doubt whether I shall see Wallasey after all. I have not written there yet.

Friday

It has turned very very cold up here. We had this morning out on manoeuvres and were nearly frozen.

It seems very funny to think of all those places being smashed up. The ARP must be pretty busy now, taking if all round I think I'm, lucky to be out of it.

Tomorrow, Saturday, we are all being sent on fatigue duty to Manchester for the day. Clearing up air raid damage I suppose. The snag is that it does us out of our Saturday half-holiday – the penalty of active service! Love Ted

Saturday

We have had a very busy day today. Early we were driven right through Manchester to the docks (Ships Canal) to an enormous dump of old rubber tyres, millions and millions of them all round which we had to load on to lorries. They were filthy dirty and full of water, so you can imagine the mess we got in. We finished about 4.0 and have just (6.30) finished dinner. This has cut heavily into our "Saturday half day"!

As we are to repeat the performance next Wednesday and Sunday it does not look as though we will be moving for some time after all.

Love Ted

Wednesday

Thank you for your letter. You mustn't be alarmed when I tell you that at present I am laid up here for a day or two with a mild attack of ptomaine poisoning. I told you the grub here was rotten!

It happened like this. On Monday we went tyre slinging as usual, and for rations we had the usual bread and butter and a chunk of 'chicken and ham' roll stuff. It seemed no worse than it usually was, so I ate nearly all of mine, the rest I threw away in the tyres. In the evening I and 3 others went to "Grapes of Wrath" which is a wonderful film, but very sombre. On coming out however, I was surprised to find I could not walk properly but staggered about all over the shop. Two of the boys supported me as far as the Salvation Army canteen where I was able to be sick. Then they got me back to barracks where I was sick again, even bringing up a drop of water directly I had drunk it. Still, I had a fairly good night, but the next morning I still could not walk or keep anything down, so I went sick and was sent down to the MI room for twenty four hours. I am now back in the barrack room and feeling a bit better, although still quite weak. I am excused duty today and have to report sick again tomorrow. Several other fellows were sick as well, but none seem to have taken it so badly as I.

Sorry to hear about the poor old Library, especially when I think of all the books I haven't read in it!

I bet you are living in cramped quarters now you have cleared the front room.

I have been to the MO again and am glad to say that I am quite OK again and feel as good as ever. I had some tea and porridge this morning and it has stayed down so that's alright. Instead of going to Manchester again today I am acting as Room Orderly a nice quiet cosy job with nothing to do, so the rest should put me right. Love Ted

Sunday

Dear Mum, Today I was called up to the Company Office to see the Captain who told me that at last your allowance is okayed, in case you have not already had notification. You are to receive 20/6d per week as from the date of my enlistment, which means you will get a lump sum of £6 odd which is owing to you. Very useful!

I am glad to say that I am quite fir again after my poisoning. You will be amused to know that it has gone down in my medical sheet as 'Gastritis'. Thus they cover each other up!

We are having some real Manchester weather just now, simply pissing with rain and nothing to do indoors. I am on Sergeants' Mess fatigue today so missed Church Parade. The snag is that I must stay on until after tea, I have done a lot of staying on this week.

We have had a large new intake this week, mostly Welsh though there are a number of Londoners amongst them.

We have been issued with fatigue suits – overalls like LDC ones. This is after we have

messed up our uniforms. I don't expect I shall recognise Forest Gate when I get my leave, which should be due in about three weeks' time or so. Whether I shall get it then or not is quite another matter. I shouldn't bank on it if I see you. Love Ted

Wednesday

Dear Mum, On Monday night we had a full dress air raid with guns, bombs – everything, quite close at times. On going tyre pushing the following day we saw some bombed houses in Manchester, and found our tyre dump had stopped some incendiaries destroying quite a lot. Since then we have had a raid very night but none so near.

We have been having appalling weather up here. When it pours, it has to be seen to be believed.

It must be very dark with felt instead of glass in the windows. Is the gas on again yet?

I had a busy day in the cookhouse yesterday washing up acres and acres of filthy pots and pans, on the go from 6.30 am to 6.30 pm you can imagine how tired I was at the end, particularly as I was mug enough to volunteer for the job, as I thought I would have a change from parades. However I was on parade again today and found it far better although very cold.

A plane was brought down Tuesday night on the moor. Several times travelling through Manchester we have seen plane wreckage being carted through the streets.

I forgot to mention that whilst in the cookhouse we had a visit from the Brigadier General, on a visit of inspection. He just sailed through like a red-tabbed whirlwind whilst we slaves stood at humble attention by our greasy washing up water, which incidentally we had to guard with our lives against thieves who came to steal it for shaving water.

I am glad to say I have had no recurrence of my guts trouble, which I am convinced was poisoning.

Glad to hear that Bing is settling down at last. Hit him from me. We have a lot of barrack cats all over the buildings.

Well dear, I have about 6,000 brass buttons to clean, besides gaiters to Blanco green; and boots to clean so must close now. Love Ted

Wednesday

Dear Mum,

This week in Manchester is War Weapons Week (Spitfire Funds etc) organised by the Lord Mayor and on Friday there is to be a parade through Manchester of the troops, Air Force, Navy et. The Amps are sending a picked force of 120 men of which I am to be one, and at the moment we are busy rehearsing. We parade in battle order, steel helmet, cartridge pouches, belts, haversacks, rifles etc with band and everything. They are working us to death with it, but it makes a change. I will tell you about it when it's over.

We seem to have finished our tyre pushing. I suppose the incendiary bombs helped us with that. Touching wood it looks as though our raids have slackened down a bit up here.

They are taking men from our company wholesale. About 30 were moved down to Norwood today. I might have been among

them, had I not been in the Manchester parade.

Thursday We are still busy training for the Manchester parade and we are going through it. The Major in charge of us was Governor of Strangeways Prison before the war, so you can imagine. Still the Colonel said we were a damn fine body of men, soldiers everyone of you, and by God we need em now! So we can't be as bad as we feel. Love Ted

Saturday

Dear Mum, At last we have a few moments respite. We have not moved yet, but expect to at literally any moment now. The whole mill is cleared and there are only 60 of the old A Company waiting here now. The others have been scattered all over the shop – London, Liverpool, Scotland, Isle of Man, another mill in Oldham called Further Hey (a jumping off ground for somewhere else) etc, etc. We have our kits all packed ready, equipment and so on.

All our Manchester Parade crowd are going together. The parade itself was a comic from our point of view. It was very big, a sort of Lord Mayor's show in fact, with tanks, RAF, Navy, Lancashire Fusiliers and several other regiments. All I was conscious of was marching, marching, marching, a sea of faces out of the corner of my eye, as I was an outside man, and a terrific blare of bands. I could hear about five different tunes and steps at once, rather like being in the middle of the Fair. It was terrifically hot marching, although it was a cold foggy day, as we wore steel helmets painted green, webbing, belts, cartridge pouches etc (also green) and carried packs and rifles. The perspiration was rolling down my face like tears.

The whole city was out, just like a parade in London, and altogether, I was glad of the experience, especially as we were heartily congratulated by our officers. So they might, the miles we walked!

Then as soon as we got back we were warned for draft. Thus we are rewarded. A number of our friends have been sent away, but the majority of us are still sticking together.

You, remember I told you a crowd were sent to Norwood only the other day. Well, of that crowd already four have been killed and sixteen injured. Apparently they ran straight into a raid with the above results. Thank God I was not in that draft.

After yesterday's parade we are the white-headed boys of the Corps. Even the Major (the Prison Governor one) showed an interest in whether we had enough food or not.

We have had a lot more kit dished out – a drab service gas mask – up to now I have been using the old one – a cap badge, gloves, long-pants – another shirt.

Well, I will try to get this off tonight. I expect we shall move by Monday, certainly before Thursday as there is then an intake of 600 new recruits. Love Ted

13070162 Pte EG Baker, Section 7, 128 Coy, Pioneer Corps, Fraserburgh, Aberdeenshire, Scotland
Saturday

Dear Mum, Thanks for your letter, and for parcel, still on its way, as far as I am concerned, for as you see, I have left (ed

note: letter finishes here)

1 Jan 41

Dear Ma,

Today is, of course, the famous Hogmanay so we have all day off being under the North Highland Command. It is a Bank Holiday here, and the whole town is closed down for the day like Christmas in England. Yesterday and last night we had a heavy fall of snow, which is about four inches deep over all the trees and even on the sands.

We have done a lot of work this week at a fishing village some distance off, a very lovely place in summer I should say, but at present that might not apply. The sea here is like that of Cornwall, great crashing breakers, only there are no cliffs only miles of smooth sands. Behind the sands the country is like that artificially produced in golf links, which are of course an indication of the country ("Links" is the proper name) so that one finds miles of perfectly natural greens, and roughs, just as though properly laid out. Besides those at Orkney, I have seen two wrecks here, I believe they hit mines.

How did Forest Gate come off in Last Sunday's conflagration? I am sorry the poor old Guildhall is no more, in fact very little of the City are to be still there. What makes it so ironic is that before the War they were so busy pulling down 'redundant' City churches, not to mention the Adelphi, Alexandra, Regent Street and chunks of Berkeley Square, yet now they are crying their eyes out because an enemy augments their own vandalism. Moral. "Leave well alone!"

Our chief relaxation here, when the pictures full is a very good canteen run by the Church of Scotland which does a lot more than the English one. They run mobile canteens all over the Orkneys, and here one can get all sorts of grub very cheaply. (I usually invest in coffee and hot dogs) and there are plenty of books to read, particular some class American ones like "Life", "Time" and to my interest our old friend "Liberty" (Canadian edition).

There is also a Salvation Army joint which is a good second, so not to mention fish and chips, joints, etc, we do not do too badly.

8 Jan 41

Dear Ma, Thank you for letter and clippings which are very interesting. I am glad to say I am still OK in spite of the frigid weather we have been having. I told you in my last letter how we had a week on the sea-shore tangling barbed wire. This week we are back in Fraserburgh generally messing about., Incidentally I got a chill burn on the lobe of my ear, but it has not been painful, only burnt a bit.

Today it has started thawing and everything is awash. At the Army's request I had a tooth stopped today. They seemed to think it needed doing, so I let them go ahead.

Now for some good news, I hope. Yesterday I stopped the SM with the result that when one of the blokes in the office goes on leave, I take his place. This may be a means of getting my foot in and perhaps getting a permanent post there. I sincerely hope so, as I am fed up with navvyng. Also, it is the only way I can hope for promotion,

as most of our Company are volunteers and old sweats and as such are bound to have preference. So I am awaiting further developments.

We,, I am getting catty – by the way – Nature note – all the cats here are smoke grey like Shrimp, very delicate creatures, and all the dogs are Scotties. I never saw so many in my life, they really are local culture. All my love Ted.

Undated

Dear Mam, I am still in the office and hope I shall be able to stop. At present I am filling in for a chap who has gone on a course, so I hope he will go altogether. The work is easy and pleasant and I don't start till 9.00 am. Its good, too, to have a little authority for once, instead of being pushed around by NCOs!

In case you want to know what I do, I make out parade statements, Company returns, sick reports, type Company Orders and any stray letters, statement and orders that are wanted, make out 252s (Uncle Bert will know what they are!), enter Part II Orders, check leaves and arrivals. In my own time I answer the phone, and chase up Sergeants and Corporals for their muster rolls, sick reports, etc. Not bad eh?. All my love Ted

10 Jan 41

Dear Mam, It is trite to say how small the world is, yet here is an instance. Last night three other blokes and self were invited out to supper by some people we met in the C of S canteen – and in the course of conversation it transpired that our host had a cousin living at Endsleigh Court, and he himself had stayed there! Odd, isn't it!

They were very nice people – he is responsible for the town's water supply etc – and it was grand to sit in an easy chair and eat civilised grub again. All my love Ted
PS. No more navying! Hooray!!!

18 Jan 41

Dear Mam, I am quite well established here now and think I can safely say I am here for keeps, unless unforeseen circumstances occur. I have just been having a chat with the QMS (I am on friendly terms with all the tops now! Such an official position does for me) and he tells me I can reasonably expect leave in February or early March. If I can wrangle it, I shall try to get home for my birthday, or thereabouts. I have a lot more to tell you when I see you.

At the moment we are undergoing a raging blizzard, Snow, snow, snow about four inches deep.

One of my friends here, who lives at Leytonstone had had his roof blown off, somewhere in Grove Green Road I believe. You can imagine with this weather the sea is tremendous. Our billets are well within sound of it, but we only get the cold. Speaking of colds, my own is clearing up a bit, but not much, but everyone seems to have them this weather. Speaking of influence – I have been trying for months to get a new pair of gaiters; my first ones were all frayed like an Indians. Directly I got in the office I got them as easy as dammit. Sickening, isn't it?

I am gradually recovering my old facility (!) with the typewriter, and I do feel that in doing this job I am doing something that will be more useful to me after the War

than navying, which was leading me nowhere. Incidentally I am getting much better food as a "clerk".

One thing, when I come on leave you will get my ration allowance which is about four times the civilian so that will help you out a bit. I shall get a free travelling warrant and apparently it takes about 13 hours from Aberdeen to London and about two hours from here to Aberdeen, so I shall get 9 days leave (2 days travelling). Love to all, Ted

Sunday PS. Sitting pretty now! One of the blokes in this office who has been waiting for a commission to come through, has got it today, which makes me a fixture, as everybody moves up one. It's been a rough road to get here, but I'm here and that is all that counts. Expect to be home next month.

23 Jan 41

Dear Mam, Last week I had an offer to go as Clerk to Group Headquarters. I think though I shall turn it down, as for one thing it will mean staying in Aberdeen, probably for the duration, and for another, promotion is likely to be slower there than if I remain with the Company. So here I stops for the moment.

All the snow has gone from the town here, but outside out in the country communications are very bad still. It is not so cold and the howling gale has given over for a bit, all to our advantage. I got my new glasses today (at last!). They are not very comfortable nor very sightly, I think, but I am persevering with them for a bit anyway. You must tell me what you think of them.

Sorry to hear Romford Road has been bashed about a bit.

Well remember me to all. Do you see anything of Grace and George Smythe these days, or have they been blitzed? All my love Ted

23 Jan 41

Dear Mum,.

We are at last thawing here after two day of 'snowed up' quite literally, with no trains, no mail and alas no rations, so we had to fall back on emergencies. Even the electric cables broke down but were repaired in time for me to go to the flicks last night. I hear they had five foot snowdrifts out on the Aberdeen road, and the wind was somethink chronic. As you can see from a map we are on the outside edge of Scotland and more or less always in a gale. Still we are thawing nicely now and drying up at the same time so we have our advantages.

Now we have got to an inhabited country us Amps have got all civilised and are actually giving a dance on the 31st, borrowing the Royal Scots band and hall. This gives us office wallahs quite a lot of fun organising and so on.

One advantage about this job is that one is no longer a nonentity, but soon gets known all over the Company and is constantly in the eye of the officers, which is all to the good. I'm afraid I rather like a sport of limelight! – and I certainly find it more congenial to give orders than to take them.

Leave is going on very nicely – now we are on the mainland, it is much easier, and of course we of the new draft have to wait until all the old Company have gone before we have our chance but this month should see them through easily, and then it's our

turn. Till then, Love Ted

28 Jan 41

Dear Mam, It is bitterly cold here again. The snow has gone but the wind is howling all the time. On Sunday I went on the beach. It was bitter along there as you can imagine. I was right frawn.

I hope you don't have to use the Anderson much these days. It must be like living in a miniature Nissen, and that's certainly uncomfortable enough.

Being a member of HQ staff I have had to hand my rifle in, as am now technically non-combatant. I am not sorry as it no longer has to be cleaned which is a long job, but it is a bit annoying to think that I lugged it all the way from Oldham to Orkney, all over Pomona Island, then all the way back to here for nothing.

Last week there was a flag day for soldiers, sailors and airmen, and honestly the only people I saw with flags on were our own Amps.

You need not worry about Army boots, ours is a very select do, and ammunition boots are verboten. I have acquired a pair of pumps,. I am quite an old hand at this, by the way. One has to be in the Army.

31 Jan 41

Dear Ma, As far as I can tell at the present moment, I shall be home for 9 days leave on Wednesday next arriving Kings X or S Pancras about 7.30 pm. Of course, I may be put back a day or so, on account of compassionate leave and so on, but you may take it as definite that I shall be home next week. Before I catch the train at Aberdeen I will wire you the station and approx time of arrival, and as Aberdeen to London takes about 15 hours it should reach you in good time. Whoopee!! So if you have any birthday presents I'll collect them in person!

I have had a move up in the office and am now in the Administration Dept, much more interesting work. Also am actually working in the Orderly Room with the Major and Lieutenant.

I hope everything keeps quiet for my visit and continues to do so.

If I am likely to be unavoidably detained I will let you know as soon as poss. Otherwise – expect a 'gram. In haste to catch the post. Love Ted

2 Feb 41

Dear Mam, I am afraid I was a little too premature over my leave announcement, as it is very unlikely that anyone will be able to go on leave before Thursday at the very earliest, so I expect I shall be home sometime in the following week Sorry to disappoint you, but these things can't be helped. Still it won't be long now. Love Ted

7 Feb 41

Dear Mum, We have had some excitement here today – Jerry has been over, machine gunning and laid five unexploded bombs over the town which our chaps and The Royal Scots are guarding at present. So far no damage has been done except a house hit by a machine gun bullet. He came over about 11.30 in broad daylight and dived as low as the telegraph wires, right down overhead. We were busy in Company Office and heard the racket outside, exactly like a motorcycle backfiring. What

fun we do 'ave!

Re the leave question, you can expect me around the 17th, this is more or less definite but everything has been held up for the snow.

I forgot to mention that one of our raiders unexploded ripped the side off one of the towns two gasometers and then lay in the yard. I suppose he was too low for his bombs to explode. He got away to sea quite safely I believe.. Love Ted

PS. By the way, we had no sirens at all for our raid!

16 Feb 41

Dear Ma,

Our working parties on the beach had a thrill yesterday when a Henkel came over them from the landward side only 30 feet over their heads. They all fell flat but he must have thought they were armed for he made off out to sea.

During the recent gales a number of mines have been washed up on the shore (one turned out to be a dead porpoise). A dog went sniffing around one of the mines and blew himself and half the coast line to bits.

Yesterday was the anniversary of my first six months in the Army which qualified one for War Proficiency Pay, which means as far as you are concerned that you will get an extra 3d per day.

On the night of the 14th I bashed into a wall in the blackout, smashed my glasses and cut my forehead a bit. Unfortunately they were my horn rims so I am forced to wear the issue after all. It was very good thing I had them by me., Love Ted

16 Mar 41

Dear Ma, Our old friend Tim McCoy is in trouble again. During the last three weeks he has sold three complete issues of kit, boots, greatcoat and all. Today he turned up wearing only a pair of denims. He has been sent to the M.O.s who diagnosed chronic alcoholism so Tim has to see a psychiatrist and I suppose will finish in a home for inebriates.

Re Campbell the Irish "Be Jesus" merchant is also in trouble and is doing 28 days in a military prison for (1) overstaying his leave (2) losing his kit (3) rubbing some Anti Gas Ointment in his eyes thus producing conjunctivitis. These fellows really must be quite mad, the ridiculous things they do.

Love Ted

4 Mar 41

Dear Mother, I am now settling down to the life again and it hardly seems possible I only started for London a week ago. I heard about the raid from the chaps who followed us in. We have had a few attacks on convoys out at sea here, and last week a trawler came into harbour with wheel house smashed by bombs and two men killed. The Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis) were on show the other night. I only saw the end, long white strobes and took them for searchlights, as there was a raid on at the time, but those who saw them say it was a wonderful shows, blue, purple, green and all the rest.

Those who should have followed us in from leave last week arrived three days late owing to raids and snow.

I am negotiating for kippers and hope to

send some soon. There has been no sign of rabbits yet, but will keep my eyes open. Anyway, I rather doubt their travelling abilities.

As you have probably read in the papers, our rations are cut down, not enough to make any difference really, for we still get tons of cheese.

We have a Norwegian boat in harbour at the moment, quite a big one.

We have also had a change of garrison and the streets are full of kilted Scottish officers lounging on long sticks like Shepherd's crooks. There must be thousands of them. PS. In future I am not in 'Section 7' but 'HQ 128 Coy PC. A small thing but it makes a slight advancement.

9 Mar 41

Dear Ma,

We have had a lot of activity this week shifting our billets. We have got a better place at the other end of the town from where we were before – nothing like a change.

I and another bloke in the office have a little garret of our own, rather bare but quite cosy with a stove, table and chairs and a sloping attic roof with a big bay in the middle looking out over roofs and squares. We had rather an unpleasant lodger at first, one of the old men of the company, in the Sanitary Squad, who carried a little spit pot about with him, but he only stayed one night Glory be.

Now we are quire comfortable and private – another privilege of being in the office. It will be possible later on to entertain our friends up there, having a place of our own and I am trying to scrounge a radio from the QMS. We have already acquired a dartboard! At present I am an unwilling prisoner in the office but one must take things as they come.

Our weather here is still fine, though cold. Our new billet is right away from the sea front and consequently so much cosier.

Very few of our London chaps who went on leave saw anything of the City bombing, because like me, they were too pre-occupied with their own people to go out and about much.

At the present rate I should be on leave again in about another three months or so, but anything can happen by that time.

We have had a few air raid warnings but nothering serious. I must carry an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity about with me, I think. Nothing happens where I am, yet the moment I move the balloon goes up, or the bombs come down. All my love, Ted

22 March 41

Dear Ma, How are you surviving the latest Blitz? We have heard about last Wednesday's bombing. I hope they left Forest Gate alone this time.

I am just recovering from a burst of flu, otherwise I would have written earlier.

I still have a heavy cold, but yesterday I was really bad, sweating, shivers and weak as water. However I cleared off back to my billet as soon as I could, made a big fire and crept into bed. We have not been bothered much by air-raids, except for occasional warnings.

It has turned very cold up here and we seem to get a lot of hailstorms. Well, all my love Ted

25 March 41

Dear Ma, I can't tell how relieved I was to get you letter today, saying you are all alright. Except for the mere fact of the Blitz we have heard no rumours, because no letters appear to have come through, but we have been hoping for the best. tl must have been very bad, but I should like to hear all about it, if you can, next time you write. I am glad things are quieter now and hope they continue so. God bless you Ted

PS. I have joined the library here and have discovered a new author Hugh Edwards. V. good

28 Mar 41

Dear Mum, You must have had a terrible time last week and I am glad every thing has been quieter since. I expect that by now you are up and about, but what a blessing it is you have Alice there. If you had to rely on our relations, you would indeed be in a bad way!

I am quite OK again. I had only one really bad day, this time last week, and by now I have quite recovered.

We find ourselves in the depth of winter again. Two day ago it started snowing heavily (it still is) with the result that we have had no mail, neither in nor out, no papers, no rations, and no electricity (not that the last worries us!), Love Ted

2 Apr 41

Dear Mum, Our snow is going now, though it is still very cold. I have managed to shake of my flu which has been going all round the office. I was the third or fourth to get it.

I am very happy these days, as the job seems to grow and grow as time goes on. I wish we could move from here, as such a small place gets very monotonous after a time and the Scotch are not a particularly interesting race to live amongst. However I suppose we might be a lot worse off – in face we have been!

We are still waiting for our radio, like my stripe. Still, all in good time, I suppose. Love Ted

3 Apr 41

Dear Mum, Hope you are still getting on OK. If your weather way down South is anything like ours up here, you should be in for the spring has really come to Scotland, so it seems. If it could only understand to be warm as well as bright, it would be grand, but that is asking too much.

In Tuesday night I saw a convoy being attacked whilst out on the beach. Not that there was so much to see, except that every so often a tremendous burst of flares would flash over the edge of the horizon. This kept on a long time, long after I went to bed, and I don't know what the outcome of it all was.

Friends Hollis and Thompson have both been turned down as prospective candidates for an OCTU. They are both very disappointed about it, naturally for they were both anxious to get out of working parties. I expect their chance will come along later. There will certainly be a vacancy in the office soon, so perhaps one can come up here.

I spent an interesting hour or so on the quay watching them launch a minesweeper yesterday. They are very graceful little craft with the lines of an old frigate, except of

course that they have no masts or sails etc. All my love, Ted

7 Apr 41

Dear Ma, I don't know if you heard or read the news about the raids on a town in the Eastern Scotland on Saturday. Well, it was us and he got the Maconochus good and proper. Our blokes here have been two days clearing up the mess and are still doing it. It was about 10.45 in the morning when we heard the "humph" of a bomb and the patter of machine-gun bullets. There were at least five killed and many others wounded, and plenty of broken glass etc etc. He also dropped an unexploded bomb – a 250 kilo – which had to be detonated in the evening on the beach. We see life in a small way, don't we?

Last night (Sunday) I heard a speaker from the University of Aberdeen on the progress of the War sponsored by the M of I. It was very good and I thought very well balanced and realistic.

By the way, on Saturday's raid we had a bit of shrapnel through a window of our billet. Fortunately it was not through any of the windows in our room so we are not troubled by draughts.

Well there's no more real news. Every time a plane comes over here now they all duck. They ain't seen nothin' yet! You never saw such a panicky lot as these Scotch., All my love Ted

12 Apr 41

Dear Mother, We have had no more raids here, and everything is more or less quiet. We have all been dished out with rifles once again, which means the trouble of keeping them clean, and also of bringing it home when I come on leave, whenever that may be.

The news is not so bright, these days, is it? All my love, Ted.

17 Apr 41

Dear Mother, I have just heard over the radio that poor Au London has had its heaviest raid yet, and hope that Forest Gate escaped it as much as possible.

We are still having it fairly quiet up here – a few warnings from time to time but that is all. I have had another rifle issued to me, a great improvement on my former musket. We are also having bayonets, which will be very useful for chopping wood, toasting, etc, etc. Love Ted

20 Apr 41

Dear Mother, We had another bashing on Thursday afternoon. We had the usual broad daylight business with no warning. He made rather a mess of two houses in Castle Street opposite to where I used to be billeted. I believe five people were killed altogether.

Our CQMS came home from leave the day after last Wednesday's blitz and he says that London certainly does look in a mess now, with Waterloo Bridge, Hungerford Bridge, Charing X Station, Waterloo, the Admiralty Arch and St Thomas' Hospital all down. It must have been a bash when the landmines came down in Claremont Road, I expect most of it is ruins now.

The 'siren' has just gone again. Another convoy passing, I suppose.. All my love Ted

PS He has just been over again! No damage, dropped a bomb, missed his

target, and machine gunned us a bit. We have been round picking out marks on the walls where bullets have struck!

25 Apr 41

Dear Mother,
Frank Thompson and Reg Hollis went to Aberdeen yesterday for an interview for their commissions and they do not seem very hopeful about them from their account this morning. I don't think they really want to be officers much, it's just to get out of the drudgery of working parties and I can't say I blame them.

We have had a lot of intricate needlework recently decorating ourselves with little red and green stripes (the Corps colours) and PC in our epaulettes. When I come home you shall put them on for me properly. All my love, Ted.

29 Apr 41

Dear Mother, I certainly shall see a change in Forest Gate this time. What a lot of jobs for Amps there must be down there.

We have had it fairly quiet in the last few days, except that yesterday a mysterious cream coloured plane with British circles machine gunned one of our working parties on the beach. Nobody was hurt, but a soldier of another unit was injured further down the coast.

The weather is glorious now, if cold. The sea looks grand deep blue like the Cornish sea, and at night it is so light, even very late, that the colour of the sand and sea is quite discernable. We are so far north that in the summer it never gets completely dark and conversely in the winter the days are very short. All my love Ted.

6 May 41

Dear Mother, Last Sunday afternoon I walked along the beach about 20 miles. On the way I found a little puffin sitting on the sands. He was about as big as a little chicken, black, with a grey face and a striped yellow and red beak, like a cross between an owl and a parrot with ducks feet. I went right up to him and stroked him and talked to him, but the rotten little sod bit me, so I left him to his fate. When I got back he had went, so he must have swam or flown away. I presume he had been flying across the sea and was tired out, as he does not seem injured in any way.

How do you like having to get up two hours earlier? We find ourselves working in the dull grey light of early dawn and it is still very light when we have to go in. It is very cold up here still. Occasionally we have bouts of sunshine but they are very very brief. All my love Ted

10 May 41

Dear Ma, We have not had much new happen up here, except that you can expect me home on leave on or around the 24th, that is in a fortnights time, which date I will confirm later. I am trying to wrangle two extra days by this means and shall also probably manage to travel at night this time. All my love. Ted

14 May 41

Dear Ma, It is actually snowing today! What a country this is!

I was very glad indeed to hear you survived the last blitz, which seems to have been very extensive indeed. We are having

it fairly quiet up here now – touching wood.

What do you think of this Hess business? It makes the war more fantastic and fictional than ever, more like a John Buchan or an up to date Premier of Juda than actually. I certainly hope it means the beginning of the end, as seems possible. Well we have no real news so will close now. All my love Ted

18 May 41

Dear Mother, I had a pleasant afternoon out yesterday having the chance to go into Aberdeen with one of the officers and the CQMS. It was quite a long run (44 miles) and I enjoyed it very much. Aberdeen is not so hot after all, rather like the Tottenham Court Road with a Scotch accent. Some of the buildings are rather fine, all built of silver-grey granite. Both at Aberdeen and at Edinburgh, and even here, they are very fond of building their houses, and shops and banks and so on, in a sort of Walt Disney castle architecture, with pepper-box turrets and battlements stuck all over them. From a distance they look fantastically imposing, but closer still they look rather silly.

Aberdeen is crowded with troops, Poles and Canadians and so on. It will be a change to get to London where soldiers are scarcer!

Did I tell you that last week we had a visit from the Duke of Kent, visiting the ARP and AFS Defences. Of course, us being soldiers they didn't trouble about us at all, still, I managed to get a glance at him in his car. He was in a very flash Air Force uniform and very nicely sun bronzed, we got an occasional whirl, don't we?

I have seen pictures of the bashing Westminster had had and should like to inspect it for myself.

We have got Frank Thompson working up in the office now, as one of the blokes is going. As you probably guess it is the result of an artfully manipulated wrangle. The other chap, Hollis has landed a rather good job with the Res i/c Defences up Invergordon way, so they are both more or less compensated for the loss of the commissions.

Well we have no exciting news of any sort. Things are pretty dull up here at the moment, though yesterday on the way to Aberdeen I saw a bombed shop, where they gave Peterhead a soaking the night before, and the other evening I saw a schooner in full sail, hull down on the horizon. I did not think there were any left. Love Ted

5 Jun 41

Dear Mother, Well as you will see I have got here at last. Actually I arrived last night at 8.00 pm, the reason for the delay being that cook (whom I met at Liverpool Street) and I missed our connection at Edinburgh, with the consequence that we had four hours to kill in that city. We did not make out so badly, found a decent canteen and had a good meal. The only snag was that it made a very big journey of it, although the London to Edinburgh part of it was very comfortable only four of us in our carriage.

It is very cold up here, as I thought it would be. The Company is still the same though we are all changing billets again.

The whole Office seems to have been turned inside out while I have been away

but that does not worry me as it looks rather as though things may be a bit easier from now on.

Edinburgh was stiff with Polish and Canadian officers. I was not very impressed with the place, though I had longer to look round it than before.

There were two bombs dropped here yesterday, before I arrived.

Our new canteen is still open, and I managed to get two eggs and chips last night which was very welcome. Otherwise Fraserburgh is just the same, except as I said, it is about ten times as cold as it is at home, and there is nothing to see at the pictures this week.

Still never mind, it's only another three months or so (I hope). All my love and thanks for a grand time. Ted.

11 June 41

Dear Mother, I don't know if I mentioned it in my last letter, that we have now changed our billets again, and are now in a very decent place indeed, what used to be the Territorial Drill Hall. When I tell you that the room I share with two others has a sink in it, and a bath room adjoining, you will know how different it is from the fisher huts. Only I don't think the bath is very much good.

Well, I will write again when I get back to Fraserburgh. All my love Ted

15 June 41

Dear Mother, Thank you for the "I, Claudius II" and the other book with which I am very pleased indeed. They were waiting for me last night when I arrived back from Aberdeen. I was at 30 Group HQ on an administration course, which was very helpful and at which incidentally I met some of my Oldham friends.

There are some very fine silver-granite buildings in Aberdeen and the War Memorial is very good, a colossal stone lion, and the Marischal College is a lovely building. There is only one decent street of shops, Union Street, and they are the usual Boots, Woolworths and so on, so there is nothing about them, that is new. There are some nice gardens, and I believe the beach is very good, but I never got there. The town is full of troops, Poles, Canadians and Norge.

Altogether it made a very pleasant break for a few days, as well as the change of seeing how Groups works. Not much I should say. All my love Ted

20 June 41

Dear Mother, I have just finished sewing the "dogs legs" on my tunic and very new they look. Naturally I feel very pleased and gratified, especially as it means 1/- a day more!

We are having marvellous weather, bright hot sunshine.

All my love Ted

26 Jun 41

Dear Mother,

We had another blitzing last night, 3 bombs dropped, a bank smashed and half a street down. The Company is busy clearing up the debris today, I think it may be a long job.

Yesterday I had the job of seeing off Tim McCoy off for the last time. He has finally been discharged as a mental defective, after

selling 4 dozen blankets and assorted kit, so we had to get rid of him as he was costing the Army too much. All my love Ted

HQ 128 Coy PC, Cowdenbeath, Fife 1 Jul 41

Dear Mother, As you see from above address, we have at last had a move, and a very quick one it was, before we knew where we were, so that I had not time to let you know. However, here we are.

This is a small coalmining town, very dirty and scruffy, near Dunfermline and 174 miles from Edinburgh. The billets we're in were originally inhabited by the Poles, and there are Polish notices all over the walls and a White Eagle in the Company Office.

Incidentally most of the billets had been left in an appallingly filthy condition. Literally inches of mud on the floors and the lavatories blocked up solid by our brave allies. Fortunately the one in which I found myself was comparatively clean, so I had jam on it as usual. By the way we expect to be here only a month then back to Fraserburgh. I expect we shall be glad of a bit of sea air by then.

There are plenty of cinemas and canteens here, but the place is very sordid, slagheaps all round and pit-heads, rather like Oldham. The people seem more civilised than those of Fraserburgh, and altogether I welcome the change.

By the way our Company Office is over a cinema on the High Street, across which a railway runs. There is no level crossing gate, so that when a train (a coal train) comes along an old man comes out from a little hut and stops all the traffic first with a red flag.

If we do stay here, I'm quite a bit nearer for leave, if not, it doesn't matter much.

I will write again soon and tell you a bit more about this joint when I've been around a bit, but believe me, it sure is a dump. Love Ted

2 July 41

Dear Mother, As you will see from above address, I have changed my location again, this time to a Scottish coal-mining town, which is quite a change from Fraserburgh. It is a very dirty, scruffy place surrounded by slag-heaps and pithead gear. We have coal trains clanking all round us all day and all night.

Still it's much larger than Fraserburgh and I think we shall be all right now we are settling in. I am glad you are going to the country for a bit it will be a change for you. We are having some fine weather there now, in fact it's very warm and close. We miss the sea breezes of Fraserburgh.

Did I tell you that just before we left Fraserburgh we had another bombing. Quite a lot of damage was done. This place hasn't been touched, and doesn't know there's a war on.

Our Company Office is over a cinema, outside the window is a dusty neon sign and we are all using gilded chairs.

Originally this was the Company Office of Polish troops, who were our predecessors here, and notices in Polish are all over the place.

They were a filthy dirty crowd, and we have been busy ever since we got here trying to get the place clean. Very difficult considering the atmospheric conditions, Love Ted

Wednesday (undated)

Dear Ma, We have had plenty of air raid warnings, but no repetition of last week's bombing although today a German was brought down some seven miles out at sea and the blokes picked up in the traditional rubber boat.

We are having a sudden outburst of fine weather, really bright sun, though not hot. Still it is much more cheerful.

Our prospective Easter looks about as exciting as most Bank Holidays in the Army. I expect I shall be working anyway.

Apparently you have had nearly (or is it over) a fortnight of raid-less nights, may it keep so!

Well, we have really nothing happening in this place – except we are all being dished out with rifles and bayonets again. That means that I'll have to cart it home on leave with me, (which may not be so far off). All my love Ted

Undated

Dear Mother, Yesterday (Saturday) I took the evening off and went into Dunfermline which is only a 5d bus ride away. It is a very nice place, very picturesque with winding streets and many old buildings with gargoyles, turrets and battlements in the Disney style of architecture which seems to have been so popular then. They have an ancient abbey where Robert the Bruce is buried and adjoining are the ruins of the palace of Bruce, for Dunfermline was once his capital. These ruins stand in the most magnificent park I have ever been in – I have seen nothing to touch it anywhere – planted by Andrew Carnegie who was born in Dunfermline. It is very broad wide lawns, like Hyde Park at the Marble Arch, only instead of Oxford Street being on the horizon, there are hills and mountains (distant) in a wide panorama. Here there are aviaries of tropical birds and fish and rabbits in an enclosure in a little wood that runs through the park. There is a small lake and a fine restaurant and concert hall, but the finest is just round the castle ruins, where it is a wild sort of glen, a steep brae leading to a burn at the bottom with paths all round, very thickly covered with trees and tropical shrubs (including bamboo) and flowers of all sorts, all growing quite wild.

I can't begin to describe how lovely it all is. There are a lot of peacocks roaming about wild here. Fortunately we were there on a perfect day, and it is situated so high that it is never really too hot.

The town is stiff with Poles, every other one of whom seems to be an officer of some sort, not that we take any notice of that.

They have a very fine YMCA there, Canteen etc, an old house (very like the one in Bedfords Park) entirely given over to troops, where one can also get a very good meal.

The shops are a curious blend of sophistication and simplicity, as though Regent Street were suddenly dropped into the midst of Bury St Edmunds say, even more does it seem so with all the foreign languages one hears all around, and all the strange uniforms.

They have a grand Woolworths too, just like home.

To pile comfort on comfort, I now have a room of my own in my billet, and a Radio in the Office (where I am writing this. I really

think I shall be sorry to go back to Fraserburgh, now I have got used to this place. Love Ted

Sunday

Dear Mother,

Yesterday we had a sort of Highland Gathering here, and the streets were full of kilts, sporrans etc, with bagpipes screeching all over the place, all very picturesque in its way. Unfortunately I was unable to get out to view the fun and games, I had to get 3 blokes off to the Middle East, which was rather a hectic job.

There is some very nice scenery just outside the town, with distant mountains and very high hills with horned sheep grazing on them. In the main, the place and district remind me very strongly of Oldham, the same grime in the town and the same scenery outside if one takes the trouble to go and look for them.

This place is much more civilised than Fraserburgh. One can understand what the people say, and it is much more of a town. We have a very good billet, with a bathroom, wash basin and lav next door, while our Pay Office is only a few shops down the street. As one would expect in a mining town the prevailing dog is the greyhound.

At certain times one sees miners going home with black faces and those steel caps with lamps fixed in them, that we have seen in films so often. I had never thought of Scotland as a coalmining country, but there seems to be a lot.

One of these evenings, I intend to have a fourpenny bus ride into Dunfermline.

It is raining miserably at present. Love Ted

25 Jul 41

Dear Mother, The most exciting thing that has happened here this week was a thunderstorm with showers of rain, since then the weather has been very dull. All my love Ted

28 July 41

Dear Mother, I am feeling rather tired today, as I had a rather strenuous day yesterday. Summarising from the map that Loch Levan was not very far away, I and another bloke decided to inspect it. We started off at 6.00pm. I might mention that it was a very warm evening, but we stepped out towards the distant hills.

We managed to leave the slagheaps ('bings' they call them) behind at last, and as we came up with them these little hills seemed to grow higher and higher. However, the main road to Kinvers, which we were taking, skirted them, and after about four miles we turned right and took a side road with the same range of hills rising high on our right, they were very grand here, covered with heather and bracken with the bare rock looking through on their crests.

After another three miles or so, we saw the shine of water and at last came to the Loch. It is a vast expanse of water with hills rising all around fading into blue mountains in the distance. There are three islands on it, one with Lochleven castle on it where Mary Queen of Scots was imprisoned. The whole scene is very wild and desolate.

I don't know if I mentioned by the way that it was so hot and I suppose the flies

were so tantalising that the cattle appeared to be literally maddened, rushing about with their tails arched high, stampeding up and down the sloping fields. I saw one leap one of the stone walls that divide the field here, into a wood.

When we had seen enough of Loch Leven – one can just see the opposite shore, we decided to go back and as it had been such a hellish long walk decided to try to cut some off by crossing the hills.

We started up all right, through a pine wood, then came out into thick high bracken, taller than we were, and very tangled, just like that in Moles' woods only there was a lot more and it was up a mountain side, also it was full of flies and insects. After a hell of a struggle we got out among the heather which is rather loose. I always thought heather was like grass, but it grows in thick stiff clumps, like thyme, and is very hard to walk on. It was all in bloom by the way. I enclose a sample. It was full of little powdery moths. Being so awkward to walk on (or rather climb) we were continually losing our footings.

Still when we got to the summit it was well worth it. There were only a few black faced horned sheep, but the view over Loch Levan was glorious. As we were still about six miles from Cowdenbeath we kept on, and had to climb another hill before we could cross the range. It was bare rock here. On our way we disturbed half a dozen sandy hares.

It is amazing how small everything looks from such a very great height, yet sounds came up from the valley very clearly for example a car would sound quite near then, looking down, There was a tiny thing about an eighth of an inch long crawling along a road like a ribbon.

From the top of the hills Cowdenbeath looked a hell of a way off but we kept on, across heather and through bracken again. I may add that we were both thoroughly exhausted by now, but we just went straight down the side of that mountain, over walls and fences when we came to them down in the cultivated parts.

Finally we struck the road at Kelty, still about three miles off, so we kept on at an automatic marching pace, having failed miserably to hitch-hike any of the miserly Scotch cars. They are a lousy lot.

Still it was a fine experience even if it does make one want to view mountains from a distance rather than try to climb them in the future.

I have never been so tired or so thirsty in my life.

This heather, by the way, is a most lovely sight, it is covered with these little purple flowers, and it has a rather lovely smell. Living in the country, I find I am remembering my half-forgotten botany and recognising a lot of wild flowers of which the glens are full.

Well that's all on Loch Levan. It's rather like an essay on my nature ramble, but I thought you would like to hear about it. Love Ted

7 August 41

Dear Mother, Last night I saw another lock, much nearer this time. It is called Loch Gelly and not as picturesque as Loch Levan, and only about quarter the size. However, it is still very pretty, with swans swimming on it. Love Ted

12 August 41

Dear Mother, We had a very enervating weekend, being on a stand-to, with practically half Scotland, playing invasions. As Orderly Room Corporal my job was to stay by my post like Casablanca which meant that I spent all Saturday, Saturday night and Sunday morning in the Orderly Room. I was up all Saturday night taking down silly messages and then either going myself or sending a runner careering madly through the streets in search of troops to tell them they were all dead.

This district being mining and not so far from Glasgow is as Red as can be (politically) and it is amusing at the pictures. Whenever the newsreels show Stalin they cheer and scream the place down with joy. There are notices all over the streets – Lift Ban on Daily Workers, Unite with Russia, Smash Fascism and so on, most of which have been rendered obsolete by the March of Time. I think they rather resent us soldiers as oppressors of the workers, and the soul-less robots of the wicked loyalists. Love Ted

128 Coy PC, HQ, Galashiels, Selkirk 19 August 41

Dear Mother, Now you know where we are, and is it the goods!

To begin with, we are in the Border country (several hours nearer home) and it's the most marvellous scenery, beating anything in the Highlands hollow.

Galashiels is a very nice little town, very 'classy' and 'country' one would say, in peacetime. The Tweed flows through it, very fast water, with little bridges crossing it at intervals, and being in a valley, large heather covered hills rise round on every side, so that wherever one looks, hill tops appear above the houses, with blue mountain peaks in the distance.

And our billets! We are again over a cinema, but this time it is a Super Cinema and we have what was once the café, a large room with rubber flooring and arty lighting. This is the Orderly Room. Next to it, opening off it, is our billet, exactly the same. We have a cot each(!) and a radio and overlook the Market Square. We have hot and cold water and even the lavatory has a plate glass door, all mirrors. Seems too good to be true, doesn't it!

At present we are very busy getting straightened out, as we have move into a new area and a new Group which makes a bit of work. Cheerio from the best joint yet! All my love Ted

22 August 41

Dear Mother, Thank you for your letter. Yes, we are lucky to be here. The other night I had a look at the Tweed. It is very lovely indeed. We are having splendid weather too, bright sunshine.

Now about my leaf. Except that I expect to be home sometime next month. I can give only the vaguest information as yet, So far, my 3 months are up on the 26th, but it is too much to expect to get home around the exact date, especially in a mob like this. We are allowed to have only 7% of the Company away at a time, which is about 15 men, and as all our Irishmen consistently overstay, it is apt to hold up everybody else, with the result that most of our leave is nearly a month and a half behind.

Still I am pushing them off as quickly as I

can and hope to get things straightened out by the time it gets to my turn.

28 August 41

Dear Mother, I had a very pleasant day in Edinburgh and had a longer time to look the city over. I still do not think very much of it. Perhaps I have missed the best parts but I have been down Princes Street from end to end.

Our weather here has turned very wet, but perhaps will clear up later.

I doubt if it is worth applying for a commission, a Major was telling us at Group that he loses 50% of his salary in Income Tax and then one has to wait for so long that it is almost starvation: for example: a Sergeant gets, say 5/- a day, plus food, clothing, lodging and his wife's allowance. A 2Lt on the other hand gets 7/- per day, no marriage allowance, and has to buy his own kit, billets, food etc; he gets an allowance, I agree, which is about 2/3 of the actual cost of living. In addition there is a definite social standard to maintain, so it is not so good, after all, he has a pip on one's shoulder. All my love Ted

HQ 128 PC, Hoddom Castle, Ecclefechan 2 September 41

Dear Mother, As you see from above, we have had the change I hinted at last letter, and here we is. But this too will be only a very short stay, I fancy.

We came in here yesterday and are now safely ensconced in the castle, HQ that is. The rest of the company dwell in huts (Nissen) around the gate in true feudal style.

And as a castle this is the real thing, a wonderful huge medieval building, with turrets, bastions, battlements, bridge over where the moat once was, great courtyard with huge iron gates, set in really beautiful grounds (before the Army got at it) with deep woods and cornfields. It was very beautifully decorated, and was the castle in which the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester spent their honeymoon. My office adjoins the Royal Bridal Chamber!

That is one side of the medal. The other is that we are miles from anywhere (5 from the nearest village, God knows how many from the nearest town!), and our castle, though very pretty to look at (it's like the one in Dore, the Sleeping Beauty one) has no sanitation so that we have about half a mile to go for a tom-tit, neither has it very good washing facilities, one tap to about 15 men, so you see we are really medieval.

We are further south still, near Dumfries, and on the way here we came through Gretna – a miserable hole like Great Baston.

As far as 'leaf' goes, I may hang on for a week if it means going from here, as it's a hell of a journey from here. However, as I said, we may not be here so very long.

I am going into Lockerbie tomorrow to see the Groups (we're in another new one!) to know how things are, and what sort of returns they want. I'm getting quite important aren't I?

There is a marvellous view from this window. Love Ted

6 September 41

Dear Mother, I had my day in Lockerbie, once more learning the workings of a new Group which makes the fourth. Lockerbie is quite a nice place but very small, 7 miles away. I enclose a postcard of my present

billet and am writing this in the room on the top floor extreme right. You can see the set of four windows very clearly. The whole castle by the way is of some pink stone. The grounds are magnificent, all thick woods although they don't show in the photo, and immediately surrounding it is a deep dug moat, overgrown with ferns and shrubs now, so that a stone bridge leads into the archway you can see.

I don't know how I shall go for leave, but hope to be home very soon, although it is a swine of a journey from here. On the other hand, I may get 9 or 10 days this time, having had no weekend passes. Love Ted

Thursday (Undated)

Dear Ma, Well, it all more or less settled, and all being well, I shall be home early Wednesday morning, as I shall start Tuesday night, and I expect I shall arrive about the same time as I did on my last leave, that is, in time for breakfast.

It has rained like billy-o today, for the first time since we have been here.

This place is very rich in bird life, I suppose because it has been more or less preserved. All night the woods are loud with owls, and round the castle gate are a lot of little brightly coloured birds, finches of some sort I think. Yesterday a sparrow hawk was hovering just on a level with our window for a long time, searching for mice in the stubble field below.

Saturday (undated)

Dear Mother, Last night I had a trip down to Arran to the pictures, only going on spec, the film happened to be 'Lady Hamilton' which was well worth re-seeing however. I managed to nip down again this afternoon, on the ration wagon, just for a ride. I grab every chance I can to get out for a few minutes, as there seems more and more to do every day. Troops keep pouring into this place, Q men, Aliens and the rest, and of course, every single man means a little extra work.

Sunday – It has started raining again, and already the place is about five inches deep. What a country!

We had another mob of Aliens in last night and it is like a concentration camp, only they don't work so hard, in fact they seem to have rather a good time, taking it all round. All my love Ted

Thursday (Undated)

Dear Mother, I have not heard the result of my course yet, these things usually take two or three weeks to come through. I hope I have been successful, as it may do me a bit of good. We are still busy with Courts Martial including one on a sportsman who escaped from his escort while being taken to a Detention Barracks. He was not at large very long however, all my love Ted

22 September 41

Dear Mother, By now we have all been evicted from the Castle and live in Nissen huts in the grounds. All, that is to say, except the Orderly Room to which we have managed to cling tenaciously and where I shall sleep, and so am for more comfortable than if I were in a hut. However I suspect that this state of affairs will not last for long, and soon we may be shifted out altogether. I hope it will be to some lovelier

spot than this, especially now the winter is coming on. All my love Ted

Undated

Dear Mother, Fortunately we have got a radio in the billet. It is very pleasant if you are all of the same mind, only if there is a crowd of you, you have to put up with what the majority want, namely, the bloody awful Forces programme at full blast. So taking it all round, I'd rather be without a radio in the Army, thank you.

We too are having lovely weather, wonderful for Scotland really. They are busy harvesting and we are becoming the farmers Amps all around the countryside to help with the crops.

It makes a break for them and is, of course, also essential war work (far more than putting up more and more Nissen huts for nobody to live in).

I have had a good old snoop round the Castle by now. It has been very beautifully furnished in its time. In the royal boudoir's is a marvellous fireplace, in lousy taste, but a wonderful piece of work, all carved and gilt with garlands and men's heads and little painting of urns and sprays of flowers. The other day found a cupboard full of brass fittings – candelabra and so on, very ornate, and tremendously heavy, with lions and wreaths all over them. I should like to knock one off, but they are far too heavy.

The whole place is alive with rabbits, not that we get any. By the way, don't spread it about but I have hopes of another tape soon. The Adjutant visited us the other day and turned handspring's for joy at the way I run my department., Well, hoping to be home in 3 weeks. Love Ted

Undated

Dear Mother,
Thank you for your last letter. I would have replied earlier, but I have literally been far too busy. We are having detachment after detachment from other Companies poured into this Camp and we have to look after them often at most unreasonable hours, very late at night, so we have little time to ourselves. At present I and one assistant are looking after the administration of over 400 men. I shall be very glad when we move from this place and can take things easy. To make it worse, they are all Q men and mad as hatters.

Our cookhouse and dining hall has just been moved at least half a mile from the Castle, and as you can imagine it is something of a hike there three times a day. As I go up there in the morning, just as dawn is breaking, there are owls hooting in all the woods around.

The fields below our Office window are full of pheasant pecking about, I wish I could knock one off and send him home.. All my love Ted

Saturday night (undated)

Dear Mum, As you see we are still here, and I am afraid likely to stay for some little time yet, as we have just had a new draft and am expecting another.

I did not have such a good journey up here as I did down. I caught my one o'clock train all right, but did not land in Carlisle till past eight, to find that the last train for Arran had just left. As I could not get a connection to Lockerbie either, nor were any buses running (not that it was late). I

had to put up for the night in a Rest Room for the Forces. Quite a nice place with a good bed, and all free. I had to rise at 4 however, and catch the 5 o'clock train to Arran, getting there about a quarter to six. As early as that there were no buses, nor could I thumb a ride so I had to walk the five miles and got here just in time for breakfast. Fortunately it was a lovely morning – last night it was raining terribly – so I did not really mind it.

There is a lot of work piled up here, but that will give me something to do.

I find that at the end of the month (the 27th to be precise) I am to attend a course in pay Duties at Edinburgh Castle which should make a nice change, as it is only a week's duration and may mean a bit more.

We have moved back into the Castle by the way, which is much pleasanter for us all. All my love Ted.

Edinburgh Monday (Undated)

Dear Mother, You will be glad to know I arrived here safely last night and am now busy with the Course. I have quite a nice billet, only two streets from Princess Street, in an old Georgian Square on Abercromby Square, almost exactly like Bloomsbury and Hanover Squares, that is high flat faced old houses surrounding a fenced-in square of trees, now losing their leaves. A very atmospheric place, like those old water colours in the London Museum.

Most of the men on the course are billeted here, one of them was at Oldham with me, and we have been busily swapping reminiscences.

The Castle, where the course is being held, is marvellous, like living in the Tower. I have often seen it in films etc, but it is much larger than life. As you probably know, it is built on and over an enormous rock rising high above the town, and from the battlements one can see right across the town to the Firth of Forth. All the parapets are crowded with black old cannon and just inside the tower where we are coursing is the Scottish National War Memorial. I will send some photos if I can get them.

The course itself is just writing down very dull notes all about pay, forfeitures and so on.

My cold is very nasty, but I am just recovering my taste. It's a pity it had to come now. All my love Ted

Wednesday (Undated)

Dear Mother, Just a line to let you know I am still OK; the cold is clearing up nicely. We have all been such good boys on the Course that they gave us all this afternoon off. I have been prowling round Edinburgh, we have seen John Knox's house, and Holyrood Palace, and been up and down places called the Tollbooth and Grass market and Cowgate which sounds like an historical novel, In doing so I have revised my opinion of it considerably – there is a lot more to it than Princes Street!

There are some very quaint bits, very European. One place I ran across was Surgeons Hall, where all the body snatching students used to hang out. You remember we read a book about them once. In the old churchyards here there are spiked railings round the graves to keep 'em off.

By the way, looking at enclosed photos we live on the right of Princes Street, so we

have to climb right up that bloody great hill the Castle is on, very tasty, very steep.

There are rather good pictures by the way, and give a good idea of the strange foreign atmosphere of the place. No time for more now, All My love Ted

PS. Did I tell you we are in a 'civvy' boarding house? The grub is lousy!!! But I have just had a nice super in a canteen – leg of a rabbit, potatoes and coffee – 1d!

Sunday (undated)

Dear Mother, Well here I am again, safe and sound after a week of gaiety, so you can send my watch on as soon as you like.

We finished up yesterday morning with a test, for which I am awaiting the result. I had a look at the Scottish National War Memorial which is in the Castle, and is a most wonderful piece of work, quite indescribable. In the very centre is a shrine made of beaten silver, mounted on a base which is part of the actual rock on which the castle is built and which is cropping up through the cobbles and walls all over the place. They have a huge old cannon there, forged in 1483, called 'Mons Meg' which stands on a stone platform overlooking the whole city. I was very sorry when the Course finished as I thoroughly enjoyed the change and the stay in Edinburgh.

On Friday we had an air-raid exercise with real 'planes flying over the castle and dropping detonators on us. On Thursday afternoon we visited the Command Pay Office which was quite interesting.

Will write again in a day or two, Love Ted

Wednesday (undated)

Dear Ma, Well, as you see, we are still stuck here and no sign of moving, but I have sorted out my leave and you can expect me home around the 30th of this month or the first week in January. This is nearly a month earlier than I had at first anticipated, but as you know, I have now got more or less control of the leave situation and it is now going beautifully, everybody going away within three months almost to the day.

You will be glad to know that word has just come through from Scottish Command that I passed my Pay Duties Course in Edinburgh, which is very gratifying (and relieving!). We have managed to get rid of 22 of our Q men, bunging them off on other companies which is a fine piece of work. I was not sorry to lose them, I can tell you, though we still have 62 left.

We are not quite so rushed for work now, but that is only because it is midweek.

We have a small detachment of Aliens here. Most of them are very nice fellows, very well educated, and streets ahead of our Northerners, Scotch, Irish and Welsh, who are all barbarians.

All my love Ted

Thursday (undated)

Dear Ma, Our weather has taken a turn for the better at last and the snow is going slowly.

I feel very pleased with myself at present, because on Tuesday we had a surprise visit from a Major Heath from the Infantry Records Office to inspect our documentation. We had expected him long ago but were told that the visit was cancelled.

Anyway he inspected our documentation

(for which I am responsible) very thoroughly, and was very appreciative of it all, so that everything was very satisfactory and I was complimented on the way I run the joint, which was very nice to hear even if it did not put any money in my pocket.. All my love Ted

Undated

Dear Mother, We have the Scottish Command Orchestra staying with us in camp, all Jews, mostly aliens. They are to give us a show tomorrow night. I hope it's good, after all the trouble they've been to us.

We are kept very busy these days, principally in doing nothing very intensively. The Quartermasters room across the passage has been invaded by a regiment of mice and every hour or so we have a grand mouse hunt round the office, armed with bayonets, brooms and sandbags. We have killed dozens, yet still they come.

Did I tell you how we are getting foreigners in our mob now? Quite exotic nationalities too. We have a Maltese, a Turk (by name Nissim Eskenzii) (Ed note: this is 13081885, DOB 10 Oct 05 who served from 1 May 41 – 4 Dec 45) and two Polish Jews and a Russian. Fortunately they all speak English of sorts, but in this group we have one company entirely composed of aliens.

Are you preparing for Christmas? We have made some Christmas puddings which are supposed to compensate for not being home. However I mustn't grumble, this time last year I was far worse off in the Orkney's. Now at least I have a fire, and am in the dry and have a room of my own.

All my Love Ted

Undated

Dear Mother. On Saturday I had half a day off, the first since I've been here – and walked with two other blokes to a small town near by (only five miles) call Arran. There was nothing much to see when we got there, but it made a change.

It has turned very cold up here of late. Believe me, living in a Castle is a chilly proposition! However it is far preferable to Nissen huts!

Re my leave- expect me on ir about October First – and the ten days is in the bag. We have now acquired another Company Ferret. This place is alive with rabbits. So there may, there must may be, a chance of bringing a couple of bunnies with me. I already have a pound tin of corned beef and a dozen of Bourneville chocolates – hoarding food, no less. Still it should be useful.

I sent two pals on leave today, one to Ilford and one to Chingford – never mind it's my turn next. I will confirm by telegram of course when I come, but of course, will write again several times before then, I hope. All my love Ted

6 November 41

Dear Ma, I am getting more or less used to being back at this dump, although it is pretty dull here just now. You seem to be having much severe weather than we are; we have not had any snow yet, and don't want it. We shouldn't be able to get any rations here.

The woods round here are looking very pretty now, but I don't get much chance to

see them, as it's dark by the time I have finished. Naturally, having been away a week there was a good deal of work piled up by the time I returned, but am gradually getting straight.

We now have 84 'Q' men, which is a sore trial and tribulation. We have also numerous deserters to keep us from going to sleep, including an enterprising gentleman who escaped from his escort while he was being taken to detention for 8 months after a previous detention. What a mob we have here! But from what I hear, practically every other Company is the same, so mustn't grumble. This time last year we were in the Orkneys which was far worse than this. I have still got my cold by the way, which is rather a nuisance, but not so bad as it was. Love to all Ted

12 November 41

Dear Mother, I had 5/- from the West Ham Wardens Service Fund last week – quite a pleasant surprise though I would rather have had it in kind, as one can buy nothing here.

We are very busy here doing nothing. Once or twice a week we go into Ecclefechan to the canteen, which is lousy but makes an object for the walk. Our Q men are distinguishing themselves, some by vanishing entirely for two or three days some by refusing to go on leave at all, and one or two by climbing trees to hide from the Sergeant Major, and getting lost up the Castle Tower and generally behaving in an odd manner. They are all tremendous eaters, and will volunteer to clear up after meals so that they may have the opportunity of licking up the plates (literally!). Although, most of them are very gentle and polite. I am usually saluted by them!

Is there much preparation for Christmas in England. Here of course it is ignored (by the inhabitants I mean) the company will howl in chorus because they can't all be on leave for that week. All my love. Ted

23 January 1942

Dear Mother, Hope you are keeping well and are not snowed up as we are. This place is in a proper state, it has been snowing almost continuously since Monday and you can imagine the result, drifts five feet deep all over the roads. Fortunately we are still able to get our mail through, but the ration lorry was unable to collect our grub today being stuck in a snow drift about 6 miles from Dumfries. Oh, am I not glad that I took my leave when I did!!! There have been no southward bound trains at all today.

It looks very pretty of course, especially the Castle itself, but believe me, it's some hike up to the cookhouse for breakfast these days!

Friday. I have just received letter and papers also five bob from the ARP. We have just started thawing and every ceiling is raining on us. The downstairs is flooded and the whole camp swimming as the snow slowly melts. The roads are still nearly impassable but the mail got through.. As for as I can gauge so far ahead, I may be home next sometime around the beginning of April, but if bad weather holds up the run, as it looks like doing, I may lose a week or so.

We have plenty to do now, but we have

all the staff re-united after our various leaves. Which makes us able to get down to it once again. All my love Ted

26 January 42

Dear Mother, We are thawing at last and gradually the snow is disappearing. It is now in the slushy messy stage and I shall be glad when it has quite disappeared.

As usual I am very busy, one of our frequent Courts Martial comes up tomorrow which always means a bit extra. All my love Ted

Sunday (undated)

Dear Mother, Yesterday afternoon and evening I went to Dumfries, which should be Dump-fries. However I saw the house (or rather hovel) where Burns died, and the pub which was Bonnie Prince Charles' HQ in 1745 and the famous Hole I' the Wa' tavern which dates from 1620. The town is very old, the streets cobbled in fan-like patterns. Otherwise it is pretty lousy, not much changed from 1745 days I imagine.

Our aliens are still going strong. The office (Lt Schulhof, oi yoi) (Ed note: it is believe a detachment from 249 (Alien) Coy were located here) has brought a pair of skis and two alpenstocks, for the 'snowink'. Some of the younger aliens are very nice fellows, highly educated at German and English public schools, and are very good company, for preferable to our Scotch, Irish, Welsh and North country people. Incidentally I understand that Corporal Felix was a Director of Philosophy before he became a Corporal of Pioneers. He used to live at Hampstead and asks me if I know Click Straw's Castle, and je old Booll and je Bosch.

We have still plenty of snow, and it is still very cold, but we manage to keep pretty warm. (Ed note: the letter finishes here)

Hoddom

Thursday (undated)

Dear Mum, At the present moment the wind is howling round the battlements and the shutters are rattling – a perfect setting for a ghost story, the illusion of which is destroyed by the roaring fire before which I am roasting.

As Orderly Room Corporal, I have now been made an honorary member of the Sergeants Mess, by special invitation (very flattering!) and this is a great improvement on the jungle manded of the mess dining hall. Cups and saucers instead of mugs, and much better food much better cooked. This little by little we progress. My money now goes up to 5/- a day by the way, not too bad, is it?. Yours Ted

6 February 42

Dear Mother, We have our office crowded now with a mix of aliens who are looking after their own blokes. The language is very amusing- like old Zada all the time.

The prize specimen is an old boy very like Dr Malone, called Cpl Felix, his language is a dream.

'Jes chips' he said, introducing me to one of his buddies, 'jes chaps, he is je boss, and jes one, he is boss of pay' ie pay corporal. We have a table tennis fitted up down below and one of the officers was trying to explain when he broke in, 'Oh ja, you mean je peank-ponk. I know him!'

This as you may imagine is rather amusing, but very trying to live with. However we manage to survive. All my love Ted

15 February 42

Dear Mother, Today it is raining like 'ell which is not very nice, but is a change from snow. Anyway it's my night on duty so it doesn't matter very much.

This is our new notepaper, not too bad is it? (Ed note: Corps badge shown top left)

Our old Group, which embarked some weeks ago has just turned up in Australia so I hear. I know most of the fellows there very well – so Pioneers do go overseas sometimes. I shouldn't mind that sort of voyage myself.

We have the Pioneer Corps Scottish Command Orchestra visiting us last week. They were better, but not much.

I understand that I go on my course next Tuesday and return the following Saturday, nice work!

The Major is on leave at the moment so all is fun and games. He lolled off in such a hurry he forgot his Ration Card so had to send a frantic telegram for it. All my love Ted

Undated

Dear Mother, As you will realise I am back at Hoddom again after a very pleasant four days in Edinburgh, although the weather was not very good. Still I managed to have a very nice time. I had a very comfortable billet, good food etc, about twenty minutes from the Record Office.

The course itself was a slice of cake. Started at 9.30 and finished at 5.00 with an hour and a half for lunch. There was no examination at the end so there will be no result.

I got back here at 6.30 last night and found the office in a hell of a mess. I think my under-studies must have slept all the time I was away. However I shall soon be straight again, I expect.

The moat (dry) round the Castle is full of snowdrops. I have never seen so many growing before all together, as thick as daisies. All my love. Ted

PS. Expect me home on the 13th, I would make it sooner, but all leave is stopped over Easter.

22 February 1942

Dear Mother, I also saw Len (Ed note: his cousin) in Woolworths he has been out on 'schemes' as they are called and apparently has not had much time to himself. He tells me that he has put in for a commission, principally I gather, to get out of the Tank Corps. I am going on another course – in Documentation this time, again at Edinburgh from the 18th to 20th of March, which will be just before my leave (I hope). This is a direct result of the visit of the bloke I told you about. He mentioned at the time that he ran courses which were quite interesting, and I said I'd like to go thinking no more of it. Imagine my surprise to hear later that a place had been reserved for me and it only remained to put the application through the proper channels, which I lost no time in doing.

Len said he had heard from Lol who is also writing to me at some future date. Perhaps he'd have done better to have chanced what the Army had to offer after

all.

It must look queer without railings, still I suppose we shall get used to it, like everything else.

All my love Ted

11 March 42

Dear Mother, I enclose here some more pictures of this district; as you can see, Ecclefechan is a dump of the first order. The Bridge in the bottom right hand corner of the Carlyle's Country one leads over the River Annan and is just outside the castle gate. It is a lovely river banked by high pines like a Canadian river. The little house is a boathouse 'Carlyle's Kindly Beeches' lead all the way from the castle to the village. I suppose it is a lovely avenue really, as it is like this for the whole three miles.

The other thing, Repentance Tower, stands on a hill directly opposite my window. I have climbed up to it once. I don't know if I told you about it. The legend goes that it was built by an old Border driver who got tired of driving and became a hermit instead. The square building is a tomb, and there are graves all inside the wall. One is the grave of a negro servant to one of the local lairds, who died in seventeen seventy something.

By the way, the picture of the High Street looks far more imposing than it really is. Half the houses are in ruins. All my love. Ted

Sunday (undated)

Dear Mother, You will be glad to hear that I have got my second stripe at last Friday, and am now addressed as above. As you can imagine, I am very pleased and was too long sewing on Friday night to let you know at once. Last night I went to Dumfries again, but did not enjoy it very much as it was snowing all the time. All my love. Ted

Monday (undated)

Dear Mother, I have a trip to Stranraer tomorrow on another Court Martial. It will be a change as it means a day out and a part of the world I have not seen as yet. As usual I am snowed under with criminals and deserters. I wish our Company would behave itself for a few months and give us a rest.

Our weather has turned from very hot to very cold, just to keep us on the move. All my love Ted

Saturday (undated)

Dear Mother, Well here I am back again after a very good quick journey. I was at Euston at 9.15 and caught the 10.00 train, arriving at Carlisle at 4.20, fifteen minutes ahead of time. I got straight into a train to Arran and got there about 5.45. As there were several of us by that time we phoned up HQ and the utility van was sent and gave us a lift back, so I was much better off than last time.

It is very cold here but bright. All the water is frozen (except in the Castle). There have been a lot of minor happenings while I have been away but nothing really outstanding has occurred.

As you can imagine there is plenty of work for me to do, but not such a mess as I was afraid of. All my love Ted

4 April 42

Dear Mother, Well, as you seem, we have managed to get a move after all. Not very

far, only about 7 miles but still a move. The only snag is that we are under canvas in a tented camp just outside the town and blimey ain't it cold!

We moved in yesterday when it was pouring with rain and we had a terrible job unloading lorries, putting up tents etc. I was thoroughly glad when we were able to go to bed.

We have got our office in a marquee it is alright but very cold as, of course, there is no sort of heating, nor light so that when it gets a bit dark we just pack in all our work.

Fortunately all the rest of the Company is out on different detachments, we have only our HQ here and those of the RE Companies we work with, so it might be worse. Anyway it is an experience Camping for Easter. Bah!. I had a very NCO day bossing a working party unloading etc, and had no time at all to do my own office work, but I have got most of it clear now. From the open tent flap I can see the corner of three other big marquees. One expects to see a couple of clowns or an elephant come out.

At the present time it is raining again. We have some consolations Lockerbie is a small town with canteen and a cinema and quite a number of shops so we are not too badly off.

The chief trouble is that everything is damp, even the paper one writes on. The food is quite good – we are being fed by a Company of REs.

We have one other compensation – tons of fresh air – too fresh in the morning.

I will write again soon. By the way our full address is: 128 PC HQ, Tented Camp, Dumfries Rd, Lockerbie. All my love Ted

Undated

Dear Mother, We have had a lot of changes here. First of all, the old Major has been promoted second in command of a Group in Edinburgh and Capt Alland (the one who was going to take me with him when he got his Company) has been promoted Major of 128 in his place, so I am sitting pretty. Then we have given away about half the Company to Prisoner of War Camps – all old sods so that is good, and furthermore my deputy assistant has also been sent as a Clerk to a POW Camp so everything is all right, except that I am rather stuck for assistance at the present. However that will right itself with time as the new boys come along.

Today it has been sunny but it is still very cold at night. I have plenty of blankets however as it doesn't worry me much until I get up in the morning.

We are in the foothills of the Cheviots here and some of it is rather tough going.

Last night I saw some of the oddest looking sheep with heads like skulls, the noses and round the eyes were black, the rest of the face dead white.

We have all been dished out with new webbing equipment with Bren gun pouches, very dashing. They should hold a lot of things quite easily.

I had the pleasure of cycling all round Lochmaben on Sunday; it is quite large, about half a mile across and about 2 miles round, with a ruined castle at the end. There are a lot of castles and towns in this district besides Hoddum. About a mile from this camp is an old Castle ground, fought over in 1583 – I don't know who between.

I think the old Major was quite sorry to go – he thanked me for all I'd done for him, as he put it, which was very graceful. All my love Ted

Thursday (undated)

Dear Mother, We are having lovely weather now, it's really glorious by day, but by night it's really cold. Being a prudent person I collect a small quantity of water over night for shaving, and this morning, believe it or not, it was full of ice! It was too dark to see it, so I did not know until I had finished the painful operation otherwise I should probably have dodged it.

The rest of the week I have spent exploring the country. It's really glorious, very Scotch and high bare hills and pine woods which Australian Forestry blokes are busy chopping down. On Sunday I am going to knock off early so that I shall have time to walk out about four miles where there is a loch and the usual castle.

It has been very windy during the past week. We had four tents go up and three marquees, one being the dining-tent full of blokes having their tea. All the tables were overturned and the next morning the ground was covered with birds after the scraps. I saw a crow fly off with a piece of cheese in his beak like the one in the fable, probably looking for a fox. Talking of birds I saw a pure white turkey cock on a farm last night. Very obligingly he spread his tail and gobbled, just to show he could.

Our sleeves are now beautified by little golden lions (for Scottish Command) which are an improvement on the bulldogs, witches and dominoes I have seen.

There is some talk of taking a house for our offices. Personally I rather hope we don't. After surviving the worst it would be a pity to be deprived of the fine weather when it does come.

I am glad to say we have managed to post quite a lot of the Company away as Guards to Prisoner of War Camps, including most of the miserable old sods.

We manage to get 30 cigarettes a week via NAAFI at pre-budget prices (9d for 10) so I have not yet entirely given up smoking. Ted.

Saturday (undated)

Dear Mother, Today is Warships Day in Lockerbie and all the shops are closed for a procession, which I saw, of a few tanks, Home Guard, Scouts, Land Army, ARP etc filing past the local bigwigs.

What amused me was that the cows in the fields were frightened to death by the bagpipes, galloping away from them for all they were worth, then stopping to look back wandering what the hell it was, just like dogs do. A very poor performance for Scotch cows, I thought.

As you say, it doesn't seem a year since last Whitsun, time really does fly.

We are having some lousy weather at present, very rainy and windy, the water still comes through the tent roof all night, but one manages to keep fairly dry under a few gas capes.

Once again I seem to be working very hard, principally I suppose because my assistant isn't much good, though he tries hard, and so most of the work falls on me. It seems so ridiculous that with all the thousands of clerks drafted into the Army it's almost impossible to get hold of a

competent one, at least in the Pioneers. None of the people I have had seem to have any grip on the job at all, just let what little they have to do submerge them and, not being superhuman myself its horses work to keep things afloat whereas it would be so easy with a fellow who understood his job and went at it in a business like way. I'm afraid I'm rather an exacting boss but messing about does infuriate me. However perhaps I shall strike lucky one day.

All my love Ted

Undated

Dear Mother,

You will be glad to know that I have acquired a button for my overcoat, also an enamel mug, and that I have successfully changed my ragged boots for new ones. Isn't life wonderful!

You will be amused to hear that I have taken up cycling again. The other evening, having nothing better to do, I got aboard one of the two Company bikes and found to my surprise (because it must be 9 years at least since I rode a bike) that I could ride as well as if I had never left off, so I have had a few evening out on it, which makes a change and also I am able to get further abroad than before. I wonder I didn't try it long ago.

There is a large loch about four miles away called Lochmaben a very nice spot. I have been over there once or twice. I see from the Stratford Ex that the Stratford Empire is to be rebuilt. I hope they hurry up with it. Things being what they are, I hope to be home next on 7.7.42, in time for your Birthday I hope. We'll celebrate anyway. All my love Ted

Culloden

Friday (Undated)

Dear Mother, One of the men brought in a dead deer today, quite a young one, with horns only about a foot long. It had broken its neck, and as it had only just died I think it is going to be eaten, so perhaps I'll be able to tell you what venison tastes like. The weather is wretched again, it is almost a repetition of last year only we are not under canvas this time, thank goodness. All my love. Ted

Lockerbie

Saturday (Undated)

I got here quite safe and sound yesterday, caught the 10.5 in good time and arrived at the tented field at exactly 6.00 pm, in time for tea. It was a very nice trip up, plenty of room and fine weather.

It is a nice day here, only very windy. A few more of the Company have been transferred away during my absence but there is still plenty to do.

It is very windy. I think the tent will be blown over any minute.

It seems very cold here after London, but apparently the weather has not been too bad recently.

There is no news at present, beyond the bare fact of my arrival, so will close now. All my love. Ted

Sunday (Undated)

Dear Mother, We have had two very rough days of rain and wind, but so far only one marquee has taken off. The war seems in a 'wholly mess', now that trouble has started in India. I wouldn't mind going out

there though. It would be better that some other places I could mention.

We have no real news here. There is still plenty of paper work but nothing of any real importance, except of course, inevitably another Court Martial coming up. How fed up I am with these blighters. If I had my way I'd shove every one off overseas and let him do a bit.

How do you like the Easter blackout time. Lousy, ain't it? All my love Ted

Lockerbie

Tuesday (undated)

Dear Mother, I don't know if I told you in my last letter but now our office in a house has materialised. We are in a very nice place (in the attics) just across the road from the camp where we still sleep in a marquee where rains inside as much as out. We share an office with 674 REs, all of whom are a very nice set of blokes.

I was on another Court Martial today. I was required to be present though I was not called as a witness.

On the way there (for it was held at a camp some miles away) we passed a wagon load of Italian prisoners on their way to a POW camp nearby. They were all wrapped in reddish brown blanket cloaks and some had light grey forage caps. All looked bloody unhappy, probably at the Scottish climate.

I am very busy these days and don't like working indoors much. It seems rather stuffy after a tent. There is a wonderful garden to this home, nearly all flowing shrubs, rhododendrons, and so on, some very strongly scented. Quite a nice place really, fantastically built with a big conical tower on one corner up which we have to climb to reach our quarters. The whole place (Ed note: letter finishes here)

Friday (undated)

Dear Mother, We have got a completely new set of officers, quite nice blokes, an improvement on those we pushed overseas. Incidentally the Major wanted to put my name forward for a commission, but I told him I didn't want it, not just yet anyhow. He intends, so he says, making me up to Sergeant as soon as we can poison one of the existing ones. In the meantime he asked if I'd like to accept the local rank, i.e. bear 3 stripes and be paid for two. Once again I declined politely, because there's no point in living as a Sergeant on Corporal's pay, so I shall have to wait a bit. All my love Ted

5 June 42

Dear Mother, You will be glad to know that I have practically lost my cold now, though it has been a beast. Perhaps it's the change in the weather; it's been scorching hot today, really grand.

We have now left our leaky marquees and live in two bell tents which are much better although rather cramped. However one can put up with practically anything in the Army.

The country around is looking grand in this fine weather. When one gets on high ground one can see tremendous distances with mountains (the Cheviots) in the distance. We are in the foothills here and some of these are pretty steep.

Did I tell you I went over to Langholm last Sunday. It is very wild over there, like the interior of Cornwall only more so.

I am very busy at the moment as none of my assistants are much good so I have to do everything myself. This is rather trying but I had the satisfaction of knowing that things are done as I want them.

We have lost three officers this week all shot out overseas (hooray!). I wouldn't give a two pence for a commission in the Pioneer Corps (or any other) at my age.

I am now smoking the baccy. It is very enjoyable, especially after a week's non-smoking caused by my cold.

Well, we have no more news, so All my love. Ted

PS. Did I tell you we have a lovely smoky Persian cat here, who spends most of his time with us. Name: Pete

28 July 42

Dear Mother, I have now got three stripes up, so don't forget to address me as 'Sgt' in your next letter. I have a tent to myself now and live once again in the Sergeants' Mess, where the food is better and served up better. I am very pleased as I feel that at last I have got what I have been working for.

How is your weather down there? It's lousy here, all rain and it is getting quite chilly.

It is raining cats and dogs tonight, but I don't care as it's my night on duty. I am very busy at the moment. We have another Court Martial coming off and on Thursday the whole Company is to have a 'Selection Grading Test' which means they have to answer a lot of silly questions with a view to determining their mental ages. As most of them have been transferred to the Pioneer Corps on the grounds of mental deficiency I imagine the average score will be some-where around three years.

One of my assistants is on leave at present so we are all working double shifts until he comes back.

The cigarettes are holding out very well, I am not half through them yet All my love Ted

Undated

Dear Mother. It has turned finer here now, which is just as well as my new tent is as leaky as the old one. I have been rather snowed under with work for the last two or three days but have managed to struggle clear today, I hope.

We had what is known as a Selection Grading Test yesterday which everyone in the Company had to undergo. It was a test of intelligence, observation and quick thinking and consisted of a book containing 60 diagrams or patterns. Each pattern had a bit left out and at the foot of the page were a number of designs to fit in the empty space. Some were very easy, others had apparently no logical progression at all. The grading or marks is as follows:

Grade 1- all right. This is a one in a million chance. Geniuses only

Grade 2 - above average

Grade 3+ - average

Grade 3- - Average to dull

Grade 4 - dull

Grade 5 - cracked

To get in Grade 4 one must get half marks. I got rather friendly with the Sergeant Tester and was told in confidence that my own grading is 2. The chief reason for this business which is being carried on throughout the Army is to find the cream boys of intelligence and find them jobs

more suitable than hole digging, a thing which should have been done long ago. I gather however that it is most unlikely that NCOs will be transferred. In any case a special plea was put in for the retention of four of us with essential jobs, about which I feel two ways.

However it was an interesting experiment and I underestimated that the general standard of this Company is very low.

Well, I can't think of any more news, except that food is much better in the Sergeants Mess with eggs for tea. Love Ted

Wednesday (Undated)

Dear Mother, Just a short note while I am on duty. Our weather has brightened up a bit but it has been very wet lately.

I am sorry to say that our Major is leaving us for posting overseas. His successor shows up tomorrow and we are all rather anxious to see what he is like as we know nothing about him. However we are hoping for the best.

As I now have a tent to myself I am rather missing a watch and I am wondering if you could get Mr Munn to dredge up one of my two old pocket watches, there's a big one Dad gave me and one of Dads. There is not much wrong with either and there would be plenty of room for one in a battle dress. I think that one of them is in the book cupboard in my room. It doesn't matter which, but I think should stand more knocking about that a wristwatch. All my love Ted

PS. We have got our new Major and he seems quite a nice old boy so far. We haven't seen much of him yet which suits me.

Saturday 25 July

Dear Mother, I was very glad to hear from you. It was queer about the air-raid the day I left, I heard about it, but no details. I hope your weather in London is better than ours; it has done nothing but rain for the last few days, real torrents.

The toothbrush in the cabinet does belong to me. I will need it when the one I have runs out, which will not be very long now. Don't trouble to send the gloves just yet as I don't need them until it gets really cold.

We are very busy again these days, shooting detachments all over the place and then wondering where the hell everybody is and why they're there.

By the way one of my first jobs when got home was to evolve a new leave roster and came to the interesting conclusion that I shall be travelling way down south on 6.10.42 which will soon roll around. All my love Ted

Lockerbie

Wednesday (Undated)

Dear Mother, I had a very nice day in Carlisle in spite of heavy rain. Tomorrow we have another sort of entertainment, another Court Martial. Once again I am a witness, but it is at Lockerbie this time, so I don't mind so much. I am getting in quite well with the new Major. He seems a nice old stick but he is very old.

We are still getting plenty of rain just to remind us we are camping in August.

There seems to be more work than ever. I suppose it's the usual mess when a new bloke takes over and we shall soon settle

down to a routine.

Well we have no more news. Love Ted

31 August 42

Dear Mother, One of my stooges is on leave at present so naturally there is rather more than usual to do. Also we are full with the usual spates of absentees, recaptured deserters and so on. It seems rather a surprise to the new OC. I have spent the whole afternoon helping him take a summary of evidence on a deserter. He hadn't much idea how to set about it. Very craftily I saw to it that I was kept out of the FGCM when it comes along, I have had enough of them!

Last Wednesday I had to go to the Sub Area Headquarters for a lecture by the Signals on taking of messages, quite interesting. We had a phone test afterwards, I came out all right, you'll be glad to know.

There are all sorts of signs and rumours about. I wouldn't be surprised if we don't move again one of these fine days. There is absolutely nothing definite at present, but it's about time we saw some different scenery. I hope I manage to get my leave in first.

We are having lousy weather at present. Thursday and Friday were marvellously hot days, quite like home. Then on Saturday it started to rain and hasn't stopped since. It's quite chilly too. I can't believe its August. Of course it won't be tomorrow. Imagine – the fourth year of the war. Remember how aghast we were when we heard how Churchill had warned us to prepare for a 3-year war?

All my love Ted

6 September 42

Dear Mother, Had my last letter been officially censored, do you know? or had it just been opened by persons unknown? I didn't know they got up to that lark here. I suppose it's having the regimental badge on the envelope. I must get me some plain ones.

We had a real tempest as they say in Suffolk, on Friday night. The wind was so fierce that it drove the rain straight through the canvas. I was awake most of the night, expecting the tent to go sailing heavenward, me clinging to the pole. However it held, but when I looked out in the morning, oh, what a mess! The place looked as though it had been bombed.

The officers mess marquee was ripped to shreds (I had heard it go in the night). Our mess had closed in itself and one of the men's dining tents was flat. In all I think there were five marquees, used as stores and offices down, and several sleeping tents including the old green wigwam I used to sleep in.

The whole place was afloat, now it has dried a bit and is all mud, like one of these gold-mining films.

Now that the other half of my staff have returned from leave, things are a bit easier, especially as the Major is now on leave. This time next month I hope to be thinking about it myself. The weather by now has cleared up amazingly and it is quite a nice day.. Yours Ted

Tuesday (undated)

Dear Mother, I am just back from a trip over to Langholm. The scenery was lovely; it

is such a marvellous day. Am sorry to say I have got roped in on another Court Martial – another Irishman – but I don't think it will interfere with my leave. How is the cherry tree coming on? I should be home in time to eat most of the fruit I think.

It has turned really hot now, and is very pleasant indeed, although it is surprisingly hot inside the tents. All my love Ted

10 September 42

Dear Ma, I am having a very busy time as the OC is away, but there is a corresponding degree of freedom. You will be glad to know that I have been able to backdate my promotion from 28th July. My rate of pay is now 6/6 per day minus 1/3 allotment. This means I now have quite a nice sum to my credit, besides three lovely chevrons. Taking it all round, I don't think I've done too bad, starting from the bottom.

Well Mam, I fear I have no more news at present. Everybody is very fit, and I have had a lovely sort-out, putting away some of our prize criminals. All my love Ted

Thursday (undated)

Dear Mother, I hope to catch the 1156 on Tuesday morning which is scheduled to get into Euston around 7.30 pm. I will send you a telegram as usual on the day though.

I am looking forward to it tremendously. It will be a real change to get away from here for a bit.

I hope the cherries are all right. How about a cherry pie or two next week?

I don't think I shall be very successful in getting any grub this time. We don't run this camp, you know! It is rather nice sleeping in a tent this weather. We have the flaps open and it is quite nice, only gets a bit drafty in the small hours.. Love Ted

23 September 42

Dear Mother, The weather is pretty chilly now in the morning, and as there is plenty of rain the camp is not too salubrious at present, though I suppose it is 'healthy'.

We are still having a lot of fun with Courts Martial, have just sent a bloke up the river for nine months and expect another in tomorrow.

Fancy going to Harvest Festival – they are still gathering it in up here, but I don't expect they have any religious festivities, probably build some sort of witch-fire or something.

We are still sweating on a move but I hope desperately that it doesn't materialise before I come home, if it does, I'm afraid there will be a battle, in which case I expect I shall lose. However we must hope for the best and hope to sit tight for another month or so. All my love Ted

Tuesday (undated)

Dear Mother, I had a talk with the OC today about my leave and he said go right ahead, move or no move, so, all being well, expect me to arrive at the same time as last time on Tuesday 6th October, ie 7.30 pm at Euston. If anything unforeseen does occur, like a sudden whisk away elsewhere I will send a telegram. In any case I will send the usual confirmatory telegram when I start my journey.

It has been bitter cold at night recently, but lovely warm sunny days. If the weather holds it should be very nice for me leaf. All my love Ted

Tuesday (undated)

Dear Mother, We are having a lovely time in the pouring rain but keeping fairly happy in spite of it. I'm glad I'm not on leaf this week anyway, unless the weather down there is very different from this.

We are getting on all right with the new Major. He is a bit tedious at times, being old, but in the main I get on with him all right, being tactful.

We have had the telephone installed in the office. I expect it will be a blasted nuisance. We have also been very busy picking up deserters and absentees, there are three in the guardroom (converted cowshed) now. I wish they'd desert properly and save us the trouble.

Doesn't it get late early, now the time has altered. It is quite dark up here by half past nine. All my love Ted

Friday (undated)

Dear Mother

I have had a busy day on Tuesday having to go to Stranraer on another Court Martial. It was a very long train ride, starting at 0800 and not getting there till after 1200. The train ambles all over Galloway and Wigtownshire through little towns – Castle Douglas, Gatehouse of Fleet, New Galloway, Newton Stewart and Creetown, which sounds like a Red Indian settlement. The country is very wild and rugged, bare like the Orkneys with great grey rocks and boulders strewn over the green turf. Some of the scenery is very beautiful, where the mountain streams are and where it is wooded. It was a beautiful day and the sea was peacock blue when we got to Stranraer. It is the usual little seaport town, the chief port for Northern Ireland and is staffed to bursting with troops in transit. The FGCMs were held at the Transit Camp. While we were there an American convoy came in. They are a very slovenly dressed lot, but very friendly and cheery. There were many others there of whom I suppose I should not talk. After spending about 4 hours in the sun waiting for a case to be disposed our bloke was tried and out in fifteen minutes. Even then we had to rush like wild horses to catch the 3.30 back to Dumfries. It was an even more wearisome journey back than there. The line runs close to the sea in one place and a sailor in the carriage pointed out the Isle of Man to us, two blue humps rising out of the water at least 30 miles away.

I was very glad when we got back to camp at last, at 9.00 I don't know the result of the present FGCM but I expect he'll go up the river for about six months.

Otherwise it has been a busy but dull week. All my love Ted

Wednesday (Undated)

Dear Mother, The weather has turned bright again. Last night I climbed a tremendous hill near here, call Qhytweollen Hass. At the top was a pinewood with hundreds of viola. There was a magnificent view from the top. We are ringed round with mountains here, some very distant but very high. The countryside is very pretty these days, plenty of wild flowers about the pinewoods are very fragrant.

Just for fun I worked out the foreigners in our mob the other day. We have two Cypriots, 1 Dutchman, 1 Belgian, 1

German, 1 Russian, 1 Pole, 1 Turk and lots of wild Irish. The Foreign Legion!

Yes, I have lost my cold but still have plenty of catarrh. I think its living half indoors and half outside.

Thank you very much for having my things cleaned. It's definite about my coming home on the 7th. The Major asked me when I was going on leave and I told him that date. He also suggested I take the following weekend as well but I don't know how that will work out yet. We'll see!

I have pinned the 'Leave Calculator' to my desk, as it is from there that leave emanates.

Well, all my love and thanks again, Love Ted

Sunday (undated)

Dear Mother, Well I have settled in again now and have been up to the eyes in work since I got back. Not that things were in much of a mess, there was just a lot to do.

I did not have a very nice journey back. I missed the 10.5 train at Euston by about ten minutes, which would have got me in at 4.00. I caught the 10.25 to Carlisle however and had to stand as far as Crewe. It is a very slow train and after leaving Lancaster, ambled all round Cumberland, calling at Windermere, Shap, Penrith and all little wayside halts, finally getting in at Carlisle at 6.45, twenty minutes late for the Lockerbie connection. I then had to wait an hour and a quarter at Carlisle. Finally I got in at Lockerbie at 9.00. The funny part is that I caught the train at Carlisle which leaves Euston at 1.00, so I might as well have caught that in the first place. I will check my train times more carefully next time!

Well they had the Court Martial without me after all, and tomorrow we shove the culprit in for nine months. They had the telegram all ready to send me last Saturday, for me to report to Stranraer, where the FGCM was held on Monday (shades of 'Sky High'!). Fortunately some bright person at Group HQ decided that my presence was not really necessary and so the telegram was never sent. Am I glad! It would certainly have gummed the works up to have had to go there of all places, a 3 day trip at least.

The weather is not too bad here, though there is a bite in the air we don't get down leaf.

Everything in the camp is the same and I have once again broken myself in to sleeping under canvas again. It's much nicer to wear shoes all the time though.

Well, thank you again and again for a really marvellous time. I enjoy each leave more and more as it comes round, and are now eagerly looking forward to the next one. Love to all, Ted

Sunday (undated)

Dear Mother, I will certainly bring you all the soap coupons I can muster. Went out for a long ride on the bike last Saturday. The burns (rivers, Angli) are very lovely, very very swift and crystal clear as their beds are stones. Huge rocks stick up from the river beds, making rapids like the Canadian rivers. They are said to be full of trout. (Ed note: letter finishes here)

Saturday (undated)

Dear Mother, We are apparently leaving

the Scottish summer now, or else the heat wave has travelled North. Not that it is hot – far from it, but it has not rained for at least twenty four hours. I expect we shall get a belting soon, to make up for it. Unfortunately I am on duty this afternoon, otherwise I should have gone to Carlisle, to make a change. All my love Ted

HQ 128 Coy PC, Glen Allyn Distillery, Inverness

Tuesday (Undated)

Dear Mother, I arrived here very weary and travel worn at about 7.30 this morning. Two hours late. It was a swine of a journey. First I had to change at Carstairs at 10.25 and then at Perth at 2.00 am.

When I got here I found turmoil – the whole crowd were moving from the camp to this dump – and a dump it is – a conglomeration of old ramshackle buildings permeated by a strange musty-sweet smell. It is crowned by two towers of faintly Chinese appearance and is over-run by thousands of kittens, every large loft like room is full of them, black, tabby, ginger and tortoiseshell. They appear everywhere, even in our sadly muddled and very poky orderly room.

The town is quite large, with a castle and many shops, also three or four cinemas and a theatre, so we should not be too badly off for amusement.

I am feeling very fagged out at the moment, as I have very little sleep last night and today has been very hectic. All my love and thanks for a grand time. Ted

26 October 42

Dear Mother, I am settling down here now, and like it very much. The quarters are rather rough but for preferable to a tent after all, especially when it is raining hard, as now, though as a rule the weather is very fine. The town is grand – very picturesque, rising in banks from the river which communicates with Loch Ness. There is a very dramatic castle which looks marvellous at night, silhouetted against the sky, the river flowing below, crossed by a bridge with an arch which looks as though it should have traitor's heads on it: the whole rather like a backcloth for a Wagnerian opera. The streets are narrow, many cobbled, with dark passages and sudden flights of stairs leading to streets on a higher level. All this sounds very medieval but it also has three cinemas (only the films are medieval) and a theatre, also Woolworth's etc some very fine jewellers shops and more good class bookshops than I ever remember in a town this size.

We are still quite busy but the flap is abating somewhat as time goes on. Kittens still overrun the place, you never saw so many in your life. There is a sinister side to it moreover. Next to the distillery is a canning factory whose chief produce is tinned rabbit. I fear the worst but have had some tinned rabbit anyway. I am told they found 15 dead cats all over the place when they cleared it out. Yesterday afternoon I went in the Major's office and found a tortoise shell kitten asleep in the 'out' tray. I let him sleep. This is a very lovely HQ as there are a lot of ATS drivers floating around who are also very kitterish in their manners.

We are starting a proper Sergeants mess here: I have been elected Secretary

(unwillingly on my part!). All my love Ted

3 November 42

Dear Mother, Everything is quite nice at present – plenty of work, but not so much as in the other Group. One thing this town has that I appreciate greatly is a splendid baths which is much better than some of the makeshifts I have put up with in the past. I have got into the habit of slipping off during the afternoon, if I am not jammed up with work.

It is very chilly now, and the mountains in the distance are topped with snow, looking like cardboard ones. The cats are not so much in evidence as before, but are still around. The Sergeants' Mess (otherwise 'The Glan Allyn Arms') is well under way though I do not patronise it myself much, except for meals. We have a dog there. We are feeding very well here, rather better than at the other place, the chief snag being the sleeping quarters, which are like a refrigerator. Even so, I suppose it's preferable to being in a tent. As soon as I can get out during the daytime, I will get some postcards of the place so you can see what it's really like. Except for Edinburgh, I think I like it better than any other place I've been in. At times the sight of the town from a distance, across the river, with the castle on its hill and the spires of churches rising from the jumble of roofs, is breathtaking. All my love Ted

9 November 42

Dear Mother, I hope it means the beginning of the end and that we will all be thinking about our discharges soon. Perhaps that's hoping a bit too far ahead, but one never knows.

I will certainly send you a nice calendar. I will have a foraging expedition one of these afternoons.

We have had very nice weather up here recently – very different to the rain of the last place we were at.

Well we have no news. Just as busy as ever, but things are straightening up a bit now.

I had a rove round the town Saturday afternoon. They have a big cathedral and a pink castle with a statue of Flora Macdonald in the front. This is apparently the capital of the Highlands and lets you know it.

The hills in the distance are snow-capped now and look very pretty on a bright sunny day.

They had quite a celebration here on Halloween, kids dressed up roving all over the place, begging for pennies. It seems to be a big day in this savage country. There is a hill just across the water, easily seen from our orderly room window where they go stag-hunting. Apparently deer and eagles are quite common about here. Incidentally we are only 25 miles from Forres. All my love Ted

15 Novembers 42

Dear Mother, I still haven't seen the Lock Ness Monster, but I think we had a bit of him for breakfast this morning. If I haven't told you already, I expect to be coming home for my next leave on or around 5.1.43. That is, if the snow doesn't make the line impossible, which is the general rule, I am given to understand. We didn't have any church bells today, only those on the wireless. I think they beat drums up

here or bang gongs.

The cats are still very much in evidence – we have also a number of stray dogs who seem more or less permanently attached. All my love. Ted

26 November 42

Dear Mother, On Saturday I had another prowling round the town and went down the river past the Cathedral. Here the river is broken by a number of islands about the size of those in Hampstead Park Lakes. They are connected to each other and to the banks by bridges and are laid out as a park with walks, seats, the relics of an Open Air Theatre, etc, all very nice, especially as the water runs swiftly between them in rapids.

The weather is still quite nice – last Sunday I went to a concert for the troops and an address was given (mercifully short) by the Rev Selby-Wright the guy who talks on the wireless, calling himself the 'Radio Padre'.

We are preparing for Christmas at the moment, which I expect will be rather dreary up here – however we may get a change.

I have just managed to acquire a new suit and a new rifle. A surprising thing about this place is the lightness of the nights. I don't know if it's being nearer to the North Pole or not, but we barely seem to get a really dark night. All my love Ted

7 December 42

Dear Mother, Oh, discovery! Poking round the town yesterday afternoon, I found an arcade which led into a Market Hall, rather like the Poplar Market in Woodgrange Road, with about four big rutch stalls (second hand books in polite parlance) as I did not have much time I was not able to delve as I would wish, but I got Masefield's 'Multitude and Solitude' for 6d. I shall go there again first chance I get – this town is now definitely tops for me.

Our snow has all cleared up now and its turned rather muggy than otherwise.

We are still busily reclaiming absentees, and holding courts martial. What a troublesome set of children we have! All my love Ted

26 December 42

Dear Mother, I am now recovering from a hangover after a hectic, but rowdy Christmas in the Sergeants Mess. We had a grand dinner, turkey etc and plum pudding and altogether a very good time was had by all.

I hope you enjoyed your Christmas – I expect it was rather quiet.

I'm rather glad the 'White Christmas' didn't materialize, we had a very nice day, with only a little rain. Wishing you all the very best for 1943. All my love Ted

Saturday (undated)

Dear Mother, I arrived here at 1130 this morning after quite a comfortable journey. Only one other bloke in the compartment so we stretched out on a seat each and slept the night through.

I saw some very lovely scenery this morning from Perth onwards, the real Highland stuff – mountains, waterfalls and forests.

There seems to be plenty of work of course, but I expect I shall get it down as time goes on.

Hope everything is going on all right back home and that you don't miss me too much.

No time for more now, will write again soon. Love Ted

21 January 1943

Dear Mother, Sorry to hear that you have had more alarms, and I should imagine the present barrage was pretty good.

We, of course, are very quiet up here, weather wet, but otherwise all right.

There is plenty of work here at present but we are gradually wearing it down. There is the usual batch of Courts-Martial etc but these are all in the days work.. All my love. Ted

27 January 43

Dear Mother, Our weather is very nice now, except for the rain. As you can imagine I am quite busy now as I have one of my slaves on leave. There were a lot of changes when I got back here, mostly for the better. We lost our CSM and quite a number of NCOs, who could well be spared.

Well, trying work at present is like trying to work in a three-ring circus, so I will close now. All my love Ted

Monday (undated)

Dear Ma, We are having lousy weather at present, rain, rain and nothing but rain. It's not very cold though. I am managing to keep quite well at present, touching wood. The news at present seems very good, doesn't it? Things really seem to be moving at last. All my love. Ted

5 February 43

Dear Mother, Tonight a gang of us are going to a party thrown by the YWCA. Whoopee!! At any rate it will be a change from the pictures.

The weather has been pretty rough recently but today has cleared up nicely, though it is rather cold.

It has been a rather busy week on the administrative side, what with discharges, new intakes, GFCMs, etc.

Last Wednesday we had a real live egg for breakfast. Doesn't the Army feed its boys well?

Well, there is no news, as usual, so thanks once again. All my love Ted

11 February 43

Dear Mother, I am on duty now, with the radio on, they are playing 'Fuust', quite nice too It's a pity

We have had plenty rain recently and the mess had been flooded. I didn't see the floods myself but they tell me it was caused by the snows on the hills melting. It is apparently quite a common occurrence because all the bridges are built on the suspension system.

We have had a terrific flap today, all the brass hats arriving but none of them bothered me.

Will write again soon, Love Ted

16 February 43

Dear Mother, As I am on duty tonight I thought I would pass some of the time throwing in an additional letter.

We have had a rough week, snow storms, gales and floods. The Scottish Orchestra conducted by Warwick

Braithwaite appeared last night (for one night only) and you can bet I was there.

It was a very bright day today, the sun shining on the hills which are once again snow covered.

On Saturday morning I had a phone call from Derrick (Ed note: his cousin) who was in Inverness passing through on his way to Kyle. As his train left at 11.50 I could not possibly get away during the morning and so missed the chance of seeing him. He said he had passed his course(!) and was still without news of Rex. He is writing as soon as he gets to his destination and we are going to try to fix up a meeting sometime.

I went on Church Parade on Sunday morning for the first time in years, owing to a shortage of Sergeants. It was rather fun and I enjoyed the march.

The service was in the Cathedral which is imposing enough from the outside, but very disappointing within. The Service was Episcopal Church of Scotland, just like the Anglican with choirboys in cuffs and everything, but all on the scruffy side. The lesson was read by the head of the Cameron clan, an old boy in a kilt. Apart from soldiers there were only about a dozen people there which reminded me of other churches where I've been.

Can't think of anything else to write about now, so will conclude. All my love Ted

Saturday 27 February 43

Dear Ma, Once again I am on duty, hence this letter. Have had a very busy week, principally owing to a lot more men being posted to the Company and their being housed in a new billet outside the town, an eighteenth-century mansion, said to be Charles Edwards headquarters before the battle of Culloden Moor. Very beautiful place, especially inside. On the walls are great plaques of plaster, I presume. In the hall these plaques are in the forms of trophies, one of ancient arms, the other of 'modern' ones (i.e. 18th century musket, cannon, etc). In the other rooms they represent classical subjects, none of whom I could identify.

It seems a pity to let the military spoil such a place but I suppose it can't be helped.

I am rather enjoying my evening on duty, having just gifted two boiled eggs, and the wireless is not too bad.

I bought a pair of black shoes last week, from a bloke, they only cost me two bob. The old brown ones have gone completely now, the upper has quite ripped away from the sole. I use them for the office only for which they are just about good enough.

All my love Ted

Saturday (undated)

Dear Mother, I had heard about the raid from someone who was on leave at the time, and gather it was pretty bad. However thank God you are safe.

Tuesday, Sorry I had to break off, but have been very busy, slapping reprobates into detention and generally working like a horse.

Today being Shrove Tuesday we had pancakes, complete with lemons. Who wouldn't be a Sergeant!

The weather is still glorious, though we had a freak snow storm yesterday afternoon.

As far as I can tell at present I shall be coming home again on the sixth of next month. If anything untoward occurs I shall let you know in good time.

I'm afraid I have no news in spite of the busy time we're having. All my love Ted

Saturday (undated)

Dear Ma, I had heard something about the raid, but not very much, so shall be interested in the 'Stratford Express' when I see it.

I am looking forward to my leave very much especially as it's only just over a fortnight away. It manages to come round very quickly doesn't it?

The weather is still very nice and I am hoping great things of it.

As usual I am terribly busy and don't know which way to turn, there's so much to do, people dashing about all over the place.

Well, as there's a chance of getting this posted now, I'll close now, hoping you are still quite well. All my love Ted

17 March 43

Dear Ma, How is things back home? I hear there was a raid in the E District some days ago. I hope nowhere near FG.

The weather is really wonderful, I am looking forward to me leaf intensely, if the weather is to be like this.

Tonight there was a wood on fire in the hills, vary far away. All my love Ted

24 March 43

Dear Mother, We have had a busy week, sending unfortunates to distant islands, one of which I have visited in the past, the other one step further on. Poor souls! But needs must when the War Office wills.

We had eggs and chips for tea tonight. There's glory for you!

Just think, only another 14 days and I shall be home again.

The weather is still magnificent up here, just like spring. The river is very low at present, and men fish in it, wading out to mid-stream.

I suppose there's nothing you'd like me to bring back particularly?

If so, say so, and I'll do my best. No more for now, as time is drawing in. All my love Ted.



HQ 128 Coy PC, Culloden House, Inverness, 27 March 43

Dear Mother, The threatened move has transpired at last and herewith a view of our new abode. Very handsome, don't you think! It is, of course, the place I described to you some time back, and is said to have been Bonny Prince Charlie's HQ before the battle of Culloden. There are some dangerous underground tunnels, and it is, of course haunted, by a White Lady and B.P.C. I am rather hoping for an interview

with the latter, to collect first hand material on the '45 and thus be enabled to write the novel of the period. Our Orderly room is a vast panelled affair with a carved fireplace.

The big snag is that we are an hour's walk from Inverness, but I don't think that will stop me much.

Our weather is still lovely, it's quite amazing for the time of year. We have daffodils etc in the gardens. All my love Ted

Monday (undated)

Dear Mother, I have been very busy today, in fact it's been about the worst Whit Monday I've ever spent and I feel fagged out. By the way, don't be surprised or too disappointed if I have to put my leave off for a week or two. I have been trying to sort the leave roster out and what with all our new reinforcements it is a tremendous problem, especially as we are only allowed 10% away at a time. I will do my best to get away at the original time, but if it's quite impossible I'll let you know.

The countryside is still looking beautiful but I'm getting rather tired of purple hills and lochs and would like to see some grimy bricks and mortar for a change.

Went a long walk last night, right over the battlefield down to the river Nairn, very pretty down there. There was some sort of dog breeding establishment with a big pen full of Alsations, like a pack of wolves, very ferocious beasts.

We have had some more mushrooms, very nice too, only not cooked so nicely as they might or could be. These Army cooks have no imagination. All my love Ted

Thursday (undated)

Dear Mother, I am very busy at present getting cleared up for next week. I don't think I told you that I have a little room of my own here, which I have managed to furnish quite nicely. Owing to the heavy rain I have not been able to get out much, but the grounds are very nice. The place is so large one can get lost.

In the yard is a chicken coup with a polecat/ferret inside, a large and handsome beast, brown and orange. At the back of the house are niches with old statues in them.

There is quite a frequent bus service to Inverness, which is a blessing. I have no doubt it will be a marvellous place when the summer comes.

I will certainly bring as much chocolate as I can scrounge.

I am anxiously looking forward to next week, except the journey part which is not too good.

However I expect I shall write to you again before then, if not, expect the usual telegram. All my love Ted

Saturday 17 April 43

Dear Mother, Well, here I am, safe and sound, though very jaded. I caught the 7.20 all right and after a very comfortable trip arrived at Inverness at 10.00 this morning. I had to wait an hour and a quarter for a bus though. I could have walked it in the time but did not feel up to it.

Arrived and I had a look at the office and then went to sleep for the afternoon. I am now knocking off the correspondence having told my staff they can all have the evening off if they wish.

The weather here is quite chilly, it has

been raining this afternoon and the wind in howling round the house in the usual Culloden manner. The 'White Lady' has been on her prowls again and has frightened half of them to death.

The trees are not yet in leaf here and the daffodils are still out.

There have been the normal row of casualties in my absence, and I can see there is a great deal of work for me to get stuck into.

I shall write to Kathleen tonight, telling her what you suggested. There was a letter from her waiting

Now I am back in uniform in the office it doesn't seem possible I was home such a short time ago, just a beautiful dream.

It was a very nice leave this time and I do thank you for the time you gave me and for your understanding. Once again, thanks a lot for a very happy time. All my love Ted

23 April 43 (Good Friday)

My dearest Mother, I meant to send you all an Easter card but have not been able to get in the town while the shops were open.

On Wednesday I visited our Wishing Well. It is quite a long walk, first down an avenue at the end of which is a big gate with statues on the pillars. Then you turn left, up a little woodland path which mounts higher and higher into dense dark pinewoods, very gloomy. It is very hilly and wild and altogether very scariest. The path twists and turns among the trees and here and there are clearings where, looking back, there is a marvellous view of the Moray Firth and blue hills rising behind. Suddenly after crossing a little bridge you come to the Wishing Well, in a beautiful clearing. There is an old old semi-circular well about eight feet high, topped with grass. Inside the floors is paved, and the water bubbles up through a perfect circular opening about a yard across. Coppers and silver coins have been thrown in and gather at the bottom, and on all the trees and thorn bushes around hang coloured rags, as thick as leaves, hung there by those making wishes for the fairies. The whole atmosphere is most strange and beautiful, the sunlit clearing and the bright colours against the sombre pinewoods.

I understand there is a procession there on May Eve, which perhaps you remember is a magic night in nearly every folk lore. There is a poem by Rimsky Korsakov or it may be Mussorgsky called 'May Night'. This is still quite a pagan country at least.

Well, no more news now, so I will conclude. This is a much better Good Friday than the last! – under canvas in the rain. All my love Ted

28 April 43

Dear Mother, Personally I had quite a quiet time. On Good Friday I didn't go out at all. On Saturday afternoon I went into Inverness. In the evening we had an ENSA concert here, not very good.

On Sunday morning I walked to Raigmore Hospital about three miles away to see Percy Pink who was admitted with a broken ankle while I was on leave. He was quite pleased to see somebody from the Company and I stayed quite a long time.

On Monday I went up to the wishing well again. On the way back I saw a coal black rabbit. Apparently there are several about here.

Our weather is pretty poor now. Plenty of

rain during the day, but the evenings brighten a little.

Our daffodils have all been picked but the narcissus are coming out now and the flowering shrubs.. All my love Ted

Saturday 1 May 43

Dearest Mother, Sorry to hear about the arm, one of the drafty old Essex winds, I expect. I expect by now you have managed to have some treatments which have probably scotched it for a bit.

We have three lovely kittens here, black, ginger and tortoiseshell. They have just got to the roaming stage and appear all over the place.

The weather is lovely today, and the country glorious, the trees are just budding here. The daffs have gone but the narcissus are out and up by the wishing well are a lot of snowdrops. You would be interested in the birds here, they are very tame, there is a blackbird which sings on the window each morning, thrushes on the lawn, and a lot of those coloured finches in the trees. There are some black and white birds I haven't identified. I think they are swallows or martins.

There are plenty of owls at night, too. All my love Ted

Monday 3 May 43

Dear Mother, Yesterday was the big day at the wishing well when all the Invernessians make their wishes and throw their pennies in the well.

As it was a miserably wet evening I couldn't get up there, but I was there the evening before and saw that a course bag had been cunningly lowered in to catch the shekels.

This I understand is done by the local clergy, who apply to charity what they fetch from the fairies. They had a good haul - £31, to be exact. All day long I could see hundreds of people going by.

Going up to the wishing well the other night, I was exploring the woods when I found the mausoleum of the Forbes family who used to own this joint – it's about two miles from the house, in the middle of a gloomy wood, all shrouded in evergreens. There are five graves in front, and the building behind. I peeped in – the door was ajar – to see if Count Dracula was at home but it was empty, not even any coffins, just stone slabs and a broken bier. I suppose they were all not roaming the woods – a haunting.

There was a queer occurrence here the other week. A boy was found dead in a field near here minus his leg.

Subsequently they discovered it had been blown off by a live grenade he had picked up and shoved in his pocket. His dog was beside him all the time - he had been missing two days or more before he was discovered and the funny part was that they couldn't find the leg anywhere.

They even shot the dog to see if he had eaten it, and afterwards it was discovered that the dog had buried it. All my love Ted

Monday (undated)

Dear Mother, This is a queer country. This morning I woke to find a white world – everywhere snow-covered. And now it has all gone and the sun is quite hot.

I forgot to tell you in my last letter that I had had an Income Tax form in. Apparently I earn so much now that I have to give

some of it back.

Anyway I got the CQMS to give me a hand with it, and it's OK except that I am not sure of your date of birth which has to be given for some obscure reason. I think it '9.7.1890' but will you let me know for sure as soon as poss. Please?

The other day we had some soup with quite a pleasant flavour and a lot of small bones in it. I quite enjoyed it, but later it transpired that it was made from two crows shot by one of the officers and pounced on by our overzealous cooks. So I can count 'crow soupo' in with the goats and other guess dishes I have partaken of.

We have just had some more men added to the Company, this is certainly a job and a half these days.

Our three kittens are very well these days, rambling about all over the place.

Nothing very exciting has happened apart from hail and snow, so will close. All my love Ted

15 May 43

My dear Mother, Thank you for your two letters which have enabled me to complete my Income Tax Return. I don't think I shall have to pay anything this year as I was a Corporal for part of the time and my earnings were only somewhere around £114. Our weather has taken a turn for the better but it has been very bad.

We had wood pigeon for dinner the other day, quite nice, but not cooked as you used to do them.

When it is fine, the scenery is very lovely as the banks of the hills are covered with gorse and broom which is in bright yellow blossom.

The lilac trees in the grounds are just coming out and the rhododendrons are in bud.

What do you think of the news? Looks like I shan't see the sands of the desert after all. I'm a bit disappointed in a way, but I suppose there's going to be plenty more chances. All my love Ted

Saturday 22 May 43

Dear Mother, I'm afraid I forgot all about my Insurance when making my Income Tax return. However they have done me down for £3 provisionally for next year which they are stopping in lots of 5/- per month, which won't kill me.

Until yesterday the weather was very nice, but now it's turned wet and cold.

I saw a stoat knock off a little rabbit the other evening. It was dragging it across the road and ran away before I got very near, leaving the rabbit. It was still warm and quite limp so was not long dead.

I had a new experience last night, giving a blood transfusion. There was a call for volunteers some time ago and I gave my name in, so last night they took us up on it, sent a car here, took us to the hospital, where we each gave a pint of the best gore. It was quite interesting. First we went into the waiting room – there were only seven of us, by the way. Rather a miserable show for about 150 men here – and then we were called out in twos. We went to a warm room, took off our jackets and lay on trolleys just like we were extras in a young Dr Kildare film. Then the doctor painted our arms, bunged in a local anaesthetic with a hypodermic, and then I suppose (for I didn't watch very closely) made the hole. The

blood was taken just inside the elbow. He fastened a sort of rubber tube on which ran to a big bottle, kept out of sight. Then I just let it flow. It didn't hurt a bit and I felt quite all right all the time, only as though I were floating on air. They were very careful about us kept feeling our pulses, and kept a blood pressure gauge on all the time. When they had got all they wanted, they took the affair off, bound up the place, and we had to go and lie on more trolleys. After about ten minutes they fed us on tea and biscuits and drove us back to Culloeden House.

I caught a glimpse of my bottle of blood. It looks a tremendous lot, but very nice and red. I felt sleepy afterwards but otherwise quite all right. I still have a bandage on, and the place feels a tiny bit sore but otherwise quite OK. I understand that the blood is dried, canned and sent to Field Ambulances all over the place. After all, I may be glad of my own back, one of these days!

Personally I'd have another go any time, only I understand they don't call in donors for another six months.

During the hot days last week we found all our water supplies drying up. Apparently that is the big snag here, the place is dry during the summer, unless it rains all the time.

The roses are coming out in the gardens here now, and the shrubs are flowering. The woods are full of bluebells – very pretty. All my love Ted

27 May 43

Dear Mother, I have had a letter from the blood people thanking me for my donation and informing me that I am in Blood Group A, whatever that means.

Our weather has again brightened up and the sun is quite warm at present. Saw some primroses the other evening, surely it's very late in the year for them?

There are many lambs and foals about now. They don't seem to go in for cattle much up here, only the Highland ones like Oxo advertisements. I manage to get out most evenings except when the weather is absolutely prohibitive, which is not often.

There is still plenty of work to do. I often wonder if they will ever run out of silly ideas, all making more and more work. I suppose it will all close down when the big push really starts.

The hole in my arm has healed up it was not much more than a pin prick.

Glad to hear the cherries are coming along. From the blossom when I was home it should be another fine crop. All my love Ted

Sunday (undated)

Dear Mother Glad to hear the raids have gone over for a bit. It must be very worrying to have them starting all over again.

I have had several prowls through the pinewoods here, they're lovely, like a fairy tale and quite wild. Even the rabbits are almost tame. There is an abundance of gorse and broom here too and all the hillsides are flaming gold.

The gardens round the house are now bright with rhododendrons and roses, all in bloom. We are really very lucky to be here, especially compared with our quarters the same time last year. All my love Ted

7 June 43

Dear Mother, Having a few minutes spare

I thought I would throw in a buckshee letter.

The new Flanagan & Allan show 'Hi de hi' sounds pretty good to me. We must certainly try to take that in next month. I am hoping to be home on Wednesday 7th July as usual, that is, if an invasion doesn't knock the leave rather sideways.

I enclose a clipping from the Observer I thought you would be interested in.

We are having some fine weather now, for a change. The place is alive with rabbits.

Last night I saw one sitting up on his hind legs, jumping up into the air to grab some plant or other too high for him to reach.. All my love Ted

LESLIE HOWARD: AN APPRECIATION BY C. A. LEJEUNE

LESLIE HOWARD, who was lost in the air liner shot down by Nazi fighters on its way to England from Lisbon last week, closed his career in the informal way he would have wished, giving no farewell performance, leaving no message, and bothering nobody.

His whole life was a series of dim comings and goings. His plans were always vague; his movements uncertain. He left business to his agents, and appointments to anyone who chose to remind him of them. Only in the technicalities of his work was he precise and fastidious.

He was the most modest actor I have ever known. He undertook public engagements, and since the war, very many public engagements, as a matter of course. But he neither sought nor avoided publicity. He simply didn't think about it.

Howard was a man of great personal charm, which increased with the years as his vitality ebbed. The character of the vague, dreamy, gently humorous Englishman he played in "Pimpernel Smith," "Pygmalion," "49th Parallel," and "The First of the Few" was not assumed.

Howard never tried to be anything he was not.

Except that of late years he always wore horn-rimmed glasses off the screen, he looked in life exactly as millions of picturegoers know him—slight and a little stooped, fair hair just turning grey, unlit pipe between his teeth, rather tired flannels, and an old tweed coat. He loved the country, dogs, and riding. He got on well with young people, and listened to them. His mind was always full of the films he would make some day; he liked to think them out as he talked; he talked most happily of "Hamlet."

Public Loved Him

These small things come into my mind as I think of him, for to anyone who knew Howard, and to many who did not, his death strikes first as a sharp personal loss. He had a rare and quite unconscious faculty for absorbing affection. The public really loved him. I shall never forget the electric thrill that ran through the crowd outside St. Paul's when he appeared as Nelson in the pageant of "The Cathedral Steps." That brief moment stopped the show. He had many friends, both in England and America, known and un-

known, and all his friends were good ones.

He was a better actor than director, but thought himself a better director than an actor. He used to say that the most positive things he ever did were to reject a part with Garbo, and to refuse Orson Welles the role of King Claudius in his New York stage production of "Hamlet." His reputation stood high in the American theatre, and his short-wave broadcasts from London were a regular feature of American wartime listening.

He made many films in Hollywood before the war, including the fabulous "Gone With the Wind," but only four of them, I believe, really satisfied him: "Romeo and Juliet," "The Petrified Forest," "Berkeley Square," and "Escape to Happiness." He loved America and the Americans, but refused every offer to go back to Hollywood until the war was over. He had a passion for England and the English idea that was almost Shakespearean.

To me the most felicitous memory of Howard is a moment of his own devising in "The Scarlet Pimpernel"—the John of Gaunt speech, which beats every actor who hasn't the roots of the thing in his heart.

Wednesday (undated)

Dear Mother, We had mushrooms for breakfast this morning (locally grown) – very nice too.

I don't much care what sort of literature you are able to send, as long as its readable.

I'm afraid I have no news to write home about, everything is going on much the same here.

If the weather has improved, as ours has, the cherries should be coming along nicely.

I have just had a delicious bath, very hot, so feel rather languid now. All my love Ted Friday (undated)

Dearest Mother, I too, hope very much that my leave is not held up. One never knows these days. I remember having the same forebodings this time last year!

I am still as much in the thick of it as ever – another FGCM coming up – there seems no end to them.

I suppose the cherries are about right now. I wish I was home to 'help' pick them.

Have you acquired a kitty yet? Or are you going to wait until after you have been away before you break one in. I think ours have all taken to the woods, we seldom see any of them now. All my love Ted.

Wednesday (undated)

Dear Mother,

On Monday evening I had a idea at finding the site of the battle of Culloeden. It's a lovely walk, across the fields to a little tumble-down village rather rudely named Balloch, through the village up a line hedged with golden gorse and broom. Higher up this gives way to pinewoods and turning back there is a wonderful panorama

of the Firth, deep blue against purple hills.

The road leads up to a cross roads where there is a large stone as big as our air raid shelter with CUMBERLANDS STONE raised on it.

The battlefield id down the right fork. There is not much to see – a huge cairn about twenty feet high of big rough stones with gorse bushes on the top, and on the other side of the road upright stones with the names of clans carved on, the tombstones of the clans. There are too very old cottages there as well.

The jammy part is that going back I went down a bridge path and found myself at the wishing well and this only a few minutes

from Culloeden House, though it was about four miles round by road.

Wednesday (undated)

Dear Mother, We are in a real flap now, and I hardly know which way to turn. I have been hard at it to 9.30 every night and it looks like being the same for the next fortnight.

However I expect I shall survive. I heard about Mount Pleasant – I did have an awful time there, perhaps that's what made the Army seem nice when I first joined it.

I had another medical examination this evening, I am still A4. I have to get my inoculations up to date though, being nearly two years behind, so don't be surprised if I can't write to you for a couple of days.

How are you off for eggs? I may be able to bring some home for you, if you can use them. Please let me know.

We are still having plenty of Courts Martial, one this week and another in preparation.

I have managed to get quite a good supply of tobacco from the NAAFI which is proving very acceptable.

On Monday night the CSM, CQMS and myself were invited to the Officers' Mess for the evening. Very democratic what! We didn't do much, only drank all their beer and smoked all their cigarettes and played darts, but it was a change. All my love Ted Friday (undated)

Dear Mother, I am busy recovering from my inoculations, have spent all day in bed. I had a double dose one in each arm. The right is not very painful, but the left is a bit

troublesome. The worst effect is that it is very lowering. There is a headache all the time and I passed a very bad night. However I shall be all right by this time tomorrow. The day's rest has certainly been much appreciated by me.

I believe it is quite a nice day today, as I can't go out, but that doesn't worry me much.

The cherries have not yet arrived, I expect they will be here tomorrow Saturday evening.

The cherries have arrived. Thank you very much. I have quite recovered from the inoculation except for stiffness in both arms.

There was plenty of work as you can imagine, when I came out of hibernation, but I am managing to get through with it. But I shall certainly be able to use my leave when it comes!

I have hardly had time to poke my nose out of this dump for the last week, only one short walk to the wishing well on Wednesday night.

Nothing else much is happening at present. They have had a 'Wings for Victory' week in Inverness but I've seen nothing of it, only loud planes roaring overhead when I've been trying to get to sleep.

I hope things are quieter in that line at home now, though there seem to have been quite a lot in the past few weeks, more than we suppose. All my love Ted

Wednesday (undated)

Dear Mother, Thank you for your letter, papers, etc. I saw the old man yesterday and fixed my leave, so unless something very unforeseen happens, I shall be travelling on the 6th and arriving early Wednesday morning, the 7th. Hurray! I shall be very glad of a rest, as it's a swine at present.

The cherries were very nice indeed and were much appreciated by all partaken thereof, all my love Ted

Thursday (undated)

Dear mother, The will goes to the Officer in charge Records, so there is no need to send a copy home. It is really only a temporary affair though quite legal, and is of course null and void as soon as I make another, which I shall do of course as soon as I am out of the Army.

Hope all the chocs arrived safely, and you are enjoying same.

I have not been very far afield recently as there's not much to go out for.

All out kittens here – we have eight now, are all anonymous. But they are very independent creatures, all of them.

At present we are practically waterless which is rather a trial. There is still much to do, rather too much at times, I am afraid. All my love Ted

Thursday (undated)

Dearest Mother, Thank you for the Bank Holiday letter. How different is your weather from ours! Bank Holiday was literally a washout.

I was rather pleased yesterday to get a letter from Major Almond who you will remember used to be in command of this Company. He is at present with the North Africa forces.

I have just managed to scrounge a new suit – one of the utility type with buttons all

down the front. It is being altered by the tailor to fit me more or less approximately at present.

We have four more kittens – two black and two ginger. I wish I could send one of them home.

Had a rabbit for dinner yesterday, quite nice, but I'd rather you had cooked him in a pie. All my love Ted

15 August 43

Dear Mother, I expect the house is a shambles at present, but it will be all the better for a good doing-up. I expect I shall see a difference next time.

We had venison for dinner today – yes, the dead deer. Very nice it was too, more like poultry than meat. I think it was the nicest meat I have ever tried.

Today is the third anniversary of my joining this firm – my! What a day the first one was!

Looking back it doesn't seem possible I have been in all that time – I hoped it would only be a matter of months when I started. However, there's never telling what's in store which is perhaps just as well.

Our weather has been pretty bad recently, not a bit seasonal unless they always have it like this up here.

I don't remember if I told you before, but I had a free replacement of those boots I had pinched. I am glad to say. All my love Ted

Wednesday (undated)

Dear Mother. Sorry to say I have a rotten cold just at present. I think I shall go to bed early tonight and see if I can get rid of it that way.

I should think the dining room looks nice now, and I am glad the rest of the house had been done up, though you won't be sorry to see the last of the workmen I expect.

Weather is still quite nice but on the chilly side. Summer seems to pass very quickly up here.

My magazines have come in useful at last. I have also got plenty of Aspros so will take some and get to bed, I think. All my love Ted

Monday (undated)

Dear Mother, Glad to see you received the chocolate safely and that you enjoyed it. This is a miserable wet day.

We had a roast chicken for dinner yesterday with green peas – very nice too!

As last time, I have had a splinter come down from where my tooth was extracted. My jawbone must be very brittle or something.

I managed to get my shoes mended here, so they are all right for the present. I don't think they'll last very much longer though as the stitching on the toecaps is giving way.

We have been having some very nice raspberries from our gardens, also lettuces, onions and peas. Usually when troops cultivate some ground they are moved just as it begins to come up, but we have been lucky.

The kittens are half grown now and very greedy. The old blue cat has disappeared, probably shot in mistake for a rabbit.

I am glad to say there are no exciting activities to write home about so will close. All my love Ted

Friday (Undated)

Dear Mother, I had a very enjoyable day on the range at Fort George yesterday. It was a perfect day, and it was very pleasant to be free of office worries for a short time. I did quite satisfactorily – managed to knock off a bull in the very first shot of the day and kept up quite a good standard, my final score being 30 points out of 45 which is not too bad for a fellow with bad eyes.

It is quite a nice place, down on the waterfront with some rather imposing scenery on the opposite side of the Firth. All my love Ted

Saturday (undated)

Dear Mother, I arrived back this morning after quite a comfortable journey for I slept most of the time. Thank you for the little fruit patties which were a very pleasant surprise. I managed to catch a bus immediately I got in, so was soon back at this historic mansion. It is a glorious evening, so the weather seems to have changed at last.

Everything here seems much the same and quite static.

I feel very tired at present and shall be glad to get to bed tonight. Dinner today was dreadful after the really delicious meals I have been enjoying for the last ten days.

Just at present I don't feel much interest in going out, but I shall soon shake down to work again. There seems to be plenty of it.

Our kittens have grown enormously in the short time I have been away.

The sandwiches were delicious. By the way, I arrived at Euston at 6.30 and was none too early to secure a seat. Quite a lot had to travel in the corridor, so I was lucky.

Once again thank you for a very happy time. All my love Ted

Wednesday (undated)

Dear Mother, Have just heard the good news of Italy's surrender. Let's hope this will hasten the end of the war. I think it will help in that direction.

I had hoped to go to the pictures tonight, but had to work it out, as one of our blokes got killed on the docks which meant another pile of work for me. It always seems to find its way round to my desk.

The PC Scottish Command Orchestra last night was surprisingly good. One of them was a member of Lew Stone's band and was first-class in his way.

Weather is dark and dull again but that's to be expected for the time of year. All my love Ted

Wednesday 15th September 43

Dear Mother, I have finished 'Barnaby Rudge' and quite enjoyed it. I rather like these solid meaty things now as they take such a lot of reading, which is all to be desired.

The news doesn't seem so good now, does it? However let's hope it turns out all right.

I am still hoping hard about my leave and think I shall be lucky, though of course I can't be certain. It's about his time, isn't it.

We are having a lot of rain at present, and it has turned quite chilly tonight.

I expect you are living on your own for a bit now, and not minding it either.

There is still plenty of work to do, but it is

not too bad now. All my love Ted

Friday (undated)

Dear Mother, We're still busy, but haven't killed anybody else, as yet.

If all goes well I have only 17 more days to go before climbing aboard that old train again. I do hope I can make it.

Our weather is very mixed at present, usually managing to rain at least once a day.

This time last year I was getting worried about our move up here and wondering if it would really transpire.

All my love Ted

Tuesday (undated)

Dear Mother, My cold is gradually subsiding, I am glad to say.

On Sunday afternoon we were all called out on an exercise much to my chagrin and I spent the rest of the time as a German parachutist hiding in a clump of rhododendrons waiting to be captured, only I slew all my captors first.

On Thursday we are hoping to have a day on the range. I hope it keeps fine for us.

I hope the weather is nice, ours isn't too bad. At present we are waiting for an ENSA concert party to arrive at half past seven, so must finish to be ready for the show. All my love Ted

Friday (undated)

Dear Mother, How strange to think it is four whole years since the declaration of war. As for as weather goes, today is an exact replica, but I never thought for a moment where I would be this time. At this every moment, I fancy, we were being invaded by all sorts of beasts, most of whom we have never seen from that day to this.

As usual, I'm afraid there is no news – 'nothing to write home about', in fact, so will close. All my love Ted

Saturday (undated)

Dear Mother, I arrived quite safely at 11.00 this morning. Quite a comfortable journey but rather crowded. As usual, all sorts of things have transpired in my absence. To begin with, we have a new Major, as I hinted may be the case when I was home. I gather he is being rather new broomy, but so far I have not met the gentleman.

Marvellous to relate it is not raining here though it is several degrees colder than London.

I feel rather tired though and don't feel like going out this evening. Thank you for a very enjoyable time and thank you more than I can say for your kindness to and unselfishness in regards Kathleen. I can't tell you how much I appreciate that. The sausage sandwiches and tomatoes went down very gratefully. I was lucky in getting three mugs of tea on the way up.

Well, there's not much to say as yet, but will write again in a day or two, as soon as I have sorted myself out. All my love, and thanks again for a wonderful time, Yours Ted

Friday (Undated)

Dear Ma, We have had another casualty among our officers. The Captain has departed, minus one pip, a sadder but I fear not a wiser man. I trust it will all add to the efficiency of the service.

Did I tell you I have heard again from Major Alland, who is now with the Central Mediterranean Forces, and appreciates it very much after Africa.

Our weather has turned wet on us, and even if we were allowed fireworks and a guy tonight it would be a washout.

Have just had a nice hot bath and so feel very contented and pleasant.

Well I think this is all, so will close now. All my love Ted

10 November 43

Dear Ma, Sorry to hear the raids are still going on, but hope you are left more or less unmolested.

We had quite a good ENSA shows last night and have another tonight so we are doing quite well. In the film of the prisoners I was talking about Tommy Trinder had a joke about a farmer who bought a prize bull for 200 guineas, but the bull fell in love with a cow in the next field, and leapt the barbed wire fence to her. Only he didn't leap high enough, so the farmer had to sell him for a tenner! You must imagine it put over in the Trinder manner of course.

We had one last night too, about a man who went to his bank manager and said, "Are you in the fertiliser business?" "No!" "You are now, right up to the neck, I'm overdrawn."

We are having rotten weather now, all rain and gales. All my love Ted

Thursday (undated)

Dear Mother, Thanks for your letter and papers. What a nuisance these inspections and people are. I wish they wouldn't try to be so 'helpful!' However let's hope they leave you alone for a long time now.

There is tons of work on the go at the moment, but it doesn't really matter as it is too cold and dark to go out at night much except to the pictures. All my love Ted

Wednesday 1 December 43

Dear Mother,

We have had a busy time recently, preparing for the visit of a General which took place today; the usual five minutes rush round the place and away again.

Our weather is still cold and wet, but I think has improved slightly after our snow of last week.

I don't think anything else has happened since I last wrote, so will close now. All my love Ted

Sunday 5 December 43

Dear Mother, I have been very busy this week as we have been visited by a General, so that everything had to be just so.

I am glad to say that I think my leave will be OK for 11-22 Jan. I have had a fight not to be pushed further back still, but have done the best I can.

The weather has turned out nicer now, and it has turned out a bit. All my love Ted

Wednesday 8 December 43

Dear Mother, I am glad to say I am quite OK at present (touching wood). I have run into another lot of work, which is taking up a great deal of my own time. However I suppose I mustn't grumble as it's better than being in action.

Our Company dog was in trouble the other day, Sunday to be precise, as he got in the way of a gun, but he is quite all right

now, although he had about twelve pellets in him. It's marvellous how tough these dogs are.

I was interested in the bombing in the Stratford Express this week. There's still plenty of sleepless nights about, I'm afraid. All my love. Ted

Tuesday 14 December 43

Dear Mother, I am glad your cold is clearing up. I have had a bit of a headache today but a couple of aspirins soon cleared it up. I am glad to say that the frost has gone too, up to the time of writing, which is much better.

I am sending my disk off tomorrow (at last!) so I expect it should arrive on Friday or Saturday, I have packed it up as carefully as possible, so I hope it doesn't get damaged too much.

Christmas is drawing very close now, isn't it? I shall be glad when it is all over in a way, so that we can settle down again and look forward to our leave. All my love Ted

20 December 43

Dear Mother, We are feverishly preparing for Christmas and judging by the menu we shall have a good feed, if nothing else. We are having an egg for breakfast, roast turkey etc for dinner, cold roast and port for tea(!), and turkey, beef and pork sandwiches for a buffet supper. We are having a dance up here on Christmas night, but can't imagine who is coming to it.

Probably the three witches from Macbeth's blasted heath (which isn't so far away), the White Lady and a few vampires from the tombs up by the wishing-well. I believe they originally intended to get a concert party up here, but nobody would come.

Well, here's all the best for as Happy a Christmas as possible.

Will write again soon, Love Ted

128 Coy Pioneer Corps, Byams House Camp, Marchwood, Nr Southampton, Hants, 30 December 43

Dear Mother, Thanks for letter. I am sorry I didn't reply earlier, but as you will gather from the above address I haven't had much time recently. We arrived here last night, having started on Tuesday afternoon, though it was a very comfortable journey. It was rather galling to pass through Willesden and Clapton on the way.

At last I have one wish fulfilled and am stationed in England, but I'm not liking it much. We are in huts so very different from our late mansion, that we are all homesick for Scotland, strange as it may seem. However it will only take about 3 hours when I come home in a fortnight or so's time. I'll let you know more about it next time I write.

We had a grand Christmas by the way. I'll tell you when I come home. It needed to be, as we look like having a busy New Year.

Well, I want to get this away, so I'll close now. All my love Ted

PS. To allay any apprehensions you may have, we are here for work.

c/o GPO, Marchwood, Hants Saturday (undated)

Dear Mother, We are now shaking down a bit, and trying to discover the amenities of the place. They are not a patch on those of Culloden. However, as you can imagine, I haven't had many minutes to call my own just recently. I am afraid that this upheaval

may cause my leave to drop back, but it will only be for a day or two, at the most. I'll see to that, you may be sure!

With luck, I am now only about 3 hours run from door to door, so I am hoping for a few weekends, if I can get away.

I forgot to tell you in my last letter that we brought our dog down with us, but he jumped out of the train when it stopped at Clapham, so he is now probably an inmate of Battersea Dogs Home

I believe there is a cinema about 3 miles away so am not quite out of touch of civilisation.

Well, I don't think there's anything else much to write about, so will close now. All my love Ted

6 January 44

Dear Mother, I am glad to say I shall be coming home next Wednesday the 12th. If lucky I shall arrive at Waterloo about 4.00 pm, so expect me home about 06.00 pm. I am looking forward to it very much. I shall, by the way, be only one day later that was originally intended.

Yes, the address was quite correct, as over. The papers, by the way, had been addressed to me minus 'the 128' so they had a lengthy journey round the camp before they finally found me.

I have not been out much recently as the evenings seem very short and I am glad to get to bed early.

We are beginning to shake down now in our new surroundings, though we still don't like them very much. I don't think it is much warmer than Scotland, but we'll talk about that next week.

The light is very bad, so I will close now. All my love Ted

16 January 44

Dear Mother, I have joined the Army's Savings Association which deducts so much from my pay each week (in my case 10/6) and puts it in the Post Office. I have nominated you to receive and hold the book which also means you can draw from it when you wish. This is I think the best way for you to pay the insurance when it is due, or for anything else you may want at any time.

I have also nominated you to vote as my proxy whenever there is an Election, for second choice I named Uncle Bill, you might mention it to him, though I doubt very much if he would ever be called upon.

What price the radio-controlled planes? What a bright lad Jerry is. I hope they haven't bothered you much.

I forgot to mention that in a few days you will receive my ASA Savings Bank Book.

Well, I'm afraid this must be all for now. All my love Ted

23 January 44

Dear Mother, Well, I have arrived here safe and sound, after quite a pleasant journey, landing in camp about 10.30.

It is just the same as before I went, only there is a lot more mud, and we now have electric light on. The weather has been vile, but could be worse, I suppose.

There seems to be plenty of work but so far I haven't troubled about any of it.

I expect the old radiogram is working overtime at the moment I am writing. I hope you are all having a nice time anyway.

Our marvellous new electric lights have

just failed, so I am having to carry on by torchlight.

I believe there is quite a chance that I may be coming up to town at the end of the month (what I told you about) but I will let you know more when I know more.

Well, I must close now under these conditions, but will write again soon. All my love Ted

27 January 44

Dear Mother, I am glad to say that I shall be coming to London on Monday 31 Jan 44, and shall try to get away on Sunday 30th, so that I can have at best one night at home.

Unless I can tell you definitely, however, by Saturday I will send a telegram or phone Mrs Little.

If you care to ask Kath up for next week it's OK by me, but if on the other hand you'd rather I spent my few brief hours with you, I don't mind at all, as I realise I did not spend much time with you during my leave, so I'll leave that matter to you. In any case, I don't expect I shall have very long at home.

Weather is still lousy and the mud rises higher day by day.

I shall write again before the weekend. See you soon, all my love Ted

Saturday (undated)

Dear Mother, It's rather a disappointment to me that I shan't be coming to Town until Tuesday afternoon, after all, different instructions having been received at the last moment. I will certainly try to be home Tuesday night though and will try to wrangle a day pass for Wednesday. I wish the Army wouldn't change its mind so much!

I am up to my neck in work at the moment as one of my blokes is on leave and another has been transferred to the Indian Clerks Corps for which he volunteered some time ago.

It has not rained today which is somewhat remarkable.

I have only been out of camp once this week, so there is nothing new to report.

It is very dark here at nights so I don't care to prowl very far abroad as there's so much water about.

Well, I'm afraid I must close now, through sheer lack of anything to say. All my love Ted

4 February 44

Dear Mother, Well, here I am back again! It was quite a nice journey and I got here at 3.00 pm. At present I am full of a delicious supper of steak and kidney pie – who wouldn't be in the Army?

There is plenty of work of course, but I think it will ease up a bit after a time. I feel a bit exhausted at present after the journey and last nights disturbances. I am glad to say the camp is improved a little, less mud and more paths. It is very cold here although it was a lovely bright day.

I feel almost as though I have had another leave. Thank you very much for the nice time you gave me, and I hope you enjoyed the 'monsters'. All my love Ted

13 February 44

Dear Mother, I had an afternoon at Southampton yesterday for a change. It was a lovely day but the place itself is dead and looks like Cheapside.

I managed to get a bath first thing, which was very much appreciated, then had a snoop round the town. The centre is an open park, rather pleasant. I should think it was once a rather nice town. At one end of the High Street is a very old stone gate, like the one at Launceston, intricately carved, with two large metal lions before it, sitting up on their haunches holding flags.

I hope the oranges and choc. arrived safely. I had another one today. Well, I must close now, as it's late. All my love Ted

17 February 44

Dear Mother, I am glad the food was received OK. Yes, it was all intact, so that's all right. I have had a letter from Kathleen. full of the JU 52 that came down in the field by the bus stop. She says a pilot bailed out and came down in the village, where he was captured. There is nothing to see only twisted wreckage of which I gather Judy has saved a bit with her passion for souvenirs.

Our weather has been very nice but has turned bitterly cold.

Thanks for the photo, though it does look rather ghostly. Still it was a rather foggy day I seem to remember. The argumentative expressions are rather amusing. I do not seem to be very busy these days, but I suppose a time will come. Well, I must close now, as supper time draws nigh. All my love Ted

19 February 44

Dear Mother, I hope the accompanying close ups from a horror film don't scare you too much. I am very disappointed in them personally, especially as they ignore my stars and stripes. However I'll try and get some better ones taken some time. Have just come back from a nice super of brawn and coffee. The food is not at all bad here really.

I hear from a returning leave gentleman that there were a lot of fireworks round home last night. I hope everything is OK. All my love Ted.

21 February 44

Dear Mother, I am glad to get your letter if only to know that you were out of town for the fire-raids, which seem to have been very bad.

I had another inoculation on Sunday morning but it was not one of the painful ones, so I have forgotten about it now.

It is not nearly so cold now for which I am very grateful as it has been very bad weather for brass monkeys around here recently.

I have not been out over the weekend, as there was nothing much worth seeing. All my love Ted

24 February 44

Dear Mother, Thanks for letters and papers received today. I agree with you about the photos and all four are all yours.

I'm glad the fires have spared you. As may be imagined, things have been noisy of nights here.

It has been a glorious day today, although cold.

There doesn't seem to be much to write home about, as nothing much seems to happen.

We did not get pancakes this year!

I have not been out this week yet, but hope to do so tomorrow or Saturday.

Well, time marches on. I have been back a month already! All my love, Ted

27 February 44

Dear Mother, I am sorry to hear the raids are still so bad. I suppose it is only to be expected at the present time. We have been fairly quiet here for the last two or three days.

There is plenty of work here still but I am managing to survive. I really can't tell at present whether I shall be able to get home for Easter. It's some way off yet, and I don't know whether there will be any travel restrictions over the holiday period. I will be able to let you know in a week or so.

Excuse this envelope but I am temporarily out of stock. All my love Ted

1 March 44

Dear Mother, Thanks for your letter. I approve of your distribution of the photos, such as they are. I have sent one to Kath and am sending the other to Lieutenant Makeham (I only had six done – quite enough too!).

I was lucky yesterday, as we had to go to So'ton for baths and whilst there I decided to take the rest of the afternoon off. I weighed myself in the baths and find I weigh 177lbs with my clothes and boots on, that is one and a half lbs lighter than when I was called up, with nowt on.

I see that Major Keatings got in for Bury St Eds. I am not surprised, as I never expected anything else for that part of the world. I hope there have been no night disturbances recently. We have been very quiet here recently. The weather is very nice too.

I have had another inoculation which has left my arm a little sore, but nothing serious so don't worry. All my love Ted

4 March 44

Dear Mother, I should think I may manage to get my leave at Easter, but will let you know definitely later on. I have not realised until I got your letter that I have now been back six weeks. I shall put in for a 48-hour soon, but it won't be next week as one of my young men is going on a Course on Sunday which leaves us a bit short in the office. I'll let you know about that in good time too.

The weather is really marvellous today and I wish I was home now.

I am still kept quite busy, though not so much so as formerly.

I have recovered from my 2nd inoculation, but am due for a third on Tuesday, I think I am getting rather tired of them now.. All my love, and thanks again Ted

7 March 44

Dear Mother, The cake is now consumed and was very enjoyable indeed. Thank you again.

I had my third and last inoculation today and feel quite all right now, though it gave me gyp when it first went in.

The weather has been nice today though we had some snow earlier in the week, but it disposed very quickly.

I expect to be home on leave for Easter, with luck., Love Ted

13 March 44

Dear Mother, Just a hurried line to let you

know I have got a pass this weekend. I hope to be home some time on Friday evening, to return on Sunday evening, which will give us all day Saturday at home. All my love Ted

21 March 44

Dear Mother, I arrived back here quite safe and sound at about 11.15 last night. I had rather a long wait on Southampton station but managed to get on the Marchwood train all right.

I expect Kathleen has told you how I had to sacrifice the Irish penny to get her a platform ticket at Waterloo. It was a good thing you gave it to me, though I didn't really want to part with it.

I have had a nice easy day today having been on baths all the afternoon.

I must thank you for the nice time and the lovely grub over the weekend. Now there is my long leave to look forward to, which is only 3 weeks off.

It has been lovely weather again today, which made me wish I was still at home.

The syrup tart was delicious. Thank you very much, it came in very well when I got hungry.

Thank you once again for a grand time. All my love Ted.

26 March 44

Dear Mother,

The weather down here is marvellous like mid-summer. I hope it continues for a month or so.

You will be glad to know I have fixed my leave for 12th April. So, unless anything unforeseen occurs, you can expect me home that date.

I hope the raids haven't been too disturbing. We have had some noisy nights but nothing serious.

Well, I am afraid there is not much news so I must close now.. All my love Ted

29 March 44

Dear Mother, I am glad the raid was no nearer and hope it continues so. They seem unlucky round that part of the world. I think you will be able to go to Suffolk all right, as one can travel through a prohibited area as long as the destination is outside, and you do not break your journey within the area – or so I read in the paper.

I am glad you have such an authority on the Second Front as Joe to reassure you. It seems therefore I shall get my leave after all. I hope so, as I am so near now.

Weather has been bleaker but is not too bad. All my love Ted

PS. Any sign of our new kitchen yet?

16 April 44

Dear Mother, I arrived here safely last night, and am now trying to settle down again, which is not so easy., Looking through my kit, I find I had left a little shaving brush behind, probably on my bedroom mantelpiece which I should like you to send on please. I think it has a black handle. I also left my shaving cream behind, but that doesn't matter as I can probably get some more here.

There's not much to say yet, only to thank you for the grand time you gave Kathleen and myself. I really did enjoy myself tremendously, and is very nice to look back on.

Before I close I must thank you for the

lovely grub you packed for me. It was very acceptable indeed.

I will write more fully next time. All my love Ted

18 April 44

Dear Mother, I have had another demand for Income Tax, for this year and I am afraid I must ask you once again for the following information: Your date of birth and the amount you are receiving on my behalf i.e. the Government grant you are getting.

I think I shall be able to get away with quite a small amount this time, but I must render my return before I know. It was queer that I had only those payment to make last time, but maybe I paid up all that was required.

Well there's not much to write home about as you may guess.

I hope everything is OK at home and that you will soon be able to have your holiday.

I have managed to get some more shaving cream so there's no need to bother about that. I should be glad of the brush though. All my love Ted

24 April 44

Dear Mother, I have stated doing my Income Tax returns but find the following details are still required ref my insurance, so will you please supply by return?-

1. Name of Insurance Company
2. Date of Policy (when taken out)
3. Capital sum payable at death.

I shall be glad to get this business cleared up, as it has been hanging about too long already.

Thank you for the food packed up, which was very welcome indeed. When I got to Waterloo I found that the train started 20 minutes later than last time so I had a long wait, but the time soon passed.

I am glad to say I feel much better in myself and have fished out my Meggazone and Aspros so hope to scotch the cold soon. I have had a bit of a headache all day today, but it is passing off now.

I am sorry I felt so off colour during my few brief hours at home, but all the same can assure you how very much I appreciated all you did for Kathleen and myself.

Was kept awake last night by a nightingale in one of the trees nearby. There are a lot of birds here – I think I told you when I was home that we first heard the cuckoo five or six days ago.

Hope you are still well and safe and expect you are looking forward to your stay in the country (you can have mine!). All my Love Ted

27 April 44

Dear Mother, I am still kept busy but get more free time than heretofore. What do you think of the rises in pay? As far as we are concerned we are not benefited at all, and if my Income Tax goes through, I shall be just as well off as a Lance Corporal, by the time men from here have been paid. Even at present I get only 1d per day extra than a L/Corporal mustered clerk. However I hope they will see fit to raise my original allotment.

The Budget came as a pleasant surprise which counterbalanced the other.

The cold has cleared up now and I am feeling OK. You will be glad to know I survived Tuesday night all right.

Thanks for taking my shoes in. No news

of Coal hole yet?

I was very glad to have the opportunity of dashing home last week and hope to have the same chance again in the near future. All my love Ted

29 April 44

Dear Mother,
I had quite a long run out into the country the other evening. It is quite pretty about here, with a lot of heathland and woods.

Just about this time last week, I was giving you a shock by walking in unexpectedly I hope I have the chance to do so again in the near future.

I think I have shaken the cold off now, and certainly feel much better than I did last week.. All my love Ted

3 May 44

Dear Mother, I am sorry I have not been able to make time to write to you earlier, but my time has been very much occupied of late. It's getting quite dark now, so if this is a bit of a scrawl you will understand. I am quite enjoying myself at present, and am getting plenty of fresh air.

It will be rather nice if my W/O cousin is able to visit you. I should like to meet him myself one of these days.

Well, I'm afraid it's too dark to write any more so will close. All my love. Ted

PS. Will write again soon – when I can see!

11 May 44

Dear Mother Everything is still OK and I am feeling particularly well at present.

I have not had much time to go out this week as yet, but am getting plenty of fresh air just the same.

The country – what I see of it – is looking very lovely just now.

The photos have arrived and are not too bad – you will see them soon.

I hope to have a day off on Tuesday so will try and get home Monday night, but don't bank on it as all sorts of things can intervene.

We found a snake behind our abode this evening, but it vanished with great rapidity.

Our food is much better now and we are living very well by Army standards.

Well, I fear this must be all. Hope to see you again soon, All my love Ted

PS. Have busted my pipe – will you see if you can get one for me to pick up next time.

17 May 44

Dear Mother, Just a line to tell you I got back all right, though rather late – as I had a long walk from the station.

Kathleen left me at W'loo at about 7.20 as the train was beginning to fill up. The grub was very acceptable as always especially late at night.

Once again I must thank you for a thoroughly enjoyable stay, though of very brief duration. I was very pleased to see Laurie again after all this time, and I enjoyed it as much as any time I have ever spent at home.

Naturally there's not very much to write about after having been such a short time back.

I hope to come home again soon, but don't know the exact date. Well I'm afraid this must be all for now. All my love Ted

20 May 44

Dear Mother, Have just arrived back in camp to find the parcel waiting for which many thanks. I have not read either of the two books before, so shall enjoy them.

I don't know if I shall be able to get home next week, but shall do so if at all possible.

Weather is still nice in the Straits of Dover, of course.

I saw some of the old city walls today. Very massive and have survived the blitz far better than the modern stuff.

They are a sort of light grey fawn colour so that in medieval times So'ton must have looked a white city from the sea.

The cuckoo is still vociferating, also nightingales at the appropriate time. I saw several rats on Thursday and a sow with a litter of piglets today. This is well stocked with animal life. All my love Ted

26 May 44

No 26 O/A Main Course, No 1 SME DBRE, Harper Bks, Ripon, Yorks

Dear Mother, Believe it or not I didn't arrive here until after 11.00 last night! It was quite a trip, entailing 3 changes, so you bet I was glad to get here.

This is a terrific place and I haven't half found my way about yet, but it's all experience. The weather is all right, but I am sure looking forward to Thursday.

The course is all 'green light' and I don't expect to get much time to myself, so don't be surprised if you don't get another letter before I arrive.

I had tea in Leeds last night on my way up, and it is quite a place, far exceeding my imaginings.

There are a very decent set of blokes here as always on courses and I am having quite a good time really. It's a change anyway.

As far as I know at present I shall be travelling back Thursday, but I can't tell you what time I shall arrive, travelling what it is. However, I'll write again if possible. All my love. Ted

Undated (*Ed note: this letter had the address town off and so page 2 is incomplete*)

Dear Mother, Just a line to let you know I arrived back safely at the usual time last night.

Thanks very much for the sandwiches – they were delicious. I thoroughly enjoyed my short stay at home, which was a real rest. I have had quite a pleasant day in the fresh air, but feel a bit tired now as a consequence.

Naturally there's not much to write home about (*Ed note: rest of para missing*)

Well, dear, thanks again for a grand time – I will write again soon. All my love Ted

4 June 44

Dear Mother, I arrived OK last night and have been inoculated this afternoon once again, so am writing now before my arm gets too sore. It was a fairly comfortable journey but crowded as usual.

I very much enjoyed my brief stay and hope it can soon be repeated. I have felt a bit tired today but I suppose that is natural.

Well, will write again soon. All my love and thanks a lot. Ted

6 June 44

Dear Mother, Just a line to let you know I am OK and still here – after today's news.

Personally I am very glad especially as things seem to be going so well. I hope it keeps on like this.

In a few days you may be receiving an old kitbag of mine containing some superfluous things of mine. Don't be alarmed or infer anything when it arrives as it doesn't mean anything, certainly not that I have moved. Let me know when it does arrive and I will send the key along.

I have recovered from my inoculation. I am glad to say. Have not yet heard the result of my course but live in hopes. Everything is very quiet here which is all to the good. All my love Ted

11 June 44

Dear Mother, Thanks for your letter, am very glad to hear about the 2/6 rise. I have some good financial news too. As a result of writing up about my income tax the matter has again been looked into with the result that instead of assessing me at £11 odd they have reconsidered it and have assessed me as £2.3. As I have already paid £15 this year I am now owed 12/- which is being placed to my credit.

I am delighted to hear about your treatment being reduced, that is really great news.

Things are very quiet here and peaceful. It seems almost impossible that there is that battle going on, no further away than you are from me now.

If we sit very quietly we can hear it, ever so faintly, the distant rumble of boom of guns.

We had another death in the Coy today – one of the men knocked down by a car whilst out for the evening. I am glad I am out of all the work that entails. Fortunately he was not killed outright so his wife was able to see him first.

The kitbag should be arriving soon. There is quite a lot of stuff which you can save if I send for it later. All My love Ted

22 June 44

Dear Mother, The kitbag as I sent it was locked (key enclosed herewith) so I shouldn't be very surprised if a few things have been swiped. I wonder if you could remember what was in and send me a list, so I can check. My watch was there among other things.

Sorry to hear about Len (*Ed note: his cousin*), hope they get more satisfactory news soon. He was very probably in the very first assault.

One of the blokes caught a little owl in the camp the other morning. It was a nice little thing with a cats face and gig yellow eyes. We let it go again in the woods. All my love Ted

28 June 44

Dear Mother, The list seems quite complete except for 1 towel and 1 pair of cellular pants. I hope these arrived as they were in very good condition especially the former, but if they're lost it's just too bad.

I had an attack of tonsillitis over the weekend and had to spend Saturday and Sunday in bed, but am quite OK now as I am back at duty again. It was rather mortifying as it was almost impossible to eat anything and further more, they were two glorious days and I badly wanted to go into town. However one cannot have everything one would like.

I am, sorry to hear things are so disturbing still and hope they have alleviated by now.

Any more news of Len? It must be very worrying for them all.

Hope Arthur Beresford's wedding was a success and that the guests all enjoyed themselves.

The news from overseas certainly is good and it seems as though things really are going our way now.

All my love Ted

5 July 1944

Dear Mother, I am very glad to hear Len is safe, and I expect everyone is very much relieved.

No, I have not heard any result of the Ripon business yet nor of the other matter, but am patiently waiting.

I hope things are easing up a bit for you now up there. We are getting a slight plane but not much. Glad the registered envelope arrived safely. Thanks very much for the papers including the Readers Digest which is very interesting and welcome. I expect your weather is like ours – rotten. Still, we are managing to survive, which is the main thing. All my love. Ted

8 July 44

Dear Mother, The weather, touching wood, has improved a bit, but still is not like it was.

Nice to know you have managed to get some cherries even if they are few. It means you won't be worried by scroungers too much.

Please excuse blots and the envelope but I am having ink trouble with my pen.

I hope you have a nice birthday and have managed to buy yourself something nice. Hope the flying bombs are still missing the district. Kathleen tells me that Jeff and Joan's house has been damaged, but I don't know how seriously. All my love Ted

15 July 44

Dear Mother, Thank you very much for the parcel which was very welcome. I am sure the little brush will be very useful and I can squeeze it into my kit somewhere.

I am very surprised and rather disappointed that you didn't hear from Kathleen on your birthday.

Our weather is still very up and down, but not too bad, considering.

I have heard from the Regimental Paymaster that my savings book is in operation, so you should be receiving it at any time now. These things always take a long time to come through, as they get swamped with them in such quantities. All my Love Ted

16 July 44

Dear Mother, Further to my last letter it is now possible to have 24 hours pass, so with luck I hope to be home next Thursday 20th, late in the evening coming back Friday night (21st July).

I have written to Kathleen asking her to get as much of the day off as possible.

Hope this doesn't mess up your plans too much, but it's all for victory. All my love. Ted

19 July 44

Dear Mother, I must apologise for all the conflicting letters and telegrams of the last

few days I hope you haven't been too disappointed. We were told early this week that 24 hour passes were once more in order, so naturally I applied but before I could go, they were once more rescinded, so that's that. I don't think there is very much likelihood of my getting home now, I am afraid.

As I said, it is a great disappointment but I am not the only one, after all.

The weather here is grand and I am enjoying it very much except for mosquito bites.

While I remember it, could you send me some steel wool for cleaning my pots and pans, which I am using quite a lot. All my love Ted

The next envelope is marked "Letter Missing (Unfortunately) 128 in France

128 Coy PC, BLA 30 July 44

Dear Mother, At last I have found time to squat down to reply to your letter and to thank you for papers received this morning. Everything is quite nice here and I am settling down by now.

Last Tuesday evening I went to an open air ENSA show with George Formby in person. He landed the day before we did and this was his first show. I thoroughly enjoyed it – he was on the stage practically all the time and we had several songs which do not appear on gramophone records!

I have become quite used to the sight of French buildings in various stages of dilapidation. One farmyard had cages full of lapin's round the walls. The cattle are tethered to pegs in the fields, not left to roam about like ours do, in herds.

I had a letter from Derrick by the same post as yours. He is being boarded out of the Navy, and seems rather sick about it, considering the trouble he had to obtain his commission.

You have probably read in the papers of the dustiness of the roads. It is quite noticeable – even the trees by the road are literally powdered thick white with it.

I caught a tremendous glow-worm the other night, the largest I have ever seen. There are also a number of lizards about. At the moment I can hear wood pigeons cooing very peacefully, which reminds me of the past.

As you can imagine, there is a lot to do and I have not had much time to visit, but will do so whenever I can, though the letters may be a bit scrappy and disjointed.

The weather is grand and may it continue so. We are plenty of food and altogether conditions are very good, so you needn't worry about my welfare.

The scenery is very similar to the southern counties, but the roads are very poor, which is only natural after what they have had.

There is nothing I need very much at present not obtainable immediately that is.

I have not seen many of the natives yet, those I have were very friendly, though some appear oddly dressed to English eyes.

Well, I don't think there's much else. I am glad your present arrived OK and you liked it. It was a very great disappointment not to be able to see you again, but you know now the reason why the visit had to be cancelled. However, let's hope it won't be very long before I see you again.

Thanks for the Stratford Ex. It's nice to think of everything going on back home in

the same way.

I will write again as soon as poss. All my love Ted

6 August 44

Dear Mother, Thanks for your letter. Would have replied earlier but am busier than I know how to be these days and hardly have time for anything.

Since my first letter, we have changed our location, but I think we shall stay in our present one some considerable time. On the way here we passed through several villages and one considerable town which has not to all appearance, suffered any damage at all. The place was crowded with civilians and troops, and I was very interested in the strange architecture and the shops, which had the half foreign, half-finished quality one remembers in French films. The roads were very dusty, and when we arrived at our present location we were all pretty fatigued.

The district has not long been vacated by the Germans, and we found bits of equipment, several unexploded grenades and bits of letters and books in German all over the place. There are other signs of occupation too – German posters on the walls, obliterated now by our proclamations, snipers graves by the roadside (some less than a fortnight old), the shattered lorries in the village not far away, and a little boy showing us in pantomime how his father was struck up against the wall and bayoneted. The church is too dilapidated to enter, but the churchyard is interesting. The graves have crucifixes laid on as we lay wreaths, and they have a rather charming custom of handing on small oblong chime plaques with a single flower in relief, beautifully modelled and coloured. Someway away is a grotto, a cave in which stands an altar with iron bars in front, and a coloured statue of the Virgin Mary in a niche above.

There are more biting and stinging insects to the square inch than to the mile in England. There are also many large and beautiful butterflies – I saw one sulphur coloured swallowtail with black markings about three inches across.

We get plenty of food and cigarettes. The chief lack is reading matter. By the way the papers arrived about ten minutes ago for which thanks very much.

I have had my hair cut very short, which is more comfortable and easier to keep clean.

The weather is still very kind to us, which is just as well, and there is plenty of work, but little amusement beyond what one can make oneself.

I have just realised that this is Bank Holiday Saturday – what a contrast to previous ones. However the way things are going it may not be so long before I am home for good.

Well, I must close now, as it will soon be tea time. All My love Ted

10 August 44

Dear Mother, Everything is as good as can be expected here. The weather is certainly glorious, a little too much so far comfort in fact. I am still very busy and am writing this during a hurried dinner hour. There's not really much news at the moment that I can tell you. I have only been out once since I wrote you last, when I walked to a ruined

village nearby, the only thing more or less undamaged was a big crucifix about twenty feet high. Every place seems to have one of these. The villages are much smaller than the majority of ours but the life seems much the same. In parts the country is not unlike Suffolk with great rolling cornfields and woods in the horizon. Only the buildings are different, with great blank walls and little slits of windows, for easier defence in the old days I suppose. Everything is very quiet at the moment, except for the drone of planes, and much louder, though not at first apprehended, the shrilling of myriads of grasshoppers, sounding almost like water boiling when one listens intently. (*Ed note remainder of letter missing*)

22 August 44

Dear Mother, Thanks for all letters, books, papers, etc not previously acknowledged. Everything her is quite OK except for wasps who are in fine fighting fettle.

Don't believe all you see on the films about the French femmes. There are no women here only a few Squaws. This is truly a savage country. Everything that can bite, scratch or sting visits us at night. I found a great old toad in my bed the other night, I soon evacuated he. Was stung on the eye by a wasp the other day which was pretty painful at the time but is now better. All my love Ted

28 August 44

Dear Mother, I am glad the POSB has turned up at last I think that all you do now is wait instructions as you suggest. It doesn't really matter much anyway, as I find I can just send money home from here, so let we know next time it becomes due and I will forward a postal order. The weather is splendid with the usual qualifications of wasps and flies. I tried some Normandy cider the other day. It was exactly like weak vinegar, not a patch on our Devon Stuff I am not anxious to try any more.

We are kept very busy these days but are looking forward hopefully to a speedy return to civvy street which certainly seem to be rising above the horizon now. The news is very heartening, isn't it?

Since writing the above I have been to a picture shown in a nearby town, the film being 'Action in the Atlantic' with Humphrey Bogart and Raymond Massey. The place itself was a large moated chateau some way out of the town, and up the hill the film was shown, it must at one time have been a German canteen, as there were German mottoes painted on the walls and a poem – something about this being the place for 'Lef with Frinken' and Nazi eagles and swastikas, the eagles being very well and dramatically painted.

The town itself, which we only passed through, was crowded with people, nearly every house bedecked with a tri-colour flag.

The houses have little shuttered windows and many have splendid wrought iron balconies. These look so very foreign and the surrounding country looks so very English that there is a feeling of having strayed into a large and elaborate film set.

The conveyances are curious – they are very fond of a vehicle rather like a hansom cab with a green shade. Well, I don't think there's much else to write about, so I will close now especially as it's getting dark. All

my love Ted

9 September 44

Dear Mother, Thanks for your last letter dated the 3rd I am sorry I have not had time to write earlier, but have the chance now so here goes.

What grand news about the relaxation of the blackout. I bet you are all delighted and it really does seem the beginning of the end. Am sorry you did not have your trip to Billerica but perhaps you will have the chance again. I am very glad too to know that your treatment is finishing up too.

I am having some money from my credits sent on to you in the near future. You will receive a warrant from the Regimental Paymaster which will enable you to draw the money from the Post Office in the same way as the weekly allowance. You can use what you want for the insurance etc, and the remainder can be put in the Bank for me. This will allow me to gain the interest on the money which is better than letting it be idle.

There is very little to spend money on here, and I only draw pay about once a month. My few francs go a long way here.

We now have a lot of French people working with us and I am rapidly improving my French, though it is still very much in the Eddie Gray vein.

Most of them are unable to speak English so it is necessary to speak French to make them understand anything, which surprisingly, they do.

The weather as you know, has been a bit rough recently and it is very cold in the mornings. However it usually warms up in the day, or else it rains, then we enjoy French mud in everything. I have heard of this substance before and believe me it needs experiencing. I think the French soil must contain glue in large crude quantities.

I daresay you would like to know where I am, but security reasons forbid.

It's grand to know that the flying bombs have ceased at last, and that worry is over. I expect I should notice a lot of changes if I were to come home now.

Well, the new is on, and supper is just being prepared so I will close now. All my love Ted

17 September 44

Dear Mother, Thanks for your letter and the papers which arrived this afternoon and provided a welcome diversion, as it was my rest day. It has been beautiful weather, though the evenings are beginning to become rather chilly. My 'rest day' was very fully occupied in bathing, doing the weeks washing and all the other little odd jobs that there is not time for in the week. However it is a very welcome interlude as otherwise it is difficult to tell one day from another.

I am glad to hear that Mrs Mann is better now, or should I say a little better.

It looks as though the end of the war is really insight now, doesn't it? You can imagine we listen to the news very eagerly these days.

This is the first night after putting the clock back and it seems very dark already although it is on 8.30.

I expect Len is home now. He is very lucky to have a leave so quickly, but those who came over here on D-Day deserve it, in my opinion. Personally, I am not expecting any

leave until the show is over, and in a way I don't mind I shouldn't like very much to come home and then have to come back here. Not that we are very comfortable, but it was never very nice, even in the luxurious days of Culloden House. Well, I'm afraid this is all for now. Thanks again. All my love Ted

23 September 44

Dear Mother, As may be imagined, the sole topic of conversation here is the Demob plan which everyone agrees is very fair and should be satisfactory to all.

My number is 25, so we shall have to wait until it turns up.

The weather is still nice but showery. Mushrooms and blackberries are much in evidence these days and I am getting my share of both.

I haven't been out much during the past week as it is now nearly dark by the time I get in and my rest day invariably falls on a Sunday, so that it is not worth going into a town.

You would be amused at the local clergy. Like their Anglican counterparts they ride bikes, but in morel fashion, they were cassocks and cloaks all the time. For headgear however they wear ordinary blue berets, like the farm people, which has a rather odd appearance. The church here is a fine large one, but is closed, having been damaged in the advance – the steeple has half blown off by shell fire, to dislodge some snipers who were hidden there. Now it harbours nothing more dangerous than rooks who are always wheeling about the broken pinnacles like a dance of flies.

Len is lucky not to have been included in the invasion of Holland. When you told me he was home I thought to myself that that was what he was in for. All my love Ted

1 October 44

Dear Mother, By the way, please don't think I'm looking a gift horse in the mouth or anything like that, but I'd rather you didn't send me any cigarettes as we get as much as we need here at a very cheap rate indeed, besides a free issue each week. So it's really like coals to Newcastle. I don't know if I told you before, but I have now got a pipe through the NAAFI. Quite a nice one, and only cost 30 francs. Tobacco is no problem either.

Niso and Knox were here in person yesterday at our local Garrison Theatre. I would very much have liked to have gone but I just couldn't make it.

Things are very quiet here now. Everything is going on much the same and really quite comfortably. I am still enjoying the mushrooms and blackberries, but otherwise there is not much about.

Glad to hear the money arrived all right. I shall send some home from time to time as it helps to keep the bank a/c in a healthy condition and may be useful for you.

Well, I'm afraid I must close for now as time is getting on. All my love Ted

25 October 44

Dear Mother, I am glad to say that my cold has not yet materialised (touching wood), which is really rather surprising, considering the weather.

Now that the story has been released by the newspapers, I suppose there is no harm in referring you to the story of the

marvellous artificial harbour which appeared in all Monday's papers (the 23rd). This was what we were on in England and was the first thing we saw when we came over, and oh boy! Did the walk along those piers in full kit scare me!

The French classes are still going strong and I really think I am picking up something up from them. It's a pity to waste the opportunity whilst I am actually in the country.

Nothing very much has happened since I wrote you last. Life goes on very much the same, quite 'oom-doom'. There hasn't even been any funerals to describe.

It is getting very autumnal now and the trees are changing colour. It is rather a surprise to me that the locals take so little advantage of blackberries. There are hedges and hedges just withering away. I suppose they are like country people all the world over, and take little notice of things that they could turn to very good advantage.

I have not been out much since I last wrote owing to inclement weather. Even a bivouac is preferable to the rain and mud. All my love Ted

5 November 44

Dear Mother, As usual, there's not a great deal to write home about. Every day the scene gets more and more autumnal. There are a lot of squirrels in the woods about here, who are all busily getting ready for their winter sleep. The little black goat I mentioned some letters back has now been killed and eaten by his owners. They eat even old goats out here, but they don't seem to eat horses as one has been led to believe.

Well, as I said before, there's not much to write about so I'll close now. All my Love Ted

PS. It's too windy for a really good firework party tonight.

12 November 44

Dear Mother, The war seems to be going on all right, but I don't think there is much hope of being home by Christmas.

I haven't been out much as it gets dark quite early. I'm afraid I won't be able to get into a town to get any Christmas presents, much as I would like to. Quite a contrast from last year!

Well, will close now, and will write again soon. All my love Ted

13 November 1944

Dear Mother, There's not much to write about, only nature notes, I'm afraid.

I saw a robin yesterday, the first one in this country. There are a pair of magpies lazing in a tree where we work. They are larger than I imagined, about the size of a rook, big handsome birds, with a strange harsh cry.

There are many crows living in the shattered church tower. On fine days they whirl about the broken nursery, in designs almost as full of form and purpose as ballet.

I believe I told you about the hare the other day. The farm yard he escaped down has some of the oddest ducks, brightly coloured with topknots like miniature and insecure turbans. They remind me of those in St James' Park and seeing them, I am transported to the bridge, looking down the shining water, past the cool willows and grey rock of Pelican Island to the fantastic

skyline of the buildings in Whitehall.

I can't think of anything I need very badly for Christmas, except some more steel wool, and books of course.

Incidentally we have a little library of our own now, mostly of books of the 'Penguin' type. It's nice as a standby to know there's a stock of unread literature available when the need arises.

I have seen quite a lot in the papers recently about your local POW Camp. It must be quite interesting but the sight of these gentry is nothing new to me. In their thousands they come, all shapes and sizes – even Mongolians – what a shower!

Well, I guess I must close now, as time wanders on. Remember me to all. All my love Ted

18 November 44

Dear Mother, I attended a lecture the other morning on the Government Release plan. Sounds all right, and I only hope they are able to set started on it soon. As the war seems to have put on a new spurt, perhaps it won't be so far off after all.

By the way, the tobacco you mentioned some time back has not yet arrived! Still mail is a bit slow at present, for obvious reasons and I expect the congestion will get even more intense as Christmas draws nearer. I guess our Christmas will be very different from previous ones, still it's all experience..

There is still plenty of mud about, in fact, in unbearable quantities. On the whole the weather has not been too bad recently.

Today a great flock of birds – a migration came flying over the sky – spread out in a great twisting skim, like a Milky Way of black stars moving across the whole sky, thick as tadpoles on a clear pond. They flew rapidly and were out of sight in a few moments. I have often seen birds lining up on the telegraph wires in preparation for their long flight but never before have I seen them actually on migration. All my love Ted

PS. Could you send me a tin of Dura-Glit, it's about the best thing for cleaning metal I know

29 November 44

Dear Mother, Thanks for your letter and enclosure. I am hoping for the best as you may imagine, but am very much afraid that my being over here may result in the posting being turned down. However I am keeping my fingers crossed, since it is a job and a rank (WO2) which has been my ambition for a long time. The more so since it would once more associate me with Major Almond.

Glad the £10 arrived OK. Use any of it if you need it.

The weather is pretty rotten at present. Last night I was awoken by a mouse (or it may have been a rat) gnawing my right ear. Best la guesse?

However I am bearing up and looking forward to a Christmas which will be as good as we can make it.

Among the things I sent home from Marchwood was a little thick khaki scarf. Will you please forward at your earliest convenience, as it will be very useful for the drafty old mornings.

Well I must close now as it's getting late. Keep your fingers crossed for me. All my love Ted

PARIS LEAVE		
(Issued under authority of Commander, British Army Staff, Paris)		
NAME <i>of John G. ...</i>		HOTEL <i>Hotel Antevadot</i>
LEAVE HOSTELS OFFICERS		
ORs Hotel Ambassador (S.F.L.) R. Rue de Valenciennes Tel. FBO 1225	ORs Grand Hotel (A.E.F. Club) 15, Rue de Valenciennes OFF 1000	ORs Hotel Bellevue Rue de Valenciennes Tel. OFE 800
ORs Hotel Buckingham Rue de Valenciennes ANI 1000	ORs Hotel Cancellier Rue de Valenciennes ANI 200	ORs Hotel St Albans Rue de Valenciennes OFF 900
NOTE: Other leave hotels with an approved status are available.		
CANTEENS AND RESTAURANTS OFFICERS		
ORs Imperial Club (S.F.L.) Café Capucines R. Rue de Valenciennes Tel OFE 400	ORs Canteen Club R. Rue de Valenciennes ANI 500	ORs Ambassador Restaurant R. Rue de Valenciennes ANI 1000
ORs Pavillon Information Centre R. Rue de Valenciennes ANI 1000	ORs Officers' Club 17, Rue de Valenciennes OFF 1000	
NOTE: Accommodation available at hotels and clubs, but preference in all cases must be paid for in cash. - You must NOT pay for food in canteen restaurants.		
E. F. I. SHOPS		
A. Place Vendôme A. Boulevard des Capucines (St. Remy) (Department Store)		
ENTERTAINMENTS		
ENSA * Caumont Theatre, Théâtre Marigny, Grand Palais, Avenue des Champs-Élysées. * Caumont Cinema, Avenue des Champs-Élysées.		
USO (United Service Organisation) - American entertainment unit in Allied troops) Olympia Theatre (Variety), 18, rue de Valenciennes. Marignan Cinema, Avenue des Champs-Élysées. * Open on 12 Nov		
NOTE: All entertainments are subject to availability in uniform. Particular interest in cinema and theatre programmes may be obtained from the Foreign Information Centre.		
FRENCH CINEMAS - American help-price in Allied Service personnel in uniform.		

10 December 44

Dear Mother, Thanks for letter which was waiting on my return from Paris. I expect that by now you will have received my Christmas card posted from there., I didn't have time to write during my brief stay, so I'll make up for it now.

I expect you have read in the papers about the 48 hrs leave scheme. So had we but hardly expected to benefit by it, so it was a pleasant surprise when we received an allotment to send a few men from this Company, and even more of a surprise to me when my name was drawn from the list as the only Sergeant to go.

We left at 4.00 am on Wednesday morning in a lorry and had a bitterly cold ride. It was not too bad when day broke and a pale sun came out, and I was very interested in the countryside and the towns we passed. Several times I saw oxen ploughing with teams of four oxen.

Nearing midday we passed through Versailles and had a glimpse of the marvellous palace. About three quarters of an hour later we arrived in Paris and were driven to our hotel, the Hotel Antevadot in the Boulevard Heussman, right in the centre of the 'West End'

It is a big hotel – 600 rooms – and each of us had a private with bathroom and lavatory. It wasn't long before I dived into the bath, you may be sure. Meals were served in the restaurant, cooked in the French style, tea was brought up in the morning, each of us had the key of his own room and there were practically no restrictions.

As soon as I had bathed, shaved and recovered from the journey, I went out for a look round and to do some shopping.

The shops beat those of London in my opinion, in contents and the style of goods. The window dressings are very attractive. The Galeries Lafayette, which is about the same size and style as Harrods, had a window of the Stable at Bethlehem, all the figures being antique dolls, and the heavenly choir was represented by an invisible gramophone playing old French carols.

Later in the evening I went to the Olympia – a variety theatre – a very good

show, up to Palladium standard, with a performing dog act, trapeze artists, conjurors, stage dance band, etc. By this time I had a splitting headache so went to bed early.

The next day was my only full day so I made the most of it. In the morning I did more shopping. In the afternoon I went for a tour of the city in a bus with an English speaking guide, and I must say he did us well. Our itinerary as far as I can remember is like a guide to Paris.

First, the Rue de Capucines (where the Olympia is), the Opera (no phantom to be seen) then on to the Madeline to the Place de la Concorde and the Taileries. From there to the Arc de Triumphe and then to the Trocadero and the Eiffel Tower. All the time by the way we get out to look at these things.

Then we went on to the Invalides and Napoleon's Tomb, which is marvellous indeed, along the Champs d'Élysees to the Seine to the Pont Neuf, and then to Notre Dame (no hunchbacks). The cathedral is smaller than I imagined it inside, and is very dark, owing to the fact that the stained glass has been removed and is boarded up.

The cathedral has a wonderful atmosphere, the altar candles glimmering and the organ playing very softly and mysteriously. It is very very old and the decorations very beautiful. I particularly looked for the gargoyles perched in the towers.

Among other places I saw the Louvre, the Hotel de Ville, the prison where the aristocrats were kept before being guillotined, and passed down the Rue de Rivoter, Rue de la Poix and the Place Vendoms, which is just as it was in the time of Louis XIV and has the royal sign, the sun, on each balcony.

In the evening I went to the Folies Bergore. In appearance it is a small scruffy place down a side street of the Rue Montmartee, but once inside, instead of a foyer it is a large hall with a long bar at one side and the middle full of small tables, at the forend a flight of stairs leads into the theatre proper which is quite large, and was crowded, 75% of the audience being American and British.

The show was wonderful, lasting for over three hours, and beats anything I have ever seen in London. As one would expect, the ladies of the chorus were extremely underdressed, and some of the sketches were very risqué (and incidentally very funny) but the spectacular side and the scenic efforts were marvellous. The chief comedian was a bloke called M Dandy who spoke perfect English, (or rather American) and was very funny indeed.

The next day I had only the morning so I just went for a walk round and at 2.00 pm once again climbed on the lorry and had the long, cold ride back again to the mud after 48 hours of paradise.

I think that Paris is the most beautiful city I have ever been in, and I hope very much to go there again someday. The people are very hospitable to the British and about one in three speaks English.

The women are very smart, beautifully made up and with the most amazing hair styles. There is little traffic, and the cars dash along like a race track. There are a lot of horse drawn fiacres, and many bicycles, some pulling things like covered-in bath

chairs, which appear to be 'taxis'. The food situation is tight – we were not allowed to eat in French restaurants – but the NAAFI has taken over a café on the Rue des Capucines which is run in the French style and where one can get anything – even cream cakes!

I shall be sending a parcel home this week. The scarf is for you for Christmas, with my love, and you may be interested to know that I bought it in the Galeries Lafayette in the Bd, Hessement. The compact is for Kathleen, and is from a shop in the Faubourg de St Honore. I would like to have sent it direct but can get only one concession label.

The thing with the soldiers I thought might make an amusing table or cushion cover. I bought myself a really good pipe. I wish I could have bought a few maps of the lovely things I saw but the difficulty is sending them home.

Well, it's getting late so I suppose I had better stop.

I am very glad I had the opportunity to visit Paris and shall never forget it.

I got quite a lot of cards which I shall send off as I get time. I have been very busy since I have been back as we have been moving into more comfortable winter quarters.

I think the leave in the New Year will materialise but have no idea when I shall come home.

Well, must close now, All my love Ted.

18 December 44

Dear Mother, Thanks for letter – sorry not to have replied sooner but have been very busy moving into even more comfortable quarters.

Am now recovering from the Paris trip – I sent the parcel off to you yesterday and will be pleased if you can pass the compact on to Kathleen as soon as you can. You will be interested to know I saw all the places in the packet of views as it was told to us on the tour. I forgot to mention in my previous letter that there was a marvellous marionette act on the show at the Olympia.

Incidentally the OC has (once again) asked me if I would consent to have my name submitted for a commission. I have asked for time to think it over and would like your opinion. Personally I feel that it's not worth it as this stage of the war, and also have a feeling that it would be equivalent to taking an express ticket to Burma.

The parcel hasn't arrived yet but I expect it any time. I'm afraid it's very late so I must close now.

All my love and the best of Christmas to you. Ted

25 December 44 (Christmas Day)

Dear Mother, Thank you very much indeed for the parcel which arrived yesterday with whole bundle of other mail which had been hanging about quite a time.

We are spending our Christmas rather quietly, for certain reasons, but hope to have our festivities at a later date. It is a glorious day today, but very cold and frosty. I have had a letter and a card from practically everybody I can think of. Well, I suppose I must close now. Best wishes to all and I hope that 1945 will see me home again, for good. All my love Ted

2 January 45

Dear Mother, By now you will have had my letter telling you how I have decided not to go in for the commission, as I don't think it's worth it at this stage of the war.

I am still feeling tired after seeing the New Year in, which we did with the usual celebrations.

While I remember it, thank you very much for the Duro-Glit which I have used with great success. I hope the Paris parcel has arrived.

As you may imagine, we are all eagerly awaiting for news of leave which is bound to come around in the near future, as our six months will be up quite soon. It will be grand to be home again and to see everyone. It seems a tremendously long time since I was last home, so many things have happened in the meantime.

After a few days of frost we are once again among the slush ('sloodge' as most of our men call it).

Well, I'm afraid there's not much else, so I will close now. All my love and all the best for 1945, Ted

9 January 45

Dear Mother I hope the parcel has arrived by now. It is very Christmassy outside at present, but we are snug enough here. On Sunday I went into our nearest town for an hour and had a look round. There are some very quaint medieval buildings and a beautiful cathedral but I was unable to go in as a service was in progress. One of the bogey-men came out, while I was outside, very like old Morrell in cassock and biretta, but he wore a hood and little cap over his shoulders made of what looked like weasel skins, all brown, with dozens of little tails hanging all round, and from the peak of the hood hung a scarlet cord finishing off with a tassel of scarlet silk.

The building has some lovely photographs rather like those of Notre Dame de Paris.

Kath write to tell me she has some crazy idea of turning on her job in and joining the ATS. I don't know what her idea is but I am writing to try and dissuade her, as I am sure she will regret it. Well, no more for now, writing again soon. All my love Ted

14 January 45

Dear Mother, Thank you for papers and 'Argosy' received to date, the letter I enjoyed very much.

At the moment I am harbouring quite an unpleasant cold but I hope I shall shed it quite soon as it has nearly run its course. Our conditions here are quite Arctic at the moment but our quarters are quite warm so we haven't anything to grumble about.

Today was again my rest day, but I didn't feel up to going out so I spent a nice peaceful slumberous afternoon in bed.

There is no news yet about leave. You may be sure I will let you know as soon as I know anything myself as I am look forward to it eagerly.

I'm afraid there's not very much to write about at present. Life has been pretty uneventful during the past week. Has Alice returned yet? Writing again soon. All my love Ted

6 February 45

Dear Mother, Thank you for the well timed card and letter which arrived yesterday. Glad to hear everything is still



■ Sgts Mess Jan 45 - Holland

going on OK. I think you are very wise not to send anything on, as really there is nothing I need out here.

There's nothing much to report from this front. Everything is going on much the same – mud, mud everywhere.

I expect you know that Kathleen's release was refused so that's that.

Well, thanking you once again and I heartedly wish that your prophecy comes true. All my love Ted

14 February 45

Dear Mother, It has been like spring today, saw some daisies growing in a mud bank and the skylarks have been 'ollerin' like 'ell. Also found a nice big dead rat as big as a cat. They sure do raise 'em in these here parts.

Have you heard the crack that 'BLA' stands for 'Burma Looms Ahead'?

I hope not anyway, though I would rather like to see the Shwedagon Pagoda and see the dawn coming up like thunder at Mandalay. Still I'd rather see Paris again.

No news of my leave yet, though I keep my fingers crossed whenever there is a draw. They're bound to come to me one of these days and all the time the weather is getting finer, so we live in hopes.

The 'progress of the war' is grand isn't it? I don't think it will last much longer now.

I am keeping all right these days. Maybe I'm getting acclimatised! All my love. Ted

28 February 45

Dear Mother, Thanks for letters and papers. I am sorry I have not had time to write earlier, but I am busier than ever at present as I am doing a tour of duty as Orderly Sergeant, which means rising very early and finishing very late.

I shan't be sorry when it's all over, but it's all experience. G

I had the photo arrived OK. It's rather grim isn't it, but it will give you some idea of things in the Arctic.

The weather here is nice too.

The war is going on nicely too, isn't it? I hope it soon finishes anyway.,

Still no news of my leave, but you know how it is.

Well, in spite of my good intentions I'm afraid I haven't much to write about so will close – all my love Ted

4 March 45

Dear Mother, Thank you for two letters received, there has been rather a holdup in the mail recently, for obvious reasons, so I was very glad to hear from you, as I am to hear that things are quieter now than they were.

I hope you enjoyed Easter – we hardly noticed it.

I don't know if I mentioned it before but the people of this place are very strongly Roman Catholic – fervidly so in fact and they certainly do give the church a bonding. Every morning there are streams and streams going to church, and monks riding round on bikes (ladies bikes, because of their gowns)

I'd always heard that there were a lot of storks in this land, standing on the rooftops, but have seen none yet. Still judging from the sizes of the families about here, they probably all dropped dead from overwork.

Saw a big white goat pulling a cart yesterday. The horses all have bells on their harness.

Well this must be all for now as it's getting late. All my love Ted

6 March 45

Dear Mother, Thanks for letter and papers. We also had the newsreel of the Yalta conference with Stalin as inscrutable as ever.

I think spring has come here as well. It's very mild and there are some primroses out.

I still haven't been lucky in the leave, but who knows? It might come at any moment now. So might the end of the war, which I think is very close.

Well, I think I had better close now. I expect to be rather busy next week again, so don't worry if I take some time to answer your next letter, as I have run round like a greyhound all day and half the night. All my love Ted

14 March 45

Dear Mother, At last I have a free moment to write to you, and thank you for letters and papers.

It has been a very busy time for the past few days, including nearly forty hours in a cattle truck, during which time we seemed to amble over half the continent. However it was very interesting as during the day we

had the doors open and I saw many places I have read about. The nights were very uncomfortable though, crushed up as we were, and I was very glad to have a night's sound sleep when we arrived at our present station. It is quite pleasant here, the country is pretty and the natives friendly as they should be, as we are the first British troops to arrive since the Boche evacuated. There are some small villages near by which I mean to visit when I have time. There is a small wood behind the camp full of primroses.

Am still hoping for leave soon but no definite news yet.

The weather is superb for this time of year, with a nice bite in the air at morning and night.

One can get anything for soap here. The stuff the people get – 1 bar for a family of 4 for a month – is almost exactly like dry putty and will not lather at all. During the German occupation they washed in plain water. However I don't think that the lack of soap worries them over much. They don't seem to worry much about cleanliness. Hoping to see you soon. All my love Ted

18 March 45

Dear Mother, Thanks for letter dated 13th and papers. Replying to your question I will be very glad of 'Argosy' and anything else, only please don't send a lot at a time, as they sometimes take up more room than can be agreed.

I have just been talking to a fellow back on compassionate leave from Stratford and I know things are pretty tough at present.

Today being Sunday we had a church parade in the camp – the last one I went to was at Inverness Cathedral. It was very pleasant in the sunshine, with the magpies screeching overhead. The singing was very timid though!

Yesterday I visited a seaside place some distance away; the beach was fine white sand, but had been very thickly mined so it wasn't safe to walk about on it. The town itself was quite pleasant with some rather nice shops, but I didn't buy anything.. Well, that must be all for now. All my love Ted

21 March 45

Dear Mother, I have sent home another £15 today, from Regimental Paymaster so you will be getting it in about a fortnight or so..

Went out for a long stroll last night, the country is very like England, except for the balconies – crucifixes about ten feet height – which are very frequent by the wayside. These and minefields are the most prominent features of the landscape.

I hope the weather at home is as nice as it is here, really pleasant for March.

No news yet of leave, but all in good time I suppose. One consolation is that I have it to come.

Well I think this is all for now. All my love. Ted

24 March 45

Dear Mother

There's not much to write home about I'm afraid, nothing much has happened during the past few days.

No news of leave yet but I see in the papers that they hope to get all the June and July men home by the end of April, so

it shouldn't be too far off.

I hope not anyway, as we have been over here eight months now.

Hope to get out this evening to have a look at the countryside though there's not much to see.

Well, as I have already said there's not very much to write about so I'll close for now. All my love Ted

30 March 45 (Good Friday)

Dear Mother, I hope you haven't had to wait too long for this letter. Once again(!) I have been in my travels and we have had another long and very interesting train ride, the only snag being that I now have to learn another language which looks to be quite difficult.

The countryside is very flat and monotonous, but I have seen a number of windmills in traditional style, also everybody appears to be wearing wooden sabots, (call Hemen).

The town we are in is very clean and some of the houses very modern in architecture. This was even more so in a larger town we passed through earlier today.

I don't think it's a violation of security to mention that on the way here we passed through a little town called Boon which you may remember was the setting of the film 'La Kesmerse Hiroigat'.

I was rather intrigued as I had always imagined it to be a fictitious place.

Weather is nice and I am fervently hoping the war soon comes to an end which I think it should do rapidly.

Well, guess I will close now as I am feeling rather tired after a long trip, though rather more comfortable than the last, the result of profiteering by experience. Will write again soon. All my love Ted

10 April 45

Dear Mother,. Once again we have changed our abode and although we are now in a larger town.

I would rather be at our last place as I made very good friends with a family there. Oddly enough whose name was van Mol which is Dutch of 'Mole'.

The old man and one of the boys spoke a little French and the eldest girl knew a little English and I made good progress on Hollandoche so we got along all right.

They insisted on my visiting them every night and for the whole day on Sunday, when I had some rather peculiar but quite appetising food.

They lent me a bike and this afternoon we went to the nearest town which was very high class, rather like Cranbrook Road.

However all good things come to an end and we had a very hurried move, and here we are!

Today we had an interesting trip but I can't tell you anything about it yet.

I don't know if I told you in my last letter, but we have had our leave draw for April and I am afraid I was unlucky so don't expect me home this month.

I hope the war finishes soon as I am getting fed up with all this continual moving about.

By the way, my Dutch friends have invited me over for a holiday after the war, so I may see them again, who knows.

Well, I must close now as I have to be up very early in the morning. All my love Ted

19 April 45

Dear Mother, I am still gedding about the Continent and would like to remain somewhere static for a time, if only to get my kit sorted out, but I suppose that isn't possible while Jerry is on the run so fast.

It is very warm today and there are many fruit trees in blossom about here.

I am hoping for some luck in the leave next time – perhaps the war will be over by then and things may be a lot easier.

I am rather busy now so will close for the present. All my love Ted

28 April 45

Dear Mother, I have not much time to myself at present as I am on as Orderly Sergeant again, but very soon I may have some interesting news for you. No, not leave, I'm afraid – I have been unlucky in the May draw as well, but don't give up all hope. There is still a faint chance of my getting home.

We are in a rather nice spot now – quite uninhabited, the people having been evacuated some time ago, but the fantastic thing about it is that not ten minutes' walk away is a zoo, quite a large one with the remains of what has been a very fine collection. There are still about half a dozen lions, three polar bears, wolves, tigers and practically everything else you can think of, except elephants the last of which I understand was killed by a shell a few days before we arrived, and was given to the rest to eat. Most of the beasts are in very bad condition and rather more than half starved. I have been up there several times as it's so close. It's free but one is expected to make a contribution on leaving.

Have just seen the papers giving the details of the V2's. You certainly did get a bad pasting and I expect I shall miss a lot when I do eventually get home.

Weather is nice but varied, I hope you get another good crop of cherries – there are a number of fruit trees here, but I have not seen any fruit about here. Well, must close now. All my love Ted

1 May 45

Dear Mother, Thanks for papers. I think the enclosed pictures will interest you, and remind you of some of the happy times we had in the past, even if the lettering is in Dutch. By the way, do you think it is at all possible to send me a cheap Dutch-English dictionary? Woolworths used to sell them, and one would be a great help here to me.

Thank you for the Photomat photo, I think you look very well and I would like to see some of the others, so save them for when I come home.

There is nothing much to write home about I'm afraid. The animals in the Zoo are all quite happy, particularly the Polar Bears who have reason to be considering that we actually had snow during the weekend. There is also an 'open-air museum' here, which is a park with old-time houses, windmills, etc re-erected as they were.

They are a cultured and studious race, the Dutch.

I expect that you a living like us now, with your ears practically glued to the radio, so as to hear the announcement of the end of the war. How grand that will be!

Well as I indicated at first, there is not much to write about so will close for now. All my love Ted

8 May 45 (VE Day)

My dearest Mother, So it's all over at last! We have worked so long that now it has come at last I find it very difficult to realise.

Here, things are so very quiet. I think that all the men share my re-action – that we all find it very difficult to realise that it is all over and that in a comparatively short time we shall be home for good.

It must be wonderful to be in London today – I can imagine it, but would rather be there in person.

I have just heard from Kath of the nice day you spent together. It has been a beautiful day – though it has come over cloudy. I hope the leave allocations will be stepped up a bit now things are different.

I can hardly imagine what it's like without the blackout – everything will be back to normal when I see you again, I expect.

Well, I'm afraid I'm rather at a loss for words right now, but will write again soon. All my love Ted

15 May 45

Dear Mother, Thanks for your last letter dated May 5. There seems to have been a bit of a holdup in the mail recently. I suppose owing to the VE celebrations.

Before I go any further don't trouble any more about the dictionary as I have one. I expect there have been all sorts of excitements and junketing's at home, and I wish I could have been there to enjoy them with you. Yesterday was Liberation Day in Holland and I had the opportunity to spend the evening in a large town nearby. They certainly had a bit of a do. The whole town was decorated with flags and streamers strung across the streets, red, white and blue with orange predominating. In practically every street a wooden floor was laid for dancing with a juke box, or a small band in the classier places.

You can imagine the din with everything playing different tunes. There was not only dancing, but acrobats and tumblers like a medieval fair. And all the time there were processions of people in fancy dress marching about singing. As it grew dark, the streets were flood lit and there were hundreds of coloured lamps strung about the trees and buildings, with V's and crowned W's and great round orange lanterns like golden moons. Many people carried paper lanterns too. The fireworks were starting just as we had to leave. It was all very mad and gay, a areal 'Kermesse'.

I think I told you about the Open Air Museum next door to our Zoo, Well, I visited this the other evening. It is very interesting though rather unintelligible without a guide, and is a park, with woods etc. In the grounds old time cottages and houses have been re-erected and furnished and one is quite free to wander about them as one pleases. There is a forge, and a fisherman's hut and a sort of dyke with quaint old wooden machinery. There are five or six windmills of different types. I climbed up the largest, quite a drag it was, five or six stories but a wonderful view from the top. Part of the grounds are very prettily laid out with little lakes and bridges and for good measure there is a maze and an open air theatre.

Did you see anything of the Royal Visit on VE Day? I heard the broadcast of the crown at Ilford and could imagine the scene.

Still no news of leave but imagine it will

be sometime next month. Hope so anyway as I could do with a change. Well this must be all for now. All my love Ted

17 May 45

Dear Mother, Thanks for letters and papers received today. I hope your holiday at Broadstairs materialised. It would be a nice change for you. It will be a great thing to get rid of the air raid shelter but I don't think I shall recognise the garden without it.

I can't think of much else so will close now. All my love Ted

PS. I can't remember whether I mentioned it in my last, but if not, don't trouble about the dictionary. Excuse this awful ink!

22 May 45

Dear Mother, Have just received your letter dated 18 May. I hope by now you have received all the others as I have written quite a lot to you recently. It's funny you should mention the draft for £15 as I was saying only this morning that I had heard nothing about it and was wondering if you had it or not. However I am glad it has arrived. Yes, the Argosy did arrive (and I remember acknowledging it!) about 3 weeks to a month ago. There's no immediate likelihood of my coming home very soon, so I shall be glad if you can send the other on.

No leave allocation has arrived in yet I'm more or less certain to be home in June because there are only about 80 left to go and I am 51 on the list, but when it will be I have no idea. Of course it's possible (but I think very unlikely), that we might all return to UK quite soon, but that is supposition.

Glad you had a nice 'Peace Tea' I remember the one from the last war very well! I appreciate your motive in not wishing to go to Southend with the gang. It would have been a scream.

I too have spent Whitsun quietly. Yesterday (Monday) it rained and I didn't go out at all, and on Sunday I took a packet of biscuits up to the Zoo and fed the lions, monkeys and porcupines. My biscuits ran out afraid then, so the rest had to go hungry.

The weather has turned very wet on us and it's quite miserable out after all the glorious sunshine.

I expect you have read all about the demob scheme in the papers. It's all very confusing isn't it? Every paper seems to contradict each other and we have no inside dope to correct it by. Personally I think I have a grandish chance of being out by Christmas, but maybe that's like the leave too. I remember a statement in the papers that all BLA men were to have their leave by March, then April. Well May is nearly out now and I am still waiting. So I suppose we must continue to prepare for the worst and hope for the best.

Well I must close now hope all my other letters have arrived safely by now. All my love Ted

30 May 45

Dear Mother, Thanks for letter received this morning. Now for the news you are waiting for. I have been allotted my leave at last and shall be home on the 20th of next month, which means we have only three weeks to wait. Of course there may be a variation of a day or two when it comes

along but I will keep you advised of that. I don't know if you have heard but it's an 11-day leave now we have won the war.

We have had another move but are still roughly in the same area, which is quite pleasant.

The weather has rather let us down but I think it may brighten up a bit now.

Well, I won't write any more at present as I want to get this off. All my love Ted

4 June 45

Dear Mother, Just a line to let you know that my leave has been brought forward one day, so I shall be home on the 19th instead of the 20th. I don't know what time but we arrive at Victoria and anyone can tell you when the BLA train comes in.

We are in a small town now and having quite a good time. There is a theatre given over to ENSA shows. On Saturday I saw a Belgian show there – quite good and in the large town near by they have a very good WOs & Sgts Club, with dancing, drinks, etc. A party of us went last night and had quite a good time.

The weather is very nice just at present and I hope it manages to keep the same when I am home. I have just received another Income Tax form so I expect I shall soon be slapped down for some more money.

I can't think of very much to write about I'm sorry to say.. Well, once again, All my love Ted

5 June 45

Dear Mother, No, this isn't another alteration in leave, just the old annual report, will you please send along the details of my insurance as I have a return to complete and although I have had them so many times before, I still can't remember them.

What I want is as follows:-

1. Name of Society. 2. Capital sum payable (£250 I think). 3. Amount of premiums to be paid in year ending 5 April 1945.

Let me have this as soon as possible please.

You may have heard that censorship is now relaxed, so there's no harm in telling you now that I am at Zeist, and the town I mentioned in my last is Utrecht, and a very fine city it is too.

The place I was at before, with the Zoo, is Arnhem, no less, and you will be interested to know that we were in the capture of Arnhem before the war finished and were at Elst, a village just outside when the terrific barrage that fired Jerry out went over. We got a bit of a shelling ourselves there too. We also built the bridge over the Rhine into Arnhem over which the assault troops went to take the place. It was a bit hot then, with only a river between us and many buildings in the town on fire. I have also been in Nijmegen for a week and to Cleve in Germany and a fine old mess it is. The other day I had a trip out and visited Hilversum, a very nice town as all these Dutch towns are. So you see I shall have plenty of things to tell you about when I get home.

When I went to the mess at dinner time there was a big red squirrel running about in the garden, quite tamely.

Weather is a bit duller today but still quite pleasant. Tomorrow is supposed to be

a holiday being the anniversary of D Day. I don't know what is happening. I expect they'll have the usual processions, bands, flower throwing etc

Well I must close now as I am in haste. All my love Ted

9 June 45

Dear Mother, Thanks for letter and two rolls of papers which arrived today. Len certainly seems to do well for leave, and I am glad you were invited to the party. I see the old way still persist – Barge being ill and Uncle Bill wanting to go as soon as the fun starts. I shall be very interested to see the photo of you all.

I would certainly like to get hold of a good camera but will let you know more about this when I see you (only 10 more days!).

No, I didn't wrangle my leave, but was picked out quite fairly and fortunately it comes just right.

Talking of cherries, there are some beautiful cherry orchards about here. Last night I got quite a lot for two cigarettes and they were really delicious.

I was glad to hear Jessie seems happy about her trip. A lot depends on the spirit with which you go into things.

I am now taking an interest in the Theatre and Cinema lists and there seem to be quite a number of things worth seeing.

The weather is still keeping up quite nicely and I hope it holds out for another month.

Have you read 'Farthing Hall' by JB Priestly and Hugh Walpole? I have it in a Taurichinty edition and will bring it when I come.

I understand that I shall be home around 8.00 pm on the 19th (starting from here on the 18th) but I believe times vary on account of the tides.

Well, there's not much else to write about now, so will close. All my love Ted

13 June 45

Dear Mother, Thanks for your letter with the income tax details, which I shall now be able to send away and get off my chest.

I have asked a number of men here who have been on leave and to boil down all their experience, the BLA train arrives at Victoria about 5.00 pm. In my case it will be about 5.00 pm on Tuesday 19th. It hardly seems possible that I shall be home this time next week.

It's no good wiring from Folkestone as I could be home nearly as quick as the wire. They tell me there's no time lost on these trips.

Weather is dull again this morning and there is not much to write home about.

We are getting a lot of cherries here as this is a farming part of the country for cherry orchards. They are light black and sweet.

Well, as I said before there's not much news so will close for now. All my love Ted
Sunday (Undated)

As I foretold, I arrived back here at last at midday today, after a very long and wearisome journey. I caught the train at Victoria all right at 11.00 and we went straight to Folkestone where we spent what was left of the night at a very comfortable transit camp on the Leas, what had once been a hotel.

You may remember its whereabouts if I

tell you it is on the turning where the statue of Harvey stands.

Reveille was not until 8.00 and after all that my boat did not sail until 4.00 pm so I could easily have had another night at home. However I spent the morning very pleasantly pottering round Folkestone which revived memories of old times.

I went down the Sandgate Road, Rendezvous Street, Fortune Street and the High Street and had a look at the harbour, then returned along the Leas and up the Zig-Zag path.

After dinner at the Transit Camp we were marched off down the Road of Remembrance and so aboard our boat. It was the roughest crossing yet. No, I wasn't sea sick but I am glad we got there when we did.

On reaching Calais (at 6.00 pm) we hung about a little longer until quarter to ten to be precise, then we got aboard our train and so off for Nijmegen. It was a most uncomfortable trip, hard wooden seats with very upright backs. Still all things come to an end and at 0900 am we arrived at Nijmegen and at 1030 we were picked up by our Company transport and here I am!

I haven't been here long enough as yet to see if anything new is afoot. My voting papers have arrived by the way.

But I can't finish without thanking you from the bottom of my heart for the splendid time I had during my leave – which I think was the best ever.

Well, let's hope it won't be so very long before we are seeing each other again. All my love Ted

5 July 45

Dear Mother, Yesterday I had a stroke of luck, the chance to go into Utrecht to hear a violin recital by Yehudi Menuhin. You can imagine I grabbed it with both hands! There were only 9 seats allotted to the whole group. The theatre was a grand place. Now known as the Club Ravenna it is ultra modern, white inside, the seating upholstered in flame coloured velvet, and the walls padded in white satin with gold separations. There are concealed lights everywhere, which make the otherwise hard white walls a beautiful warm apricot colour.

So you see we have good value for our money, especially as it was all free! Yehudi Menuhin is quite a charming personality, big and burly though quite young, with very fair hair. He wore an old sports jacket with grey flannels, a dark blue shirt and a red woollen tie, so evidently does not believe in dressing for the occasion.

I don't know if I mentioned in my last letter that my postal voting stuff had arrived during my leave and so I have duly recorded my vote and sent it off.

We have started on demobbing at last in earnest and our first two go on Saturday, I hope it isn't too long before I follow them, though I am afraid it will be some time yet. However all things pass, so I shall be out some day.

Well, must close now, and again hoping you have a good time, and love to all Ted

7 July 45

Dear Mother, Just a line to wish you all the best for the 9th, with many happy returns and the fervent hope that this time next year I shall be able to be with you once again.

In the absence of any other card I enclose this, which is apparently a portrait of the brass lady now adorning our front room.

We are having very nice weather just now if it were not for the mosquitoes who are very venomous.

I hope you enjoyed the fete and did not have to take too active a part. These things are always more fun if one is able to be a passive observer.

I suppose you will soon be returning home after your country holiday.

Well, I am afraid there is not very much else to write about, so once more wishing you a happy birthday. All my love Ted.

10 July 45

Dear Mother, Thanks for your letter of the 5th, received today, the first from you since I have been back. The delay in our mail these days is really too bad. I have written to you 3 times (this is the fourth) since I have been back here and yet you have only received one letter.

Starting off from this one I am going to number each letter in the top left hand corner of the envelope so you will soon be able to sport if any do go astray so I am sure they must do.

I was inoculated today, once again. I hope it is for the last time. The arm feels all right, a little swollen and throbs a bit, but is better than usual.

The Fete must have been quite amusing. I hope the weather was all right.

Thanks for recording my vote. I did the same this end, so there should be no doubt about it.

The weather here is quite nice only the mosquitoes are troublesome. All my love Ted

Quatorze Juillet 45 (Ed note 14 Jul 45)

Dear Mother, The Chinese tiepin sounds interesting and I shall be glad to have it.

The weather here is wonderful, almost too hot. It's really a good thing there is not much to do.

We are now discharging people but it's a very slow process. However, it may quicken up as time goes on.

I'm afraid there has not been much happen since I last wrote you. I haven't been out very much as it's been too warm for much exertion!

I have not heard any more about my Income tax – I rather expected a communication before this. Let's hope they have let me off lightly this time.

Even the frogs are too exhausted to croak nowadays. The only animals who enjoy life are the mosquitoes. I have recovered from my inoculation, though it was a bit of a beast for two days.

Well this must be all now – All my love Ted

17 July 45

Dear Mother, Everything is quite nice here with marvellous hot weather. The country is very lovely especially the woods. There is a sort of park quite near, very like Wanstead but with herds of deer. I saw quite a lot last night – fallow deer the sort with the spotted backs.

I am really getting going on my discharges now and it is quite a big job. So far we have only got 7 men out, with 6 men to go next week but everything has to make a start.

There are strong possibilities that leave may be speeded up too, so you may be seeing me again in late September or early October. It is very uneventful here just now. The trams are running regularly and it seems as though the war is completely forgotten.

I am glad you found the old man well, but I expect the continual nattering did rather get you down.

Well, I'm afraid there isn't much to write home about so will close now. All my love Ted

22 July 45

Dear Mother, Thanks for papers, letters and 'Argosy' all very welcome. No, the cigarettes have not arrived yet, but will let you know as soon as they do.

I sent two parcels off to you yesterday, one with some books, the other containing the green china ashtray I mentioned when I was home and a tin of sweets for yourself.

I wonder if you have been to Dorking yet. It's very nice out there, I remember it on the way to Brighton, I am on duty in the office tonight, so as we have a wireless I am going to treat myself to the Tchaikovsky 'Prom' at 7.00.

The arm is quite OK now but I am a mess of mosquito bites.

The weather is very sultry. We had a fine storm the other night but not as fierce as yours, which I read about in the papers. All my love Ted

25 July 45

Dear Mother, Thanks for letter received today. I am glad to hear you had such a nice time at Dorking. It certainly is very nice out that way from what I remember of it. No the cigarettes are still on their way – they always seem to take a long time.

I am still being eaten by mosquitoes but suppose I shall get used to it in time. The weather is still very sultry and I expect more storms are on the way. It will be nice and light on the stairs now we have the skylight in.

A year ago today we had just landed at Arronanches and at this time were probably scratching holes to sleep in or cooking up some compo rations. If we had known then that inside a year the war would be well over, we should probably have all felt a lot happier. However, it's not unpleasant to look back on those days, and compare them with the comparative comfort now.

Nothing much to report, releases are still going strongly, but giving me plenty of work. What a day when I am able to write out my own ticket! All my love Ted

26 July 45

Dear Mother, Just a line to let you know the cigarettes arrived safely this morning. Thanks a lot.

Feeling rather pleased at the moment, as I am going to Brussels on a 72 hour leave on Sunday. I hope they hold their civil war over till I am back. Will drop you a line from there and will let you know all about it when I return.

I have had my shoes repaired so am OK.

We are listening with great interest to the election results. So far, it's a landslide whichever way it goes. I hope it will lead to my getting out the Army a bit sooner. Weather is grand and I hope it continues

so. Went for a walk last night and saw some more deer. There seem to be a lot about here, but I don't think they're really wild.

Sorry I have no time for more now, as I am supposed to be working. All my love Ted

5 August 45

Dear Mother, Well, here we are back again from Brussels and very nice it was, though I still prefer Paris. It was a long and tiresome journey, by train, starting from Nijmegen, via s?, Historinbosch, Tilburg, Breda and Antwerp and we arrived at the Gere du Nord in Brussels at about 4.00 pm on Monday., Where we piled on buses and were taken to our Hostel, a dump called Victory House in the Ixeles district. This was not a patch on Paris – double tier beds, eight in a room and cold water for washing and shaving. However the food was good, served by ravishing Belgian beauties, who must be hand picked.

We were at least 20 minutes tram ride from the centre of the city, but trams were fairly frequent and travel is free to soldiers. Everybody packs on to these things in hundreds, clinging on the steps, so that they look like the patrol wagon in the old Keystone Cops films.

There are some very fine buildings and the shops are lovely, full of everything but at most astronomical prices. The only things that were cheap were fruit – huge plums, pears and peaches at 15 francs the half kilo – (about 1/6 for 12 peaches). You bet I had plenty, also some ice cream.

The Army has taken over most of the cinemas and theatres – and unfortunately the Garrison Theatre was closed. The people of Brussels do not seem to lack for anything. As in Paris, fashions are outré and the women all totter about in high wedge scandals which make them appear at least four inches taller than their normal height and always on the point of falling forward on their faces.

The chief deity of Brussels appears to be the 'Mannickin Pie' which is a very old fountain in the form of a naked little boy making water in a very negligent and composed manner. Actually the legend is that way back in the Middle Ages a merchant visiting the city lost his little son and after searching for him for four days found him in this spot in this attitude and in his gratitude, erected this fountain to perfectuate his gratitude. However the horrible little object appears everywhere, in ashtrays, matchboxes, scarfs, ties, rings, brooches, etc.

No, I didn't buy one!

The old Cathedral of St Gudule is very fine, with marvellous windows. The squares and boulevards are fine too.

There were troops of all nationalities on leave there, even some Russians.

We left on Thursday at 3.30 pm and on the long train journey back I was interested to see a dog pulling a cart, and outside Tilburg, a glimpse of the animals in the Zoo there, a huge black water buffalo and two white zebras among the fine trees.

When we finally arrived at Nijmegen we found the Company had forgotten to provide transport for our return so had to hitch hike back which took the best part of the day.

Thanks for the mail which was waiting

when I got back. Answering your query, LCpl Doyle should be 'out' by November, with luck, as Gp 16 will certainly be out by the beginning of October. All my love Ted

5 August 45

Dear Mother, It is rather a belated birthday present, but here it is just the same.

I hope you like it anyway. It's two princes really, a runner and a duchess set, I believe they call them, and supposed to be genuine Brussels lace. Anyway they came from there. All my love Ted

14 August 45

Dear Mother, I hope you like the enclosed. They were taken in the garden of our Sergeants Mess at Zeist by a Dutch press photographer at the backend of July and I have been waiting all this time for them, the original and 6 prints. I have sent one to Kath and here are the other half dozen to do as you like with. The other one is not a group from Madame Tussauds, but some of the members of the Sergeants Mess so you can see what a rough crowd I have to live with.. There is nothing new on demob in spite of wild newspapers reports. It doesn't do to take any notice of these. At the present moment we are still awaiting confirmation of the Japanese surrender. It is bound to come, so they might as well pack in now.

I have received a medal ribbon, the France and Germany Star which looks very imposing on my tunic.

Had a trip to Apeldoorn on Sunday, but was not very exciting. I hope the lace has arrived all right.

Our weather has been quite nice, but is dull at present. All my love Ted

16 August 44

Dear Mother, The wheat harvest is just finishing here and I was interested to see them threshing with flails, by hand in the fields the other day. I

It certainly seems a most backward country unless of course the Boche took it all with him when he retracted.

Talking of Jerry reminds me that some time ago I had the pleasure of seeing one of his planes brought down in daylight.

The countryside seems to look a little more populated, I suppose the refugees are beginning to drift back.

I have heard from Derrick again. He seems a little more cheerful (or perhaps 'resigned' is the word) but seems to be thinking of returning to Suffolk to carry on his work. I don't know why, except that he was never happy in Sussex. I know which county I would choose.

Have also heard from Uncle Bert, much to my astonishment. I expect you know all their news though so won't recapitulate it.

The insects are still as many and ferocious as ever. I usually manage to avoid them except at night when I usually get stung all over.

The current news seems almost unbelievably good – I only hope that what we most fervently wish will come to pass soon.

I'm afraid there is not very much else of interest happening.

The cigarettes have not yet arrived. Has the PO Savings Book turned up yet? All my love Ted

17 August 45

Dear Mother, So glad you were pleased with the lace, and also very relieved that it arrived safely. So the war's all over at last – 5 years to the day from when I first joined up. It's a good job I didn't know then that it would be all that time before the war finished, much less before I should be out myself.

Glad you had a nice party, even including gate crashers. Very flattered that Kathleen made such a good impression.

If the weather is anything like ours, it's rotten. We are getting plenty of rain. I heard the King's speech re-diffused through loud speakers in the Maeskt at Utrecht. I went in to see if there were any celebrations, and there were. Bands marching all through the streets and everybody marching along behind them, wearing orange sashes, just as though it was their war and they had won it themselves.

Hope the cigarettes turn up soon as I can do with them. We are cut to 60 a week now, you know.

Still no news of a speedier demob and personally I think if I get out this year I shall be lucky. Still one never knows. I may be home on leave sooner than I expected, anyway.

Well, this must be all for now. All my love Ted

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Well, this must be all for now. All my love Ted

27 August 1945

128 Coy Pioneer Corps, B.A.O.R. (Ed note: prior to this it was 128 Coy Pioneer Corps, BLA)

Dear Mother, By now you will have received the half dozen photos I sent you. I hope you like them.

What a disappointment the Demob dates are! Still I suppose it can't be helped and I shall just have to resign myself to another six months or more.

Let's hope leave picks up a bit anyway.

Last night I re-visited the Zoo, which is only an hour's walk away. The animals are looking a lot better fed and there are a lot of new ones, among them a wee baby porcupine about as big as a guinea pig. I would like to send him home. They have really down wonders since we left, have opened a café in the Zoo, and all the empty houses we lived in are now inhabited and the people look as though they have been there for years.

Our nearest neighbours here are a community of monks – St Joseph's (I think) from Mill Hill of all places and I believe a number are English.

I have only seen one so far and he was wearing a black beard and blue dungarees, as he is also our swill contractor, besides being a monk.

We have discovered a nest of hornets in the roof of our Orderly Room but so far they have done no damage to us.

Please note new form of address. It stands for 'British Army of the Rhine' and doesn't mean anything as the only Rhine we are anywhere near is the Nader Rijn at Arnhem which is 5 kms away. However, this is the new official designation of 21 Army Group and BLA is no more.

I wonder if you could send me another tin of Duraglit and also if you could get the following medal ribbons: 1939/45 Star and Defence Medal, just the ribbons only. I am entitled to wear them but they are so long in coming that I fear they'll never come through. Woolworths used to sell these sort of things, but I don't want celluloid ones.

The weather is being very nice which is as well, as we are in the wilds.

I think there's a chance of leave next month, but it doesn't do to bank on these things – not after the demob dates, anyway! Well, this must be all for now. All my love Ted

30 August 45

Dear Mother, Thanks for letter and papers received today. I am glad you like the photos. The weather has been lousy today – nothing but rain.

I am very busy at the moment, what with preparing Courts Martials and so on. The old job!

There's nothing much to write about as I have only been out and round the woods since I last wrote but I can throw out a broad hint that you may expect me home on leave this time next month. Will let you know more later when the leave list is confirmed. Well, I'm afraid this is all, All my love Ted

2 September 45

Dear Mother,

I do hope you and Kathleen are able to go to Kew, as I know you will both enjoy it so.

I went down into Arnhem last night. It's amazing what has been done since we were last there. Then it was a dead city, with not a living soul in it, heaps of rubble, buildings on fire, furniture lying all over the streets. Now, it is crowded with people, the houses are all patched up, and yesterday were very gay, as it was Queen Wilhelmina's birthday which is a three-day holiday. Houses and streets were decorated as they were at Nijmegen on Liberation Day. Bands were playing in the streets, with processions, and as it grew dark, the orange

13070162 Sjt. Baker, E.G.,
128 Company, Pioneer Corps,
B.L.A.

23 August 1945.

Dear Mother,

Please excuse my typing this letter to you, but it's very late and it is a lot quicker than writing.

I hope you are still at H.B.O. when this reaches you. Anyway I shall just have to take a chance on that.

Well, we have had yet another move (which accounts for the delay in writing) but not very far this time. We are at a place called Deelan, about 6 kilometres from our old billets at Arnhem, so I expect I shall be paying my old Zoo a visit before very long. This is an old German airdrome, miles away from anywhere in the heart of the woods, and is really a very nice spot, only very quiet. However we are having plenty of recreational transport laid on, so it won't be too bad. The country is very nice, and we have good accommodation, so that's the main worry settled.

I hope you are having a nice time at H.B.O. and enjoying the change.

When you saw Kathleen, did she say if her present from Brussels had arrived? So far she hasn't mentioned it, and I'm hoping it hasn't gone astray. I am so glad you were pleased with the lace. I thought you would like it.

Have just finished reading Lady Eleanor Smith's 'Caravan'. Have you read it? If not, I will send it to you as I know you will like it – all about gipsies and Spain.

It does seem marvellous, and a little incredible to think that the War is really over at last. As things are going I think I have a very good chance of being home for good before Christmas, and am hoping to get a leave in before then, being greedy.

Am glad to hear the O.M. is well. I expect the great news put new life into him, and hope he enjoyed his Victory pint.

The weather is being very kind to us, which is all to the good.

The country is nice about here. There are the usual pine forests which I have come to associate with this part of Holland, but they are varied with oak woods, and here and there are wide stretches of moorland which at present are covered with purple heather, most unexpected for Holland, and looking more like Scotland than I would ever have believed possible.

(2)

Moreover, there isn't a windmill in sight!

Yes, I can certainly use some 3-holed blades, as I am using them all the time now, because I can't get the other sort.

I suppose you missed the V-day celebrations in London, but I don't suppose that bothered you much. It's very easy for those at home to celebrate, but personally I have rather different ideas. Actually we had nothing at all, not even any time off, and I didn't worry about it. The day I want to celebrate is when I am home for good.

I was interested to read in the papers about the Gurkhas stationed at Much Hadham, and wondered if any of them have strolled along as far as H.B.O., causing wonder and alarm to the simple populace.

Well, as I said when I started, it's very late, so I had better stop now.

All my Love,

Ted

fireworks and set pieces, too. Rather poor by our standards but the people loved them.

They have a beautiful park in the middle of the town, where there is that waterfall which appears on one of the postcards I brought home. There is a path and a sort of cave right underneath and behind it, so that one can stand, quite dry, and look through a silver curtain of falling water.

No, the cigarettes have not arrived yet. I hope they hurry up. Our weather is lovely, too very warm with a faint breeze.

I find I am due to go on leave on 28 September – not allowing for cancellations, so we must hope for the best. All my love Ted

8 September 45

Dear Mother, I expect you are disappointed to miss your visit to Kew, but I expect you will be able to go some other time.

It's rather funny about the ribbons. I think I am entitled to them all right!

The weather is very nice now, but I'm afraid there is not going very much more to write about.

I am very busy at the moment – nearly everybody is on leave and for the past two or three days I have been doing 3 men's work, so I am a bit tired at present. However it will be my turn soon, I hope. All my love Ted

18 September 45

Dear Mother, We have at last put our clock back here, which makes it seem rather dark in the evenings. The weather is rather muggy and we have had a lot of rain recently.

It's a bit noisy around here at present as there's some bomb demolition going on quite near and every so often the place is shaken by a terrific bang which is quite like old times.

Haven't been out a great deal recently except a run into Arnhem the other evening. It's rather too far to go down to very often. I hope there will be plenty to see when I come home (only 10 days more!). It certainly will be a nice change.

There are three black and white Frisian cows belonging to the monks in a field outside our office, and every time one of us goes out they run to the fence and moo like hell, kicking up a terrific noise. This is a regular performance with them. I never met more sociable cattle.

The powers that be seem to have decided the war is really over at last as they are withdrawing our gas masks after all this time. Well, it's a little less lumber to cart around.

Demob still goes on very slowly in spite of promised speed-ups. What a life!

There are quite a number of red squirrels about here, they are very attractive little beasts.

I am a witness at a Court Martial on Thursday, which is an old game for me. I had fears at one time that if might hold up my leave, but all is well,

Well there's not much to write about so will close now. All my love Ted

24 September 45

Dear Mother, I expect you have heard about Kath's bad luck in breaking her wrist. Still she will be able to have plenty of time

13070162 Sgt. Baker EG,
128 Company, Pioneer Corps,
E.A.O.R.

5 Sep. 45.

Dear Mother,

Thanks for letter, and for cigarettes, which have arrived at last.

Thank you for trying for the ribbons. I hope Kath is successful, as I should like to have them all up when I come home on leave.

Hope you like "The Robe". In parts I thought the dialogue a bit too American but one can stand it. I enjoyed the "Argosy", particularly the long story by John Steinbeck, though the characters reminded me a lot of those in "Tortilla Flat" which was also by him. This book came as a blessing, as I have been rather short of reading material recently.

I hope the other books have arrived, and that you will enjoy "Caravan", which by the way, is also being made into a film, with Stewart Granger as James Darrell. There's a method in

Hutchinsons giving that book away as a victory gift, I think. Probably our old friend Arthur Rank is behind it, as thousands of people will read the book now, and many more than otherwise will want to see the film.

What a villain our Max has turned out to be!

There's not a lot to write home about at the moment, I'm afraid. I went for a walk in the woods, saw two squirrels and wrecked Lancaster last night.

The weather is keeping very nice, and needs to be, surrounded as we are by open moorlands. The same moors however look very lovely at present, ~~surrounded~~ covered as they are by purple heather.

I found a huge grasshopper today, at least three inches long, more like a locust. Perhaps it was.

Well, I'm afraid I must close now, as it is supper time.

All my love,

off.

I shall be starting from here on the 28th and so shall be arriving some time on the 29th, so I am afraid I shan't be able to go to Kathleen's friends 21st birthday party which is on that day.

Excuse horrid pencil note, but I have a lot of work to do to get straight before I come home.

It hardly seems possible that I shall be seeing you at the end of this week, roll on Friday! All my love Ted

16 October 45

Dear Mother, Well here I am back at last, after a long and weary journey. But before I begin, I must tell you that I was stupid enough to forget my money so if you will look in the inside pocket of my old brown tweed coat you should find £3. Will you add it to the other money for the bank, but before you do so will you give Kathleen 5/- of it, which I borrowed from her on the day to Victoria, when I discovered I had left the £3.

I shall be able to draw some more this week so it doesn't really matter.

As you know, we left Victoria at 11.00 and went straight to Dover where we stayed the rest of the day and all night – we did not embark until 9.00 on Monday morning. Dover is fairly dreary – I went to the pictures and saw 'Billy The Kid', but

there's not much else to do there.

We had a smooth crossing to Calais and there hung about for another day, leaving by train at 6.35 pm and arrived at Nijmegen at 6.35 this morning.

When we arrived we found the Company inside out, more or less. Only a few of the originals are left those gone have been replaced by strangers. However – and this is a very bright spot – we are almost certainly returning to England in a very few weeks, so don't be surprised when I arrive home again. Thank you very much indeed for the grand time you gave Kathleen and myself – we appreciate it very much indeed. Thank you once again. All my love Ted

21 October 45

Dear Mother, I enclose some souvenirs of a very pleasant occasion, also a photo of one of our famous bridges. You can see the Company number on the board. It looks rather as though it belongs on a fairground but was quite effective. This photo is taken from the Arnhem side of the Rhine.

We are still at sixes and sevens, but gradually we are emerging from the chaos. As I said in my last letter I expect to be back home in a very short time.

The weather is quite nice out here but the leaves are falling very fast. It gets dark very early too so there's not much opportunity to go out in the evening. I

forgot to mention it in my last letter, but at Dover there was a notice to all CMF Forces that if they were earlier than Gp 23 they were not to return to CMF.

I expect things are a bit quiet at home now, aren't they? All my love Ted

grievances.

However, we have not started there yet, and perhaps we shall not at all. Will let you know in my next.

I am afraid that the looked for short passes are out of the question, owing to

us from Holland yet so I am a bit held up with my releases as all my vital documents are aboard. That means I shall have a lot to do when it does catch up, I expect. All my love Ted

6 November 45

Dear Mother, Although the Dock Strike has finished we know nothing yet about leave, but will let you know as soon as anything does come through.

Glad the radio is back again and it is well worth the money for the pleasure we get out of it. I don't like this town any more than I did at first. There's nothing to do but go to the picture and eat fish and chips – it's funny I should grumble about them, but I have seen only one good film since I've been here – that was 'Going my Way' which I thought was really excellent.

There was no fireworks at Guys up here yesterday. I suppose it's too uncivilised a country for that.

On Saturday morning I had a run out to Group HQ at a place called Auchterarder, the other side of Stirling. It was quite a nice run but the landscape was obscured by Scotch mist most of the time. Stirling is a very nice town though, built on a high rock with the castle above all, like Edinburgh.

I am glad we are in November – only two months to release now. All my love Ted

9 November 45

Dear Mother, First of all, about leave – the Company has proceeded on 14 days disembarkation leave only. The Major detailed me to stay behind as one of a small holding party 'in case anything happens'. I hope it does, for I shan't do anything about it. I feel very sore about it myself, it seems that one is penalised if at all efficient at one's job. I wonder what they will do when I get my demob. I shall take good care to create all the chaos I can just before I go so that someone else will have the pleasure of sorting it out. Of course I shall get my 14 days when the others return, but that won't be until the 26th, more than a month after actually disembarking.

I'm not the only Cinderella left here, there are seven of us and one officer, who, like myself, do not relish the prospect of hanging around in this dump for 14 days on our own. How happy I shall be when I get out of this lousy Army!

There's not much else to write home about. The weather is quite nice but very cold. Well, I hope everyone is OK, including the cat Max. Be seeing you in a fortnight's time. All my love Ted

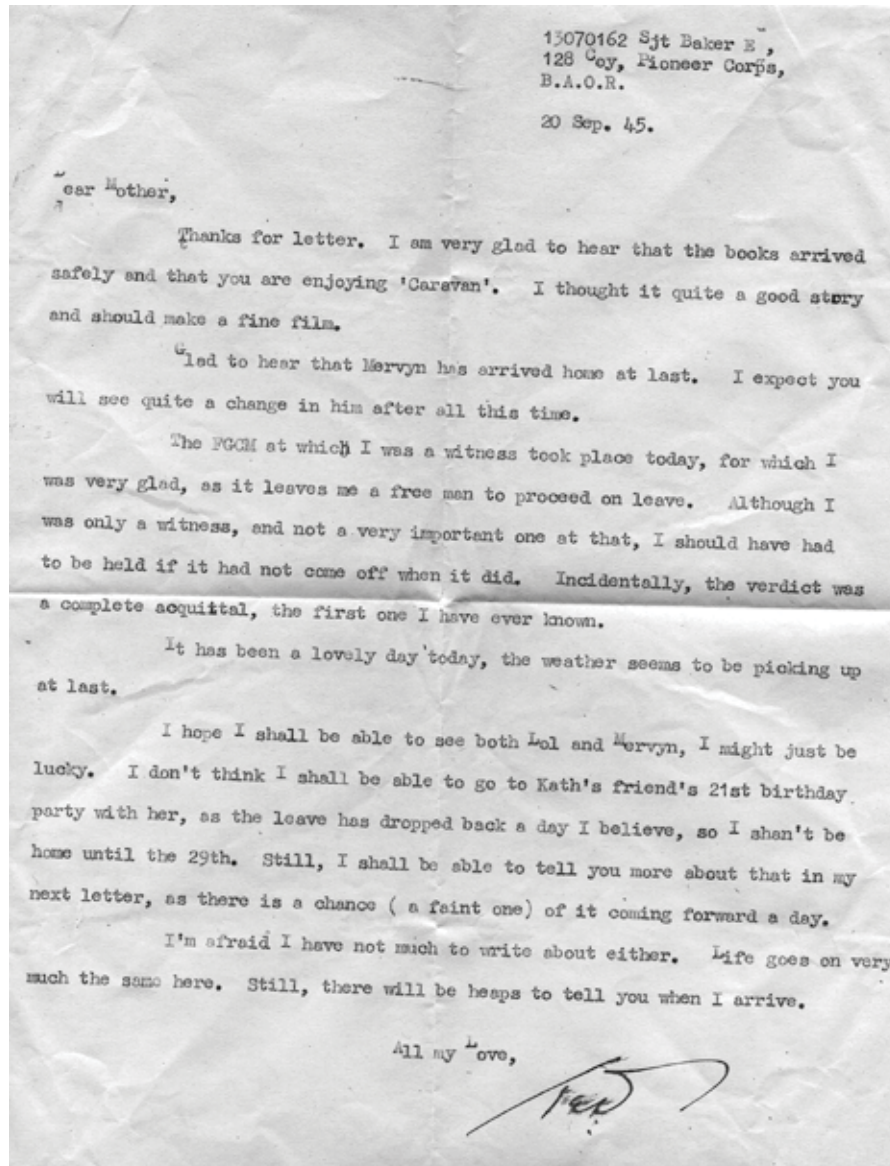
11 November 45

Dear Mother, Another letter from exile! I'm afraid this is going to seem an awfully long fortnight to me. It has been very cold today, but with pale sunshine in the morning. I heard the Armistice service broadcast at 11.00.

On the debit side, I have had a bottle of whisky I have been saving pinched. I don't think there's anything I can do about it, so shall have to write it off as a dead loss. It's a good thing I don't like whisky much,

We are living on fish and chips here. Quite nice but it rather palls after a time.

Talking of Motherwell it's just like this place only it has an Odeon and a Woolworths. Very drab and dreary after Holland. All my love Ted



28 October 45

Wishaw Transit Camp, Wishaw, Lanarkshire, Scotland

Dear Mother. I hope you got my telegram from Dover yesterday morning and I hope your anticipations were not aroused too much there by. As you see from above address I am not at all near home, actually about 15 miles from Glasgow.

We have been five days on the road altogether, spending a night and 24 hours at Calais owing to bad weather making the crossing impossible. When the crossing did come off it was quite smooth and I really enjoyed it. The trip from Dover here was very dreary and most tantalising when we passed through London.

Although we don't know it yet, I suppose we are here for dock work at Glasgow and the sooner they are back at work the better.

We are not too badly accommodated but the men are in dreadful billets. It seems very unfair to me that they should have the discomfort of a 5-day journey, have to work on the dock, and be accommodated in such places as a result of the dock workers

the distance, which is a disappointment. However it's only another ten weeks or so and I shall be out the Army for good.

What a day that will be!

All my love Ted. PS. Excuse pencil, envelope and paper but it's all I can lay hands on at the moment.

31 October 45

Dear Mother, I am glad the telegram arrived all right and that you were able to pass the news on to Kathleen.

The set-up here is a bit clearer now, but men are of course working on the docks at Glasgow. There is not question of leave whilst the strike is on, but as soon as it is over we are promised 14 days disembarkation leave, so you may see me this year yet.

This is rather a dreary town, perhaps because it has been raining all the time since we have been here. We are very near Glasgow and soon I hope to have the opportunity to go in and see if it's anything like 'No Mean City'.

Our transport has not yet caught up with

16 December 45

Dear Mother, Well, I arrived here safe and sound. I caught the 9.40 from Euston and arrived at Motherwell after 10 the following morning.

It was quite a comfortable trip and greatly to my surprise, I found my two mates on the train at Euston.

Everything is much the same here – no signs of a move so I don't think there is any chance of being home for Christmas.

There is bags of work so I shall find plenty to do for the next few weeks.

Well, as I haven't been back very long there's not much to write about. Hope everyone is OK and thank you very much for a wonderful leave.

Will write again soon. A

All my love Ted

Tuesday 18 December 45 128 Coy Pioneer Corps, The Guards Barracks, Caterham, Surrey

My dearest Mother, So here we are! We arrived here today about 3.00 pm after pushing off from Wishaw at 1.10 am in the pouring rain.

This place is the real thing, full of Guards about eight feet high – we are in two separate blocks – 'York' and 'Wellington' – and though old, the barracks are very comfortable. We sergeants have little rooms of our own – I am sharing with another, and are very comfy, with a fire, and beds all ready to hop into.

If I can I shall gate crash the family party, so if you are home perhaps you will let them know that I may be over some time Christmas, but I shall sleep at our house, I think. I have the keys so it will be quite easy for me. I'm afraid I haven't been able to get any Christmas cards or presents so you will have to take the will for the deed until I see you. A very Happy Christmas. All my love Ted.

29 December 45

Dear Mother, Thanks for letter received today. Sorry to hear you had such a dreary holiday.

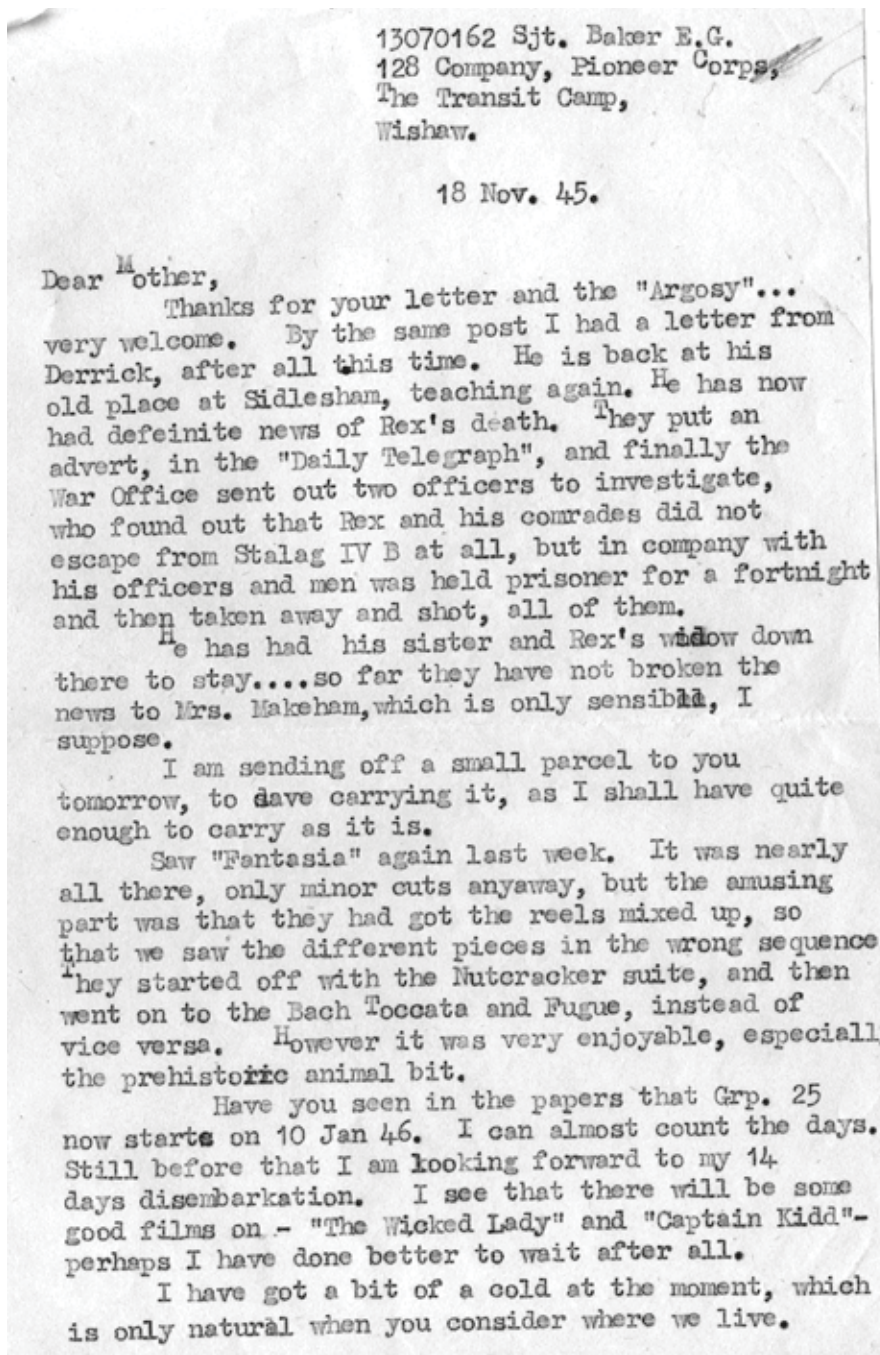
We waited till 19.15 at Havering then I had to go, and arrived home about half past 2.

I'm afraid I can't get home this weekend but will try next – either Saturday or



■ On leave at Havering

Picture: Supplied



Sunday.

I had my release medical exam this morning – it was an utter farce but I wasn't bothered about it. Anyway I passed out all right and that's the main thing.

Everybody at Havering sends their love – I left some pyjamas and shaving gear there which Kathleen will be bringing up in the near future. They were rather disappointed at their Bournemouth trip falling through but managed to have a good time all the same.

I expect Max (Ed note- the cat) is happy again. I don't suppose he told you I had him in on Christmas Eve and lit a fire for him, and made him some condensed milk but the ungrateful beast would not drink it. We had some snow today and it is bitterly cold as we are so high on a hill.

I enjoyed my Christmas very much as it was such a change from the last five.

I have left things all over the house – a bicycle lamp, a jack-knife, some gloves woollen, in my wardrobe and the pants I mentioned before I don't want anything sending back as I brought them all home

for a purpose.

Thank you very much for the parcel which was very welcome – I thought I've mentioned the Film brochure – perhaps I shall be able to get in when I have more freedom.

Well I must close now – be seeing you soon. All my love Ted

1 January 46

Dear Mother, Thank you for enclosed, returned herewith completed as necessary. I shall be very glad to have the opportunity of joining. I don't expect I shall be in time for 'Dr Caligari' but the other films are well worth the money.

I hope you enjoyed the kids' party, I saw the Christmas tree you bought them – it was very pretty and a nice idea of yours.

Did you find the Dutch blacking in the boot polish tin? It's not bad at all.

It's very cold here, being so high on a hill. I shall try to get home on Saturday 5th and possibly stay till Sunday night. If not home Saturday, expect me on Sunday.

Thanks for papers which arrived today.

13070162 Sjt Baker E.G.
128 Company, Pioneer Corps,
The Transit Camp,
Wishaw.

22 Nov. 1945.

Dear Mother,

Thanks for papers and letters. As far as I can tell you at present I shall be catching the 9.38 p.m. train from Glasgow on Saturday night, and shall therefore arrive at Euston at about 7.00 Sunday morning, so you can expect me home between 8.00 and 9.00 on Sunday.

If there should be any hold-up in these arrangements I will send a telegram, but I don't think there will be. The mob is due back on Friday so I shall allow myself quite a good time for handing-over, etc.

Have seen two fairly good films this week- "National Velvet" and "I'll be your sweetheart", the technicolor of the former was very good, but was eclipsed by the colour of a documentary called "Steel", showing with the latter. They really got some marvellous effects of glowing furnaces and grey swirling smoke.

I am looking forward tremendously to seeing you again; it will be a marvellous change.

We have had more trouble up here- one of our men in hospital for a minor operation died under the anaesthetic and I had to spend all day there the following day, getting things sorted out. It was all right in a way, nurses kept trotting up with cups of tea, and I had lunch there, but its a dreary business and I hate those places. However, everything is settled and tied up nicely now, so I dont think there is any more bother there.

I must finish now, as the days work is beginning. Excuse paper, typescript, etc, but I am in a great hurry. Thanks for letter of 20th, just received...reply to question see above.

All my love,

Ted

Time is knocking on nicely now, just fancy only 17 more days - and here is some good news. I have the possibility of a job, which I will tell you all about when I see you.

Our old friend Percy Pick who lives quite near dropped in on Sunday morning when on leave - it was quite a treat to see him again.

Well, I don't think there's much else now, Happy New Year Mam, all my love Ted

9 January 46

Dear Mother, Just a line to let you know I shall be home on Saturday as arranged. If anything stops me I shall phone you.

I got back quite safely and in very good time last Sunday.

Isn't the weather awful! I haven't been out at all this week yet.

Time is growing very short now - just think - only nine more days! See you soon, All my love Ted. ■

Views of Caen



C O P Y

13070162 WS/Serjeant BAKER Edward George (A/S Co. 25c).

Military Conduct: EXEMPLARY.

Testimonial:

Sjt. Baker is a first class Serjeant with organising ability of a high standard. He has been a Section Serjeant in charge of working parties, but has spent most of his time as N.C.O. in charge of the Company Office, where he has handled correspondence, returns, documentation, records, etc. He is loyal, trustworthy, and absolutely dependable.

At his work he has been most efficient and conscientious, and I do not hesitate to commend him.

(Signed) J. Prebble, Major,
Commanding 128 Company, Pioneer Corps.

Date: 8-10-45.



Views from Paris





■ Tony Lunn doing his Rambo pose



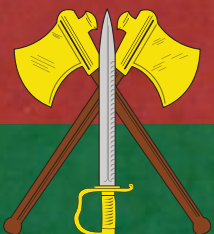
■ Gaz Bucknell



■ A young (and much slimmer) Rob Bieron



■ How to shave in the desert!



Blast from the Past

Here are a selection of excellent photos sent in by Tony Lunn from Gulf War 1



■ Tony Lunn with a heavy bergen!



■ Where we lived!



■ Forgot his name!



■ Brew time!



■ Gaz Bucknell



■ Guess what this is!

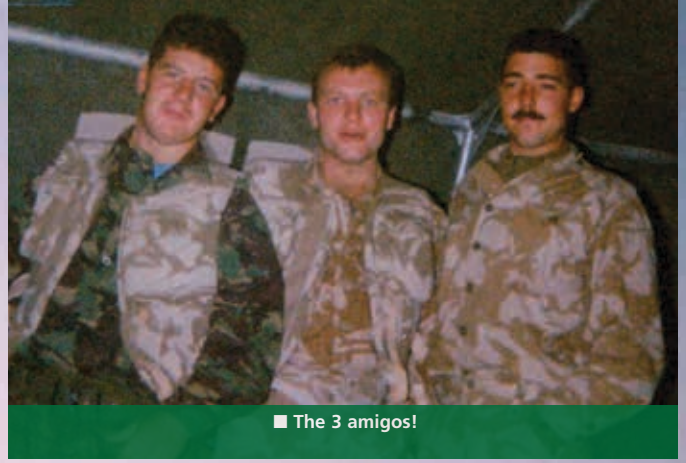


■ Yank Blundell

BLAST FROM THE PAST



■ Peace !



■ The 3 amigos!



■ Ricky McKraken demonstrating how to sort out your back, sack and crack in preparation for a camel ride !



■ R&R !



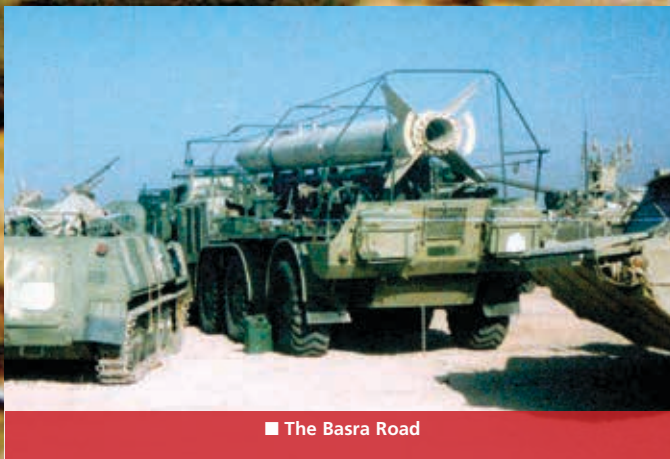
■ The winners of the Gulf War Speedo competition - Tony Lunn, Ricky McCracken, Rob Bieron, Daz Pettit, Faz Bucknell, Leroy Brown



■ The Basra Road



■ The Basra Road



■ The Basra Road



■ Tony Lunn pictured with his new paperweight

BLAST FROM THE PAST



■ The Basra Road



■ The Basra Road



■ Yank Blundell



■ Time for sleep!



11 POW Camp

Experiences during my service with the RPC in No 11 Special POW Camp by Ex 72657 WO2 WD Gould Retd. First published from The Royal Pioneer Issue 143 dated July 1980

**Report: 72657 WO2 WD Gould
RPCA Archive**

I WAS employed as a civilian clerk with 24 Bn The Hampshire Regt before embodied in July 1939. In December of that year I was posted to No 11 (Overseas) Prisoner of War Camp in Beckenham, Kent. The Coy consisted of a Colonel, three other officers and 110 ORs. Our duties were mainly escorting internees to and from various camps.

We moved to York in July 1940 to take over No 11 Special POW Camp. It was whilst here that it was decided that all personnel working in POW Camps should be transferred to the County Regt in which the Camp was situated, accordingly we were all transferred to the West Yorkshire Regiment. However, because of difficulties with documentation at Record Offices, it was decided once again to transfer us! This time to the Pioneer Corps.

Our unit was the main receiving Camp for Internees of all Nationalities. We took in between 400-500 every six weeks, documented them and fitted them out with civilian clothes before posting them on to other Camps.

The job lasted for about nine or ten months when the Camp was handed over to the local Unit of the Home Guard. Two notable internees we received there were the father of the infamous Broadcaster 'Lord Haw Haw' and Joe Beckett, one time Heavyweight Boxing Champion of Great Britain.

One interesting escort duty we undertook was taking a party of 600 to Peel in the Isle of Man. On arrival at Liverpool en route our prisoners, numbering about 600, who were mainly British began unloading their belongings from the train and stowing them away on the boat.

We were then joined by another party of about the same number who were mainly Italian. This party refused to offload their kit and ours were called upon to do the job. They were more than willing to do this and proceeded to throw everything down the gangway which caused most of the boxes and paper parcels to break open. It required very firm handling by the escort party to prevent a riot.

On arrival at Douglas harbour we found a group of about a hundred women armed with a variety of weapons refusing to allow us to disembark. It took a fair amount of time to clear the harbour and take the internees to the two rows of houses on the promenade which was to be their Internment Camp for the remainder of the War.

We then spent a few weeks at Abergavenny guarding Rudolph Hess while a special prison was prepared to receive him.

Our next move, in 1942, was to London to a large Mansion formerly owned by Sir Phillip Sassoon.

(Ed note: this was Trent Park and in an earlier Newsletter we reviewed the book "The M Room" by Helen Fry which describes how German Generals had their rooms bugged). One prisoner here, guarded by a Scots Guard Coy was General Ludwig Cruewell who had been Commander Africa Corps.

He had been taken prisoner in a strange manner; a RQMS on his way to draw rations spotted a wrecked German plane, it had two occupants, one dead and the other very nearly so.

This one he took back to his HQ. Nobody there could speak German, so he was put in a cell and treated like any other prisoner until an interpreter arrived, it was then discovered who he was. The RQMS was commissioned in the Field and by a strange coincidence was later posted to us as a Capt (QM). He was very surprised to find his prisoner was housed with us.

Our second prisoner arrived soon after we had settled down.

This was General von Thomas who had commanded the Panzer Army Africa when Field Marshall Rommel was on sick leave in Germany. He was captured during the Battle of Alemain in October 1942, and had dinner with Field Marshall Montgomery before being sent to the UK. Shortly after he joined us he became a very sick man and spent some time in Mill Hill Hospital.

Great secrecy surrounded the arrival of the next batch of prisoners. In the first car, sitting between two Brigadiers, was General von Arnim who, as Commander of Army Group Africa, on 12 May 1943 surrendered the remaining axis forces in Africa. The bus that followed him into the Camp consisted of his General Staff Officers, some 25 Colonels and Brigadiers, all in desert clothing.

After being documented and their belongings sorted out they were issued by me with a complete kit of clothing and necessities. Unlike me, very few RQMS have had the pleasure of ordering German Officers to a room at a stated time to collect their kit after signing for it on AF H1157!

About a year later this Camp was closed down and we moved again, this time to Island Farm, Bridgend, Glamorgan. This Camp was a PW working Camp from which on one occasion 67 prisoner had escaped

by tunnelling. All were recaptured within a few days. In 1979 on German TV I saw a programme concerning this escape. Six of the escapees returned to Bridgend and related their experiences during their short spell of freedom. Four of them had stolen a truck and driven it about 200 kilometres until they ran out of petrol and were recaptured.

A local Policeman told of the time he heard noises in a wood and told the farmer that some of his cattle had strayed and how surprised he was when investigating together with the farmer to discover four escaped prisoners eating breakfast.

The Camp continued to function until June 1948. Amongst the last to leave were Field Marshals von Runstedt, Dittmar, von Manstein and von Arnim together with the designer of the V1 Rocket, Wernher von Braun.

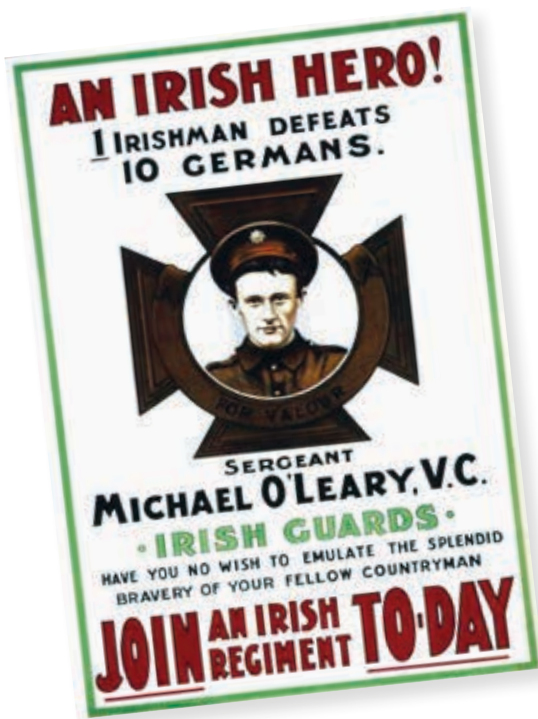
I subsequently escorted von Braun to London to hand him over to the Americans. During the journey he told me that he had offered his services to the British Government but their offer could not match that of the Americans which included a large fully furnished house and his family to be reunited with him in the States.

In February 1953 I attended the funeral of Field Marshall von Runstedt at Herford, I was very surprised that only three men attended the internment.

(Mr Gould's last posting before retiring from the Army was with 14 Indep PCLU where he served between Dec 52 and Dec 56.

He then worked for NAAFI in Hameln. ■





An Irish Hero ! Michael O'Leary VC

Killing five Germans single handedly, he then attacked a second barricaded post, killed three more Germans and made prisoners of two more. Lance Corporal O'Leary practically captured the enemy's position by himself and prevented the attacking party from being fired upon.

Report: Norman Brown
RPCA Archive

MICHAEL John O'Leary (1890-1961) was born at Kilbarry Lodge, Inchigeelagh near Macroom, County Cork on 29th September 1890. He was educated at Kilbarry National School. He was one of four children of Daniel and Margaret O'Leary who owned a farm at Inchigeelagh and was then employed as a labourer on his father's farm.

Michael served in the Royal Navy on HMS Vivid at Devonport from 1909 and was invalided out on 29th April 1910 with rheumatism in his knees. Rather surprisingly for a man suffering from rheumatism, he enlisted himself in the Irish Guards on 2nd July 1910 and joined for duty at Caterham on the 7th. Shortly afterwards, he emigrated to Canada, when on 2nd August 1913 he joined the Royal North-West Mounted Police Force in Regina, Saskatchewan. Following a two hour running gun battle he captured two robbers and was awarded a gold ring, which he wore for the rest of his life. He was granted a free discharge on 22nd September 1914 and re-joined the Irish Guards on 22nd October. Having been posted to the 1st Battalion, he went to France on 22nd November and was appointed unpaid Lance Corporal on 5th January 1916, shortly before his VC action at Cuinchy.

On 1st February 1915, the Irish Guards were attacking a stretch of the La Basse canal in northern France. Lance Corporal O'Leary ran forward in front of his men, mounted a railway embankment and shot five members of a German machine-gun crew. He then attacked another machine-gun crew 60 yards further on, killing three more Germans and capturing two.

His comrades looked on in amazement. One said that O'Leary came back from the killing as cool as if he had been for a walk in the park.

For his near-suicidal act of bravery, he was awarded the Victoria Cross and promoted to Sergeant.

In Ireland he became a celebrity, here was an authentic Irish hero, a nationalist from a

poor background, confirmed to all the stereotypes of the fighting Irish. His most enduring legacy was a memorable recruitment poster extolling Irish men to follow his example. "An Irish Hero!" it exclaimed, "1 Irishmen defeats 11 Germans. Have you no wish to emulate the splendid bravery of your fellow countryman?"

Reporters came from all over to interview his parents. His father, Daniel, nonplussed by all the fuss, made a statement that was pure stage Irish, "I am surprised he didn't do more. I often laid out 20 men myself with a stick coming from Macroom Fair, and it is a bad trial of Mick that he could only kill 9, and he having a rifle and bayonet."

He was the first Irish VC of the Great War and the first ever in the Irish Guards. George Bernard Shaw wrote a play based on his actions called "O'Flaherty VC". He was also awarded the Order of St George 3rd Class (Russia) on 25th August 1915.

On 23rd October 1915 he was granted a regular commission in the 2nd Connaught Rangers and was involved in recruiting in Dublin before moving to Catterick again on recruiting duties. He returned to the front on 11th January 1917 and promoted to Lieutenant on 1st July 1917 and moved to Egypt in October. In January 1918 hoping to enlist into the Royal Flying Corps he attended flying training but bouts of

malaria found him unsuitable for the RFC. He was discharged to the Reserve in June 1920.

In World War 2 he was appointed Lieutenant in the Middlesex Regiment and was Camp Commandant of HQ III Corps and went to France with the BEF. He was invalided home prior to Dunkirk due to diabetes and was transferred into the Pioneer Corps in 1941 initially serving in 335 Company and then in various POW Camps in the south of England until disability forced him to relinquish his commission in 1945 as a Major he then found work as a building contractor until he retired in 1954. Two of his sons also served in the war and both received the Distinguished Flying Cross for their actions.

He died at Whittington Hospital, Islington on 2nd August 1961 and was buried in Mill Hill Cemetery.

In addition to his VC he was awarded the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal 1914-20, Victory Medal 1914-1919 with Mentioned in Despatches oak leaf, 1939-45 Defence Medal, 1939-45 War Medal, George VI Coronation Medal 1937, Elizabeth II Coronation Medal 1953 and the Russian Order of St George 3rd Class.

His medals were loaned to the Irish Guards by his family in 1962 and were purchased by the Regiment in 1982.

They are held by the Irish Guards at Wellington Barracks, London. ■



Adding skills to strength

| The following interesting article appeared in the June 1976 edition of Soldier magazine

Report: By Lt PJ Killeen RPC
RPCA Archive

THE badge of the Royal Pioneer Corps comprises a pick and shovel. And ever since the corps came into being as the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps, early in World War Two, that has been its image – of men who dig holes and hump boxes around. The navies of the British Army.

But when you go to Simpson Barracks at Northampton, now more firmly established than ever as the centre for the Pioneers (the directorate recently moved there from London), this image soon takes a knock. A group of soldiers are driving pallet transporters and fork-lift trucks around obstacle courses, picking up and delivering on the way. They are Pioneers – and you learn that for years now the role of the corps has become increasingly more automated and mechanised.

Of course strong backs are still necessary and always will be. And the Pioneers do take in more lads of lower educational standards. Recruits (there were 384 of them in 1974/75), go to Northampton for 15

weeks' training before being posted either to a company in the United Kingdom or to a platoon in Northern Ireland, Germany or Cyprus. Lieutenant Colonel Derek Hainsworth, an ex-sailor who commands the RPC Training Centre, admits there is a higher-than-average wastage during the 15 weeks.

But for lads with poor educational backgrounds, there is a special detachment of the School of Preliminary Education. And a gruelling physical training programme sees many enter with an E on the Army physical fitness test and pass out as grade A. Says Col Hainsworth, "It's very satisfying. It is a reclamation job and when they leave here they are physically fit and by no means dim."

Major Ron Wildgoose, whose long military career included a spell as regimental sergeant-major of The Queen's Division, commands the Training Company, "We place great stress on the physical side because Pioneers have to do a lot of fetching and carrying – and our drill instructors really wade into the recruits. Within three weeks there is a noticeable difference. Providing a chap can read and

write and understand the three Rs we will do the rest."

Over in the gymnasium a dozen recruits were working hard in various positions on a Heath Robinsonish Polygram – one of the few used in the Army.

The twelve men all worked at once on a variety of exercises designed to develop different muscles. On the shout of "change" from the physical instructor, Sergeant Robert Kelly, they all moved round one position and started a new exercise.

The recruits also do a lot of conventional gymnasium work, pole carrying, running and so on. Sergeant Kelly told Soldier, "Where they come in the standard is very low but by eight weeks they improve 75 per cent and by the end of their training they really are good."

The Pioneers have built up quite a reputation in judo circles and recently won the Eastern District championships. Among the physical training instructors are Corporal Stuart Travis, British under-21 middleweight champion, Army lightweight, open champion and a black belt third dan, and Private Ray Hudson, a black belt first dan who has represented the Army at





international level.

In the 13th week of their training, recruits are taken off to a camp at Buckingham, Lincolnshire, for a spell of intensive field training. The battle camps were introduced in 1974 by Captain John Robb, training officer and ex-Black Watch, after he found that field training at Northampton was (in his words) "very much below standard." Sections going to battle camp take on the role of defence and employment platoon, one of the Pioneers' tasks in war.

Some lads become enemy infiltrators and are either eliminated or captured. Traditional pioneer skills are not forgotten either – the men dig their own trenches which are later inspected by instructors.

Capt Robb told Soldier, "We try very hard to stretch the men as much as we can at Beckingham. There is no NAAFI or beer bar, no welfare facilities and we discourage smoking.

They get very little sleep in the five days and nights they are here. The day starts at 0545 with a road run and we seldom finish before midnight. We keep them away from the soft life and comforts which do not add up to good soldiering."

Assault course, bayonet fighting, shooting, tactical and field training, map reading and pioneer special-to-arm training – all are fitted into the crowded hours at Beckingham.

Two weeks later the recruits pass out into their Army careers.

But it is not the recruits who learn to drive the forklift trucks and pallet transporters at Northampton. These are

taught to students at the Pioneer School which, instructors point out, is an all-arms school with exactly the same status as the Royal School of Artillery, the School of Military Engineering and all the other Army schools.

One course is for sections commanders; the Royal Pioneer Corps is probably unique in that it will send perhaps 24 men to a far-flung spot on the globe without any officer. The courses are to fit sergeants for this kind of work.

The materials handling equipment training covers the Eager Beaver, an industrial forklift truck and a range of pallet transporters. Senior instructor Major John Hickman says, "We have been using forklift trucks as long as the Army has. Now the Army is geared to a logistics system which requires mechanical materials handling and we have been geared to a greater capability to operate within that system."

Other courses for soldiers include one for general duty non-commissioned officers and clerks in personnel and there is a new course on man-management and management for junior non-commissioned officers.

This aspect is very important to the Royal Pioneer Corps. For, while the ditch-digging image persists, it is a fact that officers in the corps are Rhine Army's industrial relations trouble-shooters and pacemakers.

This specialist role is why the Pioneers are now developing their own breed of officer rather than, as happened in the past, transferring in from other regiments or even service.

Major Hickman has taken eight of the 11 available outside courses on personnel management and management and says that by the time any Pioneer officer has served a period in the rank of major he will have similar university level qualifications.

The civilian labour force in Rhine Army is currently 30,000 and the personnel management function is carried out by the Royal Pioneer Corps.

Courses at Simpson Barracks train corps officers and also officers from all arms as, in effect, line managers.

In Germany the RPC officer will provide a management service over an area perhaps 50 or 60 miles long or wide and embracing as many as 30 or 40 units and 3,000 employees.

Amazing changes sometimes take place in the attitudes of officers as they are brought face-to-face with industrial reality by means of the courses. Asking an officer to play the role of a shop steward in simulated negotiations is always interesting and worthwhile.

The arrival of the Directorate of Army Pioneers and Labour has set the seal on Northampton as the corps centre.

Lieutenant Colonel Gerry Walker, one of the directorate's officers, sums up the Royal Pioneer Corps today, "We are always conscious that one origin of the corps was to provide a mass of 'unskilled' labour to do what were in fact fairly skilled tasks.

Now we have rather more formalised these tasks. When you see the adverts saying 'the professionals' you can truly say that about the Royal Pioneer Corps." ■



Colonel E C Smith

Col Smith had a very varied career in the RPC working in A Rodrigues Coy, a Mauritian and East African Group, Depot at Wrexham (1,500 were under training), a PCLU and Grp Commander in BAOR, 23 Group at Bicester and finally closing down units in the Far East. Many famous Pioneer names are mentioned in this article.

Report: Colonel E C Smith
RPCA Archive

TRANSFERRED to the Corps from the Royal Fusiliers in 1952, having been selected for a Permanent Regular Army Commission – one of the first 35 to be so selected.

Because I had been ill I was unable to take up a Corps appointment until early 1953. I went for an interview with the DPL, Brig RAT Eve, and was told that I was being posted to 214 (Mauritian) Group in Egypt. I was a little disappointed as I had served in Egypt on two previous occasions, and not on the European continent since 1940, nevertheless, my posting was to Egypt.

I duly report to Moascar where the 214 Group was located, and was informed by the Group 2IC, Major John Leach, that I was to go to Tel-el-Kebir to take over 2061 (Rodrigues) Guard Company, and also act as detachment commander of X Camp which housed two Mauritian companies as well as my own Rodrigues.

When I arrived in Tek I found that the acting Company Commander was a rather elderly Infantry Capt QM known to the soldiers as "Capt Fire" because of his loud bark; his bite, however, was more akin to that of a pussycat. I learned that my predecessor had been relieved of command. I had no subalterns; there was no CSM but a Mauritian Sergeant acting as such. There were of course no British WOs or NCOs on the establishment. This whole situation was a bit of a shock. The men spoke 'Creole', a French patois, and my French was virtually non-existent. However, there was a quite efficient Sgt clerk who was quite a reliable interpreter.

After a short time I had a couple of reluctant Infantry Second Lieutenants posted in and we gradually began to seem more like an organised unit.

The state of Company administration had to be seen to be believed; standing orders was a copy from a Cavalry Squadron (my predecessor had been a cavalryman), time for 'stables' were frequently mentioned, and on the whole they bore no relationship to orders required for what was basically an Infantry Company. To add to the general inefficiency, King's Regulations and the Manual of Military Law had never been amended and no amendments were available for insertion. I therefore bought copies of KR's and MML from Gale & Polden, Aldershot, and did the amendments myself in my spare time.

The men I found to be good material and amenable to discipline, good workers and keen sportsmen – we became a happy

company.

The Queen's Coronation Parade on 3rd June 1953 was a very impressive affair. On parade were detachments of the three infantry battalions belonging to the infantry Brigade based in Tek – contingents from the Base Workshop REME and the COD, a contingent from 321 (East African) Group, as well as quite a large contingent of Mauritians, Seychellois and Rodrigues which I had the honour of commanding. The reviewing officer was an Air Marshall. The officers in my contingent were Maj Bill Stead (OC 2057 (Sey) Coy), Maj Wilson REME (OC Mauritian Workshop Coy), Capt John Ryall (SA/OC 2058 Mauritian Coy) and Capt Tonto, a Mauritian officer serving with 2058 Coy. I have a photograph of the march past taken by Capt Bob Beani who was a 2IC 20157 (Sey) Coy.

Not long after this I was ordered to take my whole Company, complete with tentage and all our accoutrements to a place in the desert named Bir-Odieb, on the Gulf of Suez, where we were to assist in the stocking of a Divisional Maintenance Area for 1 (Br) Division preparatory to a Divisional exercise versus either 3 (Br) or 6th (Airborne) Division. In the event the exercise (if that was what it was really to be) did not take place.

This was a first class period for the Company. Before we left Tek we had prefabricated an armoury which the advance party took with them and erected so that when the main body arrived all arms and ammunition were stored, and apart from the armoury storemen keeping the arms oiled, they were not touched until we returned to Tek.

The Rodrigues are passionate fishermen, living as they do on a small island, and every spare moment they had was spent catching all sorts of fish from the Gulf, many of which made most enjoyable eating. One of the reasons why they had so much time for fishing was because I insisted to the Sapper Officer for whom they worked that the men would be worked on a daily task system, and not by so many hours a day. Because they knew that when they had finished their daily task their time was their own, they worked very hard, and despite tasks being increased daily it was about three weeks before the amount of work to be done bore relationship to a normal day's working time.

All good things came to an end of course, and after about 6-8 weeks we had to up sticks and make our way back to Tek.

Shortly after this I managed to get my family to join me. No sooner had they arrived, however, than I was posted as 2IC

to the newly formed 322 (M) Group, located in Geneifa. This Group had Companies in Geneifa itself, a Rodrigues Company commanded by Maj Charles Cusack, Mauritian Company at Fanara commanded by Maj Rusty Rushbrooke, and two Mauritian Companies based in Suez and commanded by Maj's Eddie Phillips and Ernie Trumbell. The Group Commander was Lt Col Fraser RA, and the Adjutant Capt Basil Allen-Mills.

We were settling down as a happy little Group, but this didn't last long because HMG announced that British Forces were to be withdrawn from the Middle East, and reorganisation began pretty quickly.

I was then posted as 2IC to 219 (EA) Group, commanded by Lt Col Bob Sutton. The Adjutant was Capt Jimmy Saunders and the Chief British clerk Sgt J Read.

This posting only lasted a few months and in early 1955 I was posted as 2IC Depot at Wrexham, which was then commanded by Lt Col Jack Miller. This posting was a real challenge and turned out to be a worthwhile job.

It was during my first year that it was decreed that we could recruit regular soldiers as well as training National Servicemen, including Non Combatant Corps personnel. At one point we had as many as 1,500 soldiers under training, which stretched our resources and made the preparation of timetables a bit of a headache.

During this time I was very lucky to have some very good officers and NCOs on the training side. The NCOs in particular were an outstanding lot, and included Sgts John Hickman, George Wells, Bob Kedda. Brian Markham and Mike Burnett.

Training was carried out at two locations, Hermitage Camp, Wrexham, with mainly regulars and cadres, and Horsley Hall at Gresford, where the National Servicemen were put through their paces.

At this time the CinC Western Command was General Frank Simpson, who was of course our Colonel Commandant, and it was not unusual for him to arrive at Hermitage Camp completely unannounced, and often the first we knew of his arrival was when we heard the Guard turn out and give a General Salute. He was extremely interested in the men and their training, and I regularly drove with him to Horsley Hall so that he could see and frequently talk to NS recruits. His visits were extremely good for morale and as we never knew when he was going to drop in, it helped to keep us right on our toes.

One of my duties was to chair the Unit Selection Board interviewing potential

officers; on the board with me was a retired Brigadier – Gwydr Jones, and a frequent member was the assistant adjutant, Lt Ben Lawson. Among the dozens we interviewed and recommended to go to Officer Cadet School at Eaton Hall were John Hickman, George Wells and Dennis Higginbottom – so we were right on several occasions!

At this time we also had a number of officers attached from other arms who were seeking to join the Corps on PRAC. Not many of them achieved their objective, either because they were not up to the standard we required, or alternatively because having seen the Corps at close quarters they decided that they wouldn't fit in. There was one officer, however, a REME subaltern, who I thought would do well with us, and I think I was instrumental in convincing him that the RPC was for him. The officer concerned was Lt AF Mutch, so I think my judgement has been proved correct.

After three years at the Depot it was time to move on again, to what I hoped would be rather less onerous duties.

Having attended a short Civil Labour course conducted by the 'Master' of Civil Labour, Major Bob Peate, I set off for Dortmund as Area Supervisory Officer, a post that was soon changed to OC 3 PCLU. This was a most interesting and useful first posting to Civil Labour. I had a very experienced Det Commander at Iserlohn, Capt George Holmes, and my German Chief Clerk was married to a Labour Court Judge – which was helpful!

During my time in BAOR as PCLU commander, Group 2IC and then Group Commander, nothing of great import happened. Within the Group Area we were responsible for a labour force of 26,000, but we coped without much difficulty.

The reason I was in BAOR for such a long stint, 1958-1965, was largely due to a 'phantom' posting. I was asked by the DPL, Brig N Chesshyre, if I would like to go to Singapore as 2IC the Singapore Guard Company, with a view to taking command. This seemed an attractive proposition and when I was told that the posting was imminent we had to carry out family admin, putting my son and daughter into good boarding schools in the UK, selling my car, and so forth.

However, I was then told by Brig Chesshyre that the posting had fallen by the wayside as the Infantry had won the battle of which arm should provide the CO of the Regiment.

He allowed me to stay on in BAOR for a year, however, so that I could buy a new car and on return to UK would not have to pay purchase tax, or whatever it was called. Before the year was up I was promoted and then did three years as Gp Comd of 45 Group.

In 1965 I came home to what I considered to be the best posting in the Corps, CO of 23 Group, commanding companies of British Pioneers.

I was very fortunate indeed to be served so well by first class Company Commanders. Majors John Taylor, John Rickard, Tony Ridings, Ben Lawson and Bill Thomas, and an excellent Adjutant in Capt Pat O'Connell, whose only fault was that he was a workaholic; in fact at one time I had to order him to take some leave.

Between 1965 and 1967 I handed over

to Lt Col Peter Pope (who incidentally I was on boy service with at the Army Technical School at Chepstow, where we were both apprentice tradesmen in early 1930), there were only two incidents worth noting.

At the time I joined the Group, Maj John Taylor, OC 206 Coy, had already convinced command HQ that we as a Corps should take part in the display at the Festival of Remembrance held each year at the Royal Albert Hall. However, before much could be done the Company was taken over by Maj John Rickard, who set to with great gusto to prepare for the Festival. I will not dwell on the preparatory work that had to be done before the final format was agreed by Ralph Reader (of Gang Show fame), who was responsible for staging the Festival. (If details are required I'm sure John Taylor and John Rickard could supply them).

As the display was being presented as a 23 Group project I as Group Comd had been allocated several seats in a box, so together with Maj John and Mrs Brenda Rickard, my son and several others I was privileged to see the whole festival from a most advantageous position, and it was with a certain amount of pride I watched and listened to the audience, including members in the Royal Box, cheering their heads off for our two teams moving boxes of ammunition at great speed.



■ Lt Col EC Smith, Mrs Winstanley, Sgt Butler, Captain Etherington

The other incident worthy of mention concerned Sgt (now Major) George Lineham.

We had been detailed to provide a party to go to Australia to help with range clearance, and Sgt Lineham was to be IC. Shortly after taking off from Lyneham the aircraft developed some sort of mechanical problem and had to turn back.

Unfortunately the pilot was unable to get the undercarriage down, so it was necessary to make a belly landing.

They flew round for some time discharging fuel and then landed at Manston airfield on a carpet of foam.

I was of course unaware of this at the time, but was merely told that the flight had been aborted and that Sgt Lineham and his party were on their way back to Bicester. On the aircraft were Army, Naval and RAF experts, together with a number of civilian boffins.

Within a few hours of the aborted flight I received telephone calls and messages from several passengers heaping praise on Sgt Lineham, who apparently took charge of the passengers and organised them for what could have been a dangerous landing, and kept up morale.

Having read and digested all the messages and letters, which were completely unsolicited, I considered that Sgt Lineham was worthy of an award. In the

event, however, after filling in numerous forms, writing letters and visiting the Military Secretary's representative in Southern Command, Sgt Lineham only received the CinC's recommendation.

In 1967, completely out of the blue, I received a posting to FARELF as DADPL.

To say I was surprised and not a little annoyed is a masterpiece of understatement.

I had only three years to serve and the plan had been that when I had completed my tour at 23 Group I should become Commandant of the Depot. However, nothing is ever certain in this life and because of illness the DADPL FARELF had had to RHE half way through his tour, and Lt Col Walter Clarke had gone out as a stop-gap; I was to relieve him as a permanent posting.

One of the main jobs was to deal with redundancies of our civilian staff before final pull out in the early 1970's.

Life in FARELF was no bed of roses.

The Directorate was based in Singapore, the PCLU and detachments in West Malaysia from Johore Bahru in the South to Penang in the North, and all areas in between. Within a couple of months of arriving in Singapore we had an Inspection of Establishment team descent upon us and I had no difficulty in convincing them my appointment should be upgraded to ADPL and this was implemented.

The ADPL wore many hats, and had many functions to perform. He was firstly the Military Labour Adviser to the Army Commander and his staff, and was also civil labour adviser to the GOC 17 Division and his staff, based in Seremban, West Malaysia. He also had the responsibility of overseeing the Defence and Employment Platoon of Pioneers with the Commonwealth Brigade at Tenandak, near Malacca.

He had to liaise with the Command Secretary and his minions and the Regional Establishment officer of the Ministry of Public Building and Works for their civil labour employed in West Malaysia.

He also dealt with the War Department Civil Staff Association, particularly its Chairman, a Mr Zaidy, who was also the Secretary of the Malaysian Trade Union Congress (with access to the Tunku and ministries) and was a delegate to the International Labour Organisation.

I was again most fortunate with the staff I had – Capt Chris Etherington as Staff Capt, Majors Alan Mutch, Derek Hainsworth, Colin Davey were at various times 1202 PCLU Commanders.

Some of the Det Commanders of 1202 were of note too – Capts Len Smythe, John Hudson, Basil Allen-Mills, Dick McDonald, Jack Black and John Read.

I either chaired or was a member of eight committees, which met frequently in either Singapore or W Malaysia. Between August 1967 and February 1970 I made 75 trips by air from Singapore to various locations in West Malaysia, plus ten overnight train journeys.

In February 1970 I handed over to Lt Col Arthur Biggs, who had been Adjutant of 214 Group when I joined the Corps in Egypt.

After I returned home I performed only one military duty, as inspecting officer at a recruit passing out parade at the Depot and Training Centre. ■



■ Took my exercise on Remembrance Sunday - my local Remembrance Service. Unfortunately the pub up the road was closed! Picture: Paul Brown



■ The Memorial at Little Billing Village, Northamptonshire Picture: Paul Brown



■ Dave Moulds, Micky King, Richard Langley, Darren Nichols. Left to right sat down. Shaun Clarke, Martin Palmer and Adie Hawker. Picture: Supplied



■ The Pioneer Plot at the National Arboretum on Remembrance Sunday Picture: Jenny Bone



■ Golf Trip - Darren Nicholls, Adie Hawker, Shaun Clarke, Micky King, Martin Palmer, Richard Langley and Dave Moulds Picture: Supplied



■ Northampton Branch Burns Night - The Haggis has arrived! Picture: Paul Brown



■ After the Cenotaph March 2019 - Civil Service Club, Whitehall
Picture: Paul Brown



■ Tony Lunn and his better half. Thank you Tony for the Gulf War 1 pictures on page 76-81. They are excellent!
Picture: Paul Brown



■ Northampton Branch Burns Night - Mr Harrod delivering an excellent address to a Haggis
Picture: Paul Brown



■ Pioneer Bone showing off his camo pants (again!)
Picture: Paul Brown



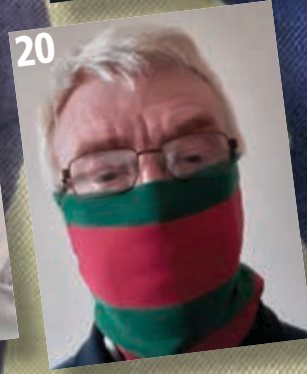
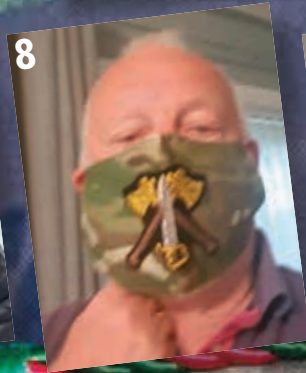
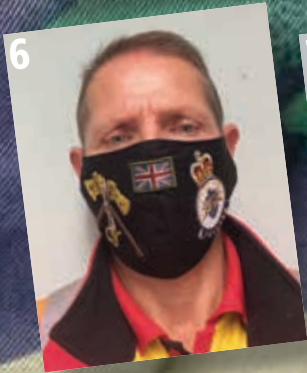
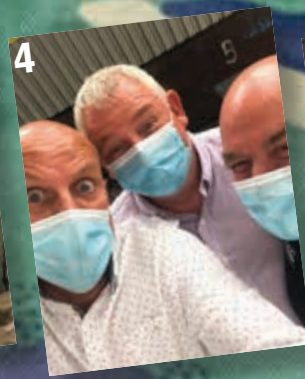
■ Northampton Branch Burns Night - Taff
Picture: Paul Brown



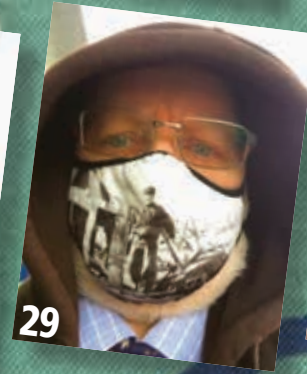
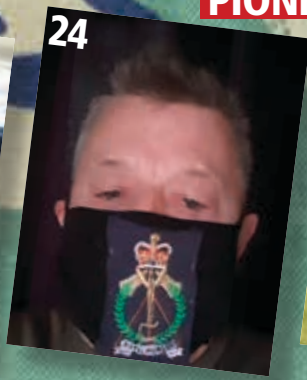
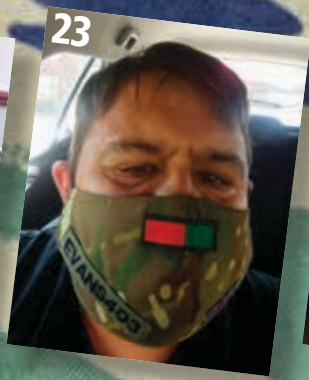
■ Northampton Branch Burns Night - Fight over whom won the handbag in the raffle!
Picture: Paul Brown



■ Northampton Branch Burns Night - Pioneer with a kilt!
Picture: Paul Brown



THE PI



PIONEER



Lockdown 2020

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Andy Hendry | bootcamp, Social distancing |
| 2. Al & Debbie Batch, VE Day | Red and Green all over the |
| 3. Billy with his pet! | parks |
| 4. Dave Ravenscroft, Dave Nelson & Ted Kewley | 18. Robert Jackson |
| 5. David Kerr on duty | 19. Roger Kirby |
| 6. Ian Webber | 20. Stephen Hall |
| 7. John Brewster | 21. Stephen Harrod |
| 8. Keith Burrows | 22. Steve Bottrell |
| 9. Kenneth Hood | 23. Taff Evans |
| 10. Kev Hilton | 24. Taff Powell |
| 11. Liam Dealtry | 25. Mick Micklethwaite |
| 12. Michael Radbourne | 26. Who is this Pioneer?
I need to get him a proper
Pioneer badge :) |
| 13. Mike RC | 27. Roger Kirby |
| 14. Neil Salt | 28. Norman |
| 15. Nigel Alan Smith on duty | 29. Neil Salt |
| 16. Norman Head, stay away from everyone | 30. Robert Jackson |
| 17. Nutty Almond Left my role as GM of a gym and opened a | 31/32. John Winterburn VJ Day in our village |

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



Report: Paul Brown
Pictures: RPCA Archives

HAVE dug deep into the Pioneer Archives and have found quite a mixed bag of photographs for this issue. Some old, some very old and some not so old.

The photograph at the top is 68 Company, Royal Pioneer Corps, do you know the year?

The photograph on the right is unknown, but what a great photo! Would love to put a name to the face but unfortunately this is all we have!

On the opposite page at the top are Alien Pioneers marching through Ilfracombe, 1940. The Pioneer Corps was the only British military unit in which enemy aliens could serve. Thousands of German and Austrian nationals joined the Pioneer Corps to assist Allied war efforts and the liberation of their home countries.

At the bottom of the page we have Pioneers clearing bomb damage during the London Blitz.

And finally over the page we have some familiar faces from back in the day. Can you recognise them?

Until next time. ■



Digging through the archives...

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









The image is a composite of two paintings. The top painting depicts a wide battlefield under a cloudy sky, with several large, dark, mushroom-shaped explosions rising from the ground. In the distance, there are small buildings and a line of trees. The bottom painting shows a close-up of four soldiers in brown uniforms and helmets, engaged in combat on a dirt path. One soldier on the left is shouting and aiming a rifle. Another soldier in the center is crouching, and a third on the right is also aiming a rifle. A fourth soldier is lying on the ground in the foreground, partially obscured.

Capt Edward Rhodes

The following notes were purchased by our historian and were made by Capt Edward Rhodes. They were part of the estate of Maj 'Freddie' Forrester. The main articles concerning his time in the Royal Artillery have been excluded except the story of the first shot of the war. It is not thought that this diary has ever been printed. 309955 Capt Edward Rhodes was commissioned into the Pioneer Corps on 25 Oct 43, and served in civil labour throughout his time in the Corps.

THE Cottage in which I lived alone was a white faced jewel clinging precariously to a rocky ledge overlooking the tiny harbour and clustered houses of a small fishing village. When I returned to England in 1936 with a score of unwritten stories filling my thoughts and begging to be written down my one ambition was to find pleasant and peaceful surroundings in which to work, and in this lovely corner of Cornwall I had found both.

But there was a fly in the ointment. For six years I had been living 'out in the blue' knowing little of what was going on in the rest of the world. I soon discovered that plenty was going on and became convinced that another war with Germany was inevitable. I was 42 years old, in excellent physical condition, and there would be no excuse for me to avoid bearing my share in what lay ahead even if I wanted to do so, which I did not. I ended up in the First War as a Captain in the Royal Field Artillery and had been a 'Gunner' at heart ever since. In 1937 war seemed so near that I tried to get back into harness in order to have training and so bring myself up to date again and not waste the time of regular soldiers when the shooting did start. It was easier said than done. Hore Belisha was scrapping the older men in favour of youth. I was too old it appeared to get commissioned rank in the Territorial Army, indeed too old to even get into the ranks of the Territorials as a private soldier except in anti-aircraft or coast defence. After turning things over in my mind I decided that the Ack-Ack units would never go overseas (How wrong I was!) whereas if I enlisted in the Coast Defence Artillery I might, when the trouble did come, manage to transfer to a field battery. That year (1937) I enlisted as a gunner and was posted to a 6-INCH Heavy Battery and in due course became Battery Commander's Assistant and a Lance Bombardier – the best rank in the Army, that first stripe.

I will not pretend that I cared much for Coast Defence work for it struck me as an insipid business after field guns, and the preliminary work before firing the first round, with its adding a few yards to the range for this and deducting a few yards for that, and putting a few minutes deflection for one thing and taking them off again for another always struck me as the height of puerility and theoretical gunnery gone mad. However, it was better than nothing.

My new friends at the yacht club were greatly amused at my serious concerns about the future. Of course there would not be another war, they assured me, and went to great lengths to prove how impossible such an event was. When in the summer of 1938 we were embodied and called out to service they were slightly shaken, but when a week later Chamberlain returned from Munich all smiles, waving his silly bit of paper and crying "Peace in our time" their assurance returned and they laughed heartily as I returned to the village and donned civilian clothes again. The year that followed is history.

On the night of August 25th 1939, or on

the early hours of the morning rather, I was wakened from a heavy sleep by loud pounding on my door which boasted neither bell nor knocker.

"Who the devil's that?" I asked, putting my head out of the window.

"Tis Police Constable Penwarden, sir. Ne you 142073 Lance Bombardier Edward Rhodes?"

"You know damn well who I am, Pen." I answered a trifle testily. "You had to buy beer for me a couple of hours ago when I beat you at darts."

"I got a message from the coastguard for ee, sir," called up the constable. "You'm got to report to yore Drill 'All at once, it says."

And so for the second time in twelve months I was embodied for active service, and for the second occasion in a lifetime I went to war, a war which by the time it had ended had added up the years I spent fighting for England to ten out of a total of fifty.

No, perhaps 'fighting' is hardly the right word, for in the six years that followed I never fired a round in anger or saw an enemy except those who were already prisoners. Yet in spite of that they were good years, the years in England, Africa and Italy from 1939 to 1945 and I am glad to have lived them, glad and a little proud. Two or three days later the Battery moved from its Drill Hall Headquarters to its war station at the Fort.

The Fort is situated at the end of a long arm of land which encircled the western end of a broad bay. It was an isolated spot for the land formed part of a large private estate and the only road on it was one built by the War Department which led to the massive iron gates which shut the Fort off from the outer world. A tiny fishing village three or four miles away could be reached by the road and a foot track along the cliff edge, but apart from that there was no habitation near.

The narrow promontory ended in a cliff face falling sheer to the sea and it was into this rocky cliff that the fort had been built in the middle of the 19th Century, and with the passage of the years its buildings had toned down in colouring until they merged imperceptibly into the trees and rocks against which they crouched. There were, in fact, two separate buildings inside those fearsome gates. To the left, the landward side that is, was the Main Guardroom just inside the gates with, at the far end the Officer's Mess, and above that again the Battery Commander's Post from which the guns were controlled, and the signal tower. To the right of the gate a flight of stairs descended to a well in the centre of which was the cookhouse, storerooms and latrines, and facing these were the men's sleeping quarters and messes in two tiers, and above the second tier the bars, open gun deck with its two six-inch guns facing seaward and a drop of 80 feet from the edge of the gun deck to the sea below. There was not sufficient level ground on which to parade the whole battery, everything was stairs, stairs up to the Battery Office, stairs up to the Command Post, stairs down to the cookhouse and latrines, stairs up to the casemates in which were the sleeping quarters, stairs up again to the guns.

In the warm sunshine of the August day

on which we took up our war station it seemed a pleasant enough spot, but in the months that followed and throughout the wretched winter on 1939-1940 we came to find it a dreary prison, a prison without an exercise yard. As Examination Battery the guns were manned 24 hours a day and the unit split up into three watches, one on duty, one standing by in reserve and one resting. We were considerably under strength and during my year numerous changes in the watches were made in an attempt to improve conditions and make life bearable for the men, but none was really successful and by comparison with the army in general the men's lot was not to be envied. On paper the system of duty watch sounds fairly reasonable but what it really meant was this. On Monday, 'A' Watch, for example did one trick on the guns from 9.30 am until 5 pm and then became the 'Resting Watch' but was confined to barracks. On Tuesday they took over the guns from 2 am until 9 am, became the 'Reserve Watch' and did training from 10 am until 1 pm, then went on the guns again from 5 pm until 2 am on Wednesday morning and were 'Reserve Watch' again from 9.30 am when they had a full 24 hours free of duty. On Thursday morning they mounted the guns at 9.30 am and did the same cycle again. As will be seen, there was only one undisturbed night in every three. The fitting in of a full day's leave was the bugbear but the reason for this was that, although we were only 3 miles as the crow flies from the port we guarded, it involved a journey of 17 miles overland from our isolated position with no transport for a considerable part of the way, and since most of the men lived in or near the port a short leave was of no use to them with a 34 mile return journey to cover. Later, a 4 hour 'village leave' was given on the day the watch came off at 5 pm which provided a little extra freedom. Had there been any level ground inside the Fort where the men could walk about or play games the prison atmosphere would not have been so acute.

To me it was an enormous relief when I left the Fort in August 1940 after a year's incarceration, but I have often thought with the very real sympathy of those men of the unit who were ordained to spend the six years of the war within its grim walls.

THE FIRST ROUND

The Battery, a territorial coast defence unit, had been embodied a week before the outbreak of war on 3rd September, 1939. Forty-eight hours after embodiment we left our drill hall in the West Country town and had gone to our war station, a two six-inch gun battery on the coast of Cornwall. We overlooked and were on the western point of a broad bay. From our position the land line swept backwards to the port, which was also a Naval station, then eastwards in a semi-circular sweep to Thole Point (Falmouth/Plymouth?) at the bay's other extremity. Between the two headlands a breakwater, on which were other guns, stood sentinel and afforded calm water for anchorage. At Thole Point and elsewhere on the rocky coast were sister batteries, mostly of guns of larger calibre. Our function was Examination battery, covering and protecting the Examination Vessel which day and night

throughout the long war years lay a mile or two out to sea. The Examination Vessel (or XV as she was commonly called) had a rather festive appearance since she flew a string of coloured bunting during daylight hours which, in fact, was a signal message intimating that all incoming shipping must report to her before entering port. On the approach of a ship making for harbour 'XV' signalled the Royal Marine watchers in the Battery Commander's Post and the order "Alarm - take post" was broadcast throughout the Fort on loud-speakers, following which our guns covered the stranger until 'XV' had examined her papers and given her master permission to proceed to anchorage. The Gun Crews then received the order "Stand Down" upon which they carried on with training or other duties of the day, or at night returned to the wooden shelters on the gun deck situated to the rear of each gun, all except one man of each gun who remained on watch.

In order not to be caught napping by an enemy attempting to block or damage the port before the declaration of hostilities, 'XV' took up her station towards the end of August we, as her protecting battery at the same time started operating on a war time basis.

They were delighted, warm, sunny days about this time. Although at war stations little training was being done and except for the Main Gate guard, cooks, and others with an immediate job of work to do, most of the men spent long, lazy hours lying on the gun deck or fort wall sun bathing. A year before we had gone through a similar embodiment, all keyed up with enthusiasm and excitement, only to be disbanded at the end of the week sick at heart at Chamberlain's capitulation to Hitler, and we were not going to get that 'het up' a second time.

It was on the 2nd of September that we got our first 'Alarm.' A small, coaster had rounded the headland, ignoring 'XV's' signal to heave to and was attempting to gate-crash the harbour. As we brought the guns to bear on her we discussed the intruder amongst ourselves. It was just the sort of clever little trick Hitler would get up to, we decided, send a small, harmless looking vessel in loaded with high explosives, and hope that she might be able to damage and perhaps block one of the entrances to the harbour. We were following her every movement, the guns nuzzling around easily on their oiled bearings as they followed the ship's steady approach. In the silence we could hear bit of the conversation in the Battery Commander's Post, the voices coming over the loud speaker circuit which had not been closed.

"We'll let her have the first one across the bows as a warning," we heard. Then the order over the loud speaker, "stand by to fire number one gun."

"Number One gun on target, sir."

"Load Number One gun."

"Number One gun loaded, sir."

By the Lord Harry this is what we had waited for so long. It was for this that during the past three years we had given up our evenings to training and spent our annual two week's holiday at camp. No dummy shell this time but the real thing. The one up the spout isn't meant to hit you, fellow, but the next one will send you to the bottom of the sea in a matter of

seconds. The air tingled with excitement and tension. Oh, but life was good at the moment!

"Fire Number One gun."

"Number one gun fired, sir."

The long-nosed beauty coughed and slid back to her normal position, a trickle of smoke still coming from her open mouth. A few yards in front of the oncoming ship the sea erupted in and column of water spouted into the air. On board the 'raider' men sprang to life. They danced, they waved their arms, they took their shirts off and waved them too, still jiggling up and down like marionettes on a string. The surrender was absolute and unconditional. We may not have fired the first shot of the Second World War, although we always claimed we did, but we certainly weren't far from it.

"Stand down the gun detachment. Clean out No 1 gun."

Number One's crew set to work with a will, laughing and talking amongst themselves.

"The first shot of the war, by Gawd, and we fired it, our gun and our battery: and ther war had not been declared yet: Good old X Battery. Won't the other blokes in the brigade be swearing mad?"

I heard the rest of the storey in the dingy bar of a dockside pub that evening. As I pushed open the swing door and ordered a drink I could hear a rich Irish voice in the background.

"Ah mow, be aisy will ye. How in the balzes could he be after knowing about phwat was going on? Five days ut from Dun Laodhaire we were, loaded wid barrels av stout, and us not fitted wid woireless. Four av us on board, not counting the lad who was on deck wid me as we rounded the point. My sister Mary Ellen's boy he is, out av Sligo. "Uncle Paddy Doyle," says he, "that's a grand ship wid all the flags flying, so it is." "T'will be a regatta," says I. "They do be after holding them things this time av year." "Phwat will yon man be waving them little flags at us for." Asks the lad. "T'is to kape off the sailing course," says I, but divil a yacht or sailing craft could we see any place. "The man's waving at us," says John Edward. "Wave back at him," says I. "Tis friendly people they are hereabouts," and wid that John Edward gives them a wave wid his hat and not to be outdone I joins the lad a waves, too. Holy priest: T'was like we had given the signal for a war to start for off goes that divil's whelp of a gun at the fort and there was a shell screaming towards us like a sowl in torment and only missing us by a matter of inches. The engineer and the two hands came rushing up on deck wid the blood drained out av the faces av them. "Glory be to God," says I, "Them sodgers has gone mad. Wave your hands," says I, "Wave your handkerchiefs, wave your bloody shirts. The Dev himself shall hear av this if we ever set foot in Eire again," and wid that we strips to the waist and surrenders the ship."

Al, well; it was a good battle whilst it lasted

THE DAYS WORK (BOUGIE – ALGERIA) (307 Coy were there Nov 42 – Mar 43)

Wearily I drop into the chair by the open window in the apartment which we use as an Officers' Mess and take the whiskey which my batman has poured out as soon

as he heard the door open on my entry.

Now that the pressure of the first few weeks following our arrival had eased off I have been able to give attention to our creature comforts. The warehouse is excellent for work purposes but most unsuitable as living accommodation. There are no sanitary arrangements, no water laid on, and worst of all we have been living herded together, officers and men, which is unfair to my staff for at the day's end they must be able to relax and enjoy themselves in their own way, something they cannot do with their officers continually on top of them. A visit to the Town Major produced two flats in Rue Lamoriciere, both within a hundred yards of the warehouse. My sergeant major and three sergeants occupy one as their Mess and living quarters; I and my subaltern the other. Actually they are only living quarters for we all feed out with 307 Company who have moved in and are our neighbours. In other ways, too, life has improved for Area Headquarters has placed a car permanently at my disposal and Melson Allen, the OC of 307 Company, has furnished a driver and batman.

The Officers' Mess consists of two bedrooms, a dining room, kitchen and toilet. Sad to say there is no bathroom but one can do wonders with a basin of warm water set on the bedroom floor and it is a luxury. After the way we have been pigging it during the last few weeks. The place is fully furnished and my bedroom contains a massive bed on which I can lie with equal comfort lengthways or widthways. The previous occupants, we understand, simply walked out and left everything when the Allied invasion took place, furniture, clothing, personal trinkets – everything. Where they went no one seems to know but probably they sought sanctuary in the interior. But I am intrigued, considerably intrigued, for when, having got the key from the Town Mayor who had requisitioned the place, I first entered the apartment to inspect the place for suitability, there draped negligently over a chair back in what is now my bedroom were a pair of vivid blue knickers. They are now folded away in a chest of drawers with other items of female clothing yet I still wonder if Madame's departure was so hurried as not to allow her sufficient time to dress fully or whether in the excitement of the hour she simply overlooked this one piece of attire. Anyway, they are preserved for her return. She may still be worrying as to where and when she mislaid them.

The windows of the apartment look across the waters of the bay to a ridge of mountains some miles away to the northwards. One massive peak, snow covered at its peak the last day or two, dominates the scene and fills my few occasions of relaxation with never ending pleasure for the constantly changing cloud formations about it make it a scene of great beauty.

But now in the darkness as I slowly sip my whiskey and revel in the enjoyment of unaccustomed rest the mountain is no longer visible, only a deeper darkness across the Mediterranean waters indicates the land mass on the far side. To light a lamp means closing the window shutters to observe blackout orders and within a few minutes the room becomes hot and stuffy and the atmosphere intolerable. What I need most

at the moment is just to sit quietly and let the tautened machinery of my nerves ease down slowly before I change to go across to 307 Company's Mess for dinner.

From early morning the pressure of work has slowly built up until by afternoon and early evening it has become a flood against which I must constantly fight if I am to keep control of events which threaten to swamp me. In fact my day commenced in the very early hours of the morning when the Duty Sergeant from my office wakened me to say there was an urgent telephone call from Allied Force Headquarters. Hurriedly I threw on some clothing and dashed along the road to the warehouse.

With difficulty I listened to a tinny voice coming along the hundred miles of wire from Algiers, "The ADLs compliments and it was essential that he be informed at once if my subaltern was on ration strength before leaving England." I cursed the man roundly, although knowing that in passing the message the clerk or whatever he was doing no more than carrying out orders, and asked what the devil he meant by getting me out of bed at that hour for a damn fool thing like that, then slammed the receiver down before he had the opportunity to reply.

There was no sense in blaming the man but I am not at my best when awakened at 2 am. Only our people in AFHQ could think of a blasted silly question like that to ask. What particularly maddens me is that Bostock was here two days ago and knows perfectly well that my subaltern is on detachment about 70 miles away and cannot be contacted by telephone. I am so irritable that I cannot fall asleep again and do no more than doze on and off until 5 am when I get up and have a shave, wash and dress. Already the Arabs are gathering in the street below and by 6 am my Sergeants are forming them up into gangs under their re-armletted chefs d'equipe to march them off to the installations where they are to work.

Everything is chaotic and pandemonium, for the natives are incapable of doing anything in an orderly, controlled manner. When at last the street is cleared of all but a handful who have complaints or special requests to make I turn in to my office to see what has accumulated on my desk.

Now that the fighting has died down in the forward areas the chair-borne wallahs are coming into their own and we are submerged under a snow storm of paper work. AFHQ wants returns on this, that and the other, so do L of C Headquarters, so do Area Headquarters, so do Group Headquarters, and all to be rendered in duplicate, triplicate or quadruplicate.

It complicates life. So does the telephone which I have recently installed. To begin with I was on the military exchange and everything was plain sailing. You simply lifted the receiver, a voice said 'Switchboard,' you asked for the person you wanted and (if the line was not engaged) were through in a matter of seconds.

Now I have been transferred to the civilian exchange – and use the telephone as little as possible for life is too short. You lift the receiver, turn the handle, and wait. After a time a metallic female voice shrieks, "J'ecoute" and you ask for your number, "Six cent quarte vingt dix sept, s'il vous plait" and wait. In the distance is heard

what appears to be a startled parrotry in full cry, each inmate trying to vie with the other. You decide it is the operators calling to their young, or whatever it is that telephone girls do whilst they are kept waiting. A turbine engine starts up – and still one waits.

The turbine pulses away and you lapse into a state of coma. The receiver is pressing too hard against your ear and arm holding it is becoming numb.

You wriggle in your seat, uncross the left leg from over the right and cross the right over your left, and change the receiver from one hand to the other. The turbine still throbs and you still wait. Suddenly the operator call a shrill "Elo" and you say patiently, "J'attende six cent quartet vingt dix sept, mam'selle."

A machine explodes and deafens you. After a second or two you realise it was the operator answering you, but by that time you have entirely missed what she was saying. None of them seems to have human voices, certainly not female voices.

Maybe they are sexless. Discretion being the better part of valour you reply, "Oui, mam'selle. Six cent quarte vingt dix sept, si" vous plait" – and wait. Very faintly through the din of the turbine comes a voice, "Switchboard." With a sigh of relief you say, "Extension 46." The voice replies "Switchboard."

The turbine roars into a thunder and you yell, "Extension 46." The voice whispers back "Switchboard" and the operator cuts in with a shriek "Finis?" Hastily you plead "Non: Ne coupe pas, s'il vous plait" and then shout louder than ever, "Extension 46" and a whisper comes back "Line engaged, will you wait, sir?" Without warning the line goes completely dead and you replace the receiver. Oh. Hell: Let it wait until tomorrow. The war will last another day.

There are a score of jobs calling for my personnel attention throughout the area but a stream of callers commences and it is impossible to get away. The morning wears on and I seem to have interviewed everyone except the Portuguese Ambassador. British, French, American, American, French, British, there is no end to them. All the little troubles that arise from my job recruiting Arabs and suppling 3,000 workmen daily, settling disputes that arise, soothing down one man, pepping up another and handling out a scolding to a third. In addition to the 3,000 casual labour I control I am forming uniformed Arab units and have to see the French officers who will (nominally) command them and the British officers who in fact do all the work. Camp sites have to be arranged and a dozen questions about equipment settled. My God: Captain Bishop has come all the way from Algiers with his stores and forgot 300 pup tents the natives are to sleep in. Forgot a small item like 300 tents! I telephone Algiers, they say they haven't got any tents. I get through to DADOS – he hasn't got any either. No sooner do I put the receiver down than the accursed bell rings again. My brain, already working at top speed, has to suddenly adjust itself to deal with an entirely different problem. I scribble a few hieroglyphics on my blotting pad and start chasing those confounded tents again. Someone comes to the door of my office – a native has cut his finger or dropped something on his toes and what should be done about it? I suggest he cuts the dammed things off but

that doesn't seem to satisfy. Phone the civil hospital. They argue about who is going to pay the bill, and all the time the injured Arab stands patiently outside my door blood dripping from his injured member onto the warehouse floor, drip, drip, drip. Eventually I get back to where I was originally, in the middle of an interview with M Guidicelli who sits bewildered on the other side of the table. More problems. Settle them, shelve them, or in desperation ignore them. Another phone call. More scribbling on my already overcrowded blotting pad. "Bon joir, m'sieur. Enchante."

Another caller gone, but always there is yet another waiting outside. Telephone again, strap on my revolver and jump into my car. A blessed relief whilst I relax in the car on the 15 or 20 mile drive to look at someone's water supply. I find DADH (Deputy Assistant Director of Hygiene) testing the water critically. He wants to purify it before the Arabs drink it. I protest vehemently.

They have never drunk pure water and it'll make them ill. Give 'em something nice ripe scum on the top and they'll lap it up like nectar and thrive on it. Chlorinate this well and they'll all be in hospital in a week. We argue the point and reach no agreement. Back to my office. Some charming slow-voiced Americans are waiting for me – not to mention a score of other people. I see the Americans first, it soothes my frayed nerves to listen to their long-drawn vowels. This question of feeding these 5,000 'genu-wine, bedu-wine A-rabs.' I love the way they separate the two syllables of the word 'A-rabs.'

Can they leave it to me? Will I do this or that? Do I think something else a good idea. I say, "Don't bother yourselves with it. I'll see to it and let you know how things are going," and they depart. Another phone call. Another interview. Yet another phone call and I sit, half dead, with the telephone glued to my ear, assuring the operator at minute intervals that I have not finished. "Ne coupe pas, s'il vous plait, Mam'selle."

My eye drops on a note on my crowded blotting pad. Stewth; I should have done that this morning. And so on it goes, hour by hour. Somehow, heaven alone knows how, I still manage to keep all the threads in fingers. Bostock suddenly arrives from AFHQ and wants me to give him the whole day tomorrow. Holy smoke: I haven't had a whole day to give to give to anyone or any single thing since landing – but he is my chief, so why argue. Prendergast phones (Lt Col G R Prendergast CO 26 Group).

He drones on and on, and it all means nothing. I say "Yes, sir" and "No, sir" until he rings off. Reports. Reports. Reports.

They all have to be rendered by some rigid hour. I have no clerk to make my returns. I am not allowed a clerk on my establishment but they still want their returns slap on the dot.

Thank goodness I have brought my own portable typewriter, it has proved invaluable. I order the Duty Sergeant to pull down the shutters of my warehouse-office. I take the telephone off the receiver and settle down to working out statistics. Many of the figures I don't know, nobody knows so I guess the answer.

If HQ can guess a better figure let them fire ahead and do so. I type out reports and

write up my war diary, lean back in my chair, light a cigarette and breathe a deep sigh of relief. Seven o'clock and the first peaceful moment I have known in thirteen hours. That's another day done, I hope. I can hear the operator screaming into the hanging telephone receiver as I wearily lock up my security box and get ready to leave. The sergeant switches out all the lights before raising the roller door. "If anyone below the rank of brigadier telephones, sergeant, tell them I died this morning." He grins. "Very good, sir. Good night, sir." "Night sergeant." It is almost as bright as day outside and only half moon as yet, and I stand for a moment and breathe in the quiet of it all before returning to my small apartment.

My whiskey glass is empty as sitting by the open window I review all the incidents of the day. Another day ended. Another job of work done for England, home and beauty. Not very spectacular perhaps, but we can't all get up into the front line, someone has to keep things going along the Lines of Communication, and thank God I'm still fit enough to do that.

I get up on my feet to wash and change before going along to 307 Coy Mess for dinner and become aware of the voice of one of the most garrulous women I have ever heard and who lives in the flat adjoining mine. I now understand why the French favour the habit of garrotting. She starts at daybreak and continues without ceasing until long after I have turned in for the night. Also, she has the annoying habit of beginning each sentence with a piercing, "Alors!" The walls being paper thin I can hear every word of her stringent conversation. There is a husband in the background but I have not yet heard his voice. So far as I can judge he has not yet had a chance to get a word in edgeways since they returned here two weeks ago from some place in the interior where they went for safety at the time of the occupation. One day I feel sure that one of her sentences will end with a nasty gurgling sound – and then there will be peace and quiet. I shall say to myself, Good man," and the next morning will call in on him and say,

"Alors," and give him one of my cigars and shake him by the hand and grin. He will grin back and there will be harmony between at least two men of the Allied Nations.

CHARLIE

Charlie was, perhaps seven or eight years old. You can never be quite sure with native children, as they themselves have no knowledge of their age. He was not, of course, baptised in the name of Charlie; in fact he was never baptised at all. One of my Sergeants gave him the name and it stuck. It at least had the merit of being more

a positive pest in those early days of the campaign, always hanging about the place shouting, squabbling, fighting, filling the air of Rue Lamoriciere with their din until one of my sergeants would dash angrily out with a stick and drive them off upon which there were shrieks of fear and the scatter of bare feet running away and then, with luck, a minutes silence. There was barely time to get one's ears attuned to the peace and quietness before they drifted back and the whole business started all over again. But Charlie never did act like the others. When the shuttered door of the warehouse was thrown open at daybreak there he was,

standing quietly by looking in at us with big, sad eyes, silent. Whilst other children played or fought he remained stationary at the door-post watching, just watching.

Right up till dusk when he must hurry away to keep curfew regulations he was there, patience personified. He did not speak, not even beg, but his eyes never left our faces. He grew on us to the extent that we scarcely liked to eat our emergency rations in front of him because of the unspoken accusation and reproach in those pleading eyes.

I think it was Sergeant Wilton who first gave him a broom and told him to sweep the place out. It probably was because Wilton was the sort who would rather pass work on to others than do it himself. In those days I had none of my staff below the rank of sergeant and therefore they had to carry out menial duties from which senior NCOs would normally be exempt. Be that as it may, from that time on Charlie was on the establishment. A couple of years later I listened in boredom to a long and waffling



pronounceable than his real name was.

No one quite knows how the boy was first adopted by the unit, is seemed as if he had always been part of the scenery surrounding the warehouse which was used as our centre for recruiting Arab labour, a small child with liquid brown eyes, usually standing on one foot as he leaned against the doorway with one thumb in his mouth, and occasionally hitching up a dirty piece of cloth draped over one shoulder which was all the clothing he possessed. Children were

monologue during dinner in a mess when Brigadier Carter was expounding at great lengths on infiltration, which he claimed to have implemented during the First World War. Infiltration; Charlie knew more about that at the age of eight than Carter ever learned of the subject in Staff College, if he ever attended one which I doubt.

My Sergeant Major asked permission for the boy to be employed by himself and the sergeants at their own expense as a mess boy and general handyman, permission

which I gave subject to his being washed and from then on Charlie was a fixture. Wise in his generation he kept well out of my sight and left my private office severely alone, but I could not be ignorant of his presence in such cramped quarters and often as I passed in and out saw him engaged in his chores from which he would look up gravely at my approach to spring to a salute when he recognised me. A very smart salute too, which obviously he had been taught by my staff. Not only did he never intrude on me but he was assiduous in ensuring no other Arab did. It was no uncommon thing that we were very busy and the warehouse crowded with natives for one of them to attempt to short-circuit my staff and sneak into my office to take up his troubles with me direct, but after Charlie's advent none succeeded. Only once did he abuse his trust, a day when all my staff were away on other duties and I alone was on the premises. I was busy on paper work of some sort and dimly aware of the shuffling feet at my door but paid no attention until Charlie spoke.

"Commandant, a woman," he said, and disappeared.

I looked up and saw a young Arab woman standing erect before my table. She was covered from head to ankles in the enveloping white gown they wear, her face covered as modesty demands. Without waiting for me to speak she broke into a torrent of pleading, begging for clothing to cover her nakedness, clothing to warm her frozen body, anything, anything, so long as it was clothing.

Since all that was exposed of her body was her eyes and hands I remarked dryly that it appeared to me she was fairly well covered and had little to complain about. The words poured from her again as she grasped tightly in her hands the robe which surrounded her.

"Commandant, I swear it is as I have told you," she protested. "I swear that I am naked. See!"

With a dramatic sweep she flings her two arms apart, holding an edge of the robe in each outstretched hand. She was right, by George! Naked as a new born colt.

Hurriedly I called Charlie and had her bundled outside. Whether she was one of his family or had bribed him to admit her to my office I never did learn. Thank heaven she kept her face veil on and so observed all the decencies.

Charlie's appearance was changing by degree. The dirty, torn scrap of material which had been his only covering disappeared first and was replaced by a cut down army shirt. A pair of khaki trousers followed, also after much shortening.

A forage cap was added to his equipment, and finally a pair of boots which my sergeants managed to buy, somehow. He was not allowed to take these clothes home needless to say for they would have disappeared into the thin air overnight. When off duty he returned to his original tattered garment but immediately on his arrival was ordered to wash and change, which he did with great ceremony by the open doorway to the wide-eyed amazement of the crowd of native children who gathered to watch. He was the envy of every child for miles around as he stood fully uniformed and apparently unconcerned at the entrance to the warehouse,

pretending to be sublimely unaware of the presence of the hordes of whispering youngsters who squatted on the other side of the road as with an unwarranted air of authority Charlie ordered grown men to move along and not block the doorway, or called to one of them to enter and report to the duty sergeant for registration.

But the boots were a sore trial to one whose feet had never known restraint and captivity. The first day they were given to him he wore them without complaint but after that he only stepped into them when he was standing idly at the door, removing them at once the moment he had to go to any place, even if only a few yards away. Once having been shown the way of it he polished them several times a day with immense energy and gusto and exhibited them with pride to all who came near, but after that first experiment he never wore them other than to stand still in.

Charlie and my staff carried on long and involved conversations, although how they did so I could never quite fathom since my sergeants knew no Kibile dialect and he knew nothing except that, and it was through him that we learned of the coming Feast of Aid-el Kibir, the 'Mutton Feast.' On that day, the 70th day of Ramadan, everything was given up to eating and singing and no man worked from the rising of the sun until the rising of the sun the day that followed.

Yet it appeared on further questioning that although no man might work and all men would sing it did not follow that all men would eat: that it seemed was the prerogative of the rich and since Charlie's family were wretchedly poor the feasting would not be for them. That was something my staff would not tolerate and clubbing together they collected between them six hundred francs and bought a sheep in the native market place; a miserable looking, bony specimen it is true, but still – a sheep. Throughout the day they kept the poor beast hidden away and then, as Charlie was about to leave and return home in the evening, they made a presentation of it to him. Never in his wildest imaginings had Charlie ever thought he would possess such wealth.

Perhaps when he was a grown man, if fortunes came his way, he might one day have a tenth or even a quarter share in a sheep, although this seemed to be unduly ambitions and not to be pondered on outside the realm of day dreams, but a whole sheep, and on the eve of the Feast of Aid-el-Kbir too! He did not thank them, but in this he was not guilty of ingratitude. At the outset he had not rightly understood what these white soldiers were telling him. He looked from one to another of them trying his best to interpret their wishes and learn what it was they wanted him to do with animal whose halter they had placed in his hand, anxious to please yet uncomprehending.

He took a lot of convincing – and then there were no words he could use to express the immensity of his gratitude, his awe at such unbelievable generosity. Still looking from face to face for assurance he started dragging the bleating animal along the street whilst at the doorway my men stood laughing and rubbing their stomachs to convey the wish that he would have an enjoyable feast. They were still at the open

door, smoking, chatting, enjoying the cool of the night when a few hours later a small party of Arabs loomed up out of the darkness.

"'Ello. 'Ello. What's all this about?" I heard my sergeant major asking. "These wogs 'll end up in prison if they ain't careful, being out after dark like this. They know there's a curfew in force. Well, blimey, its young Charlie. What do you want, Charlie boy?"

Very solemnly Charlie presented to the sergeant major an old tin pan from which, when he removed the dirty cloth which covered it, there came a cloud of steam and an evil, pungent stench. Laboriously he explained that those with him were the men of his family, his father, the father of his father, the brothers of his father and the other sons of his father.

"And this 'ere 'orrible looking 'ogwash, Charlie? What might this be intended for?" my Sergeant Major asked.

Once again the long, involved explanations were made. From the entrails and most succulent part of the sheep, Charlie explained, the womenfolk had prepared this delectable dish which, before a mouthful of the feast was touched by his family, must first be partaken by the giver. This was the custom and to fail to adhere to it would bring much disgrace upon them.

"Ee! Ah doan't think Ah could stomach that stuff," said the Sergeant Bartlett. "If you was to ask me Ah would say they hadn't cleaned the beast first before cooking it."

"I am no a-arsking of you, Sergeant Bartlett, I'm a-telling of you," answered the Sergeant Major sternly. "You will get you spoon and eat some of this much and pretend to like it. What is more I will do likewise and so will you other Sergeants." My Sergeant Major was not only a disciplinarian but a very wise man with considerable knowledge and understanding of the working of the native mind.

With much ceremony and every indication of enjoyment, despite the nausea that threatened to overcome them, my staff sampled the foul smelling dish whilst the natives stood around their mouths watering in anticipation of the moment when their turn to share the feast arrived. Mercifully, my NCOs were not expected to do more than sampling gestures and custom and honour being satisfied the Arabs set out on their return journey to their village.

"Sergeant Bartlett," said my Sergeant Major, "You had better see these 'ere men get back safely and ain't pinched on the way 'ome. If anybody stops you and wants to know why they is out after dark tell 'em these natives 'as been doing a job for the Major. Oh, an' just one other thing, Sergeant. Don't 'ang about on the way to finish off the basin of soup."

My Sergeant Major's humour tends to be a little heavy at times.

A GIFT OF TONGUES

A new development of the war was being planned and the ADL at Allied Force Headquarters had warned me to hold myself in readiness to move at short notice to take part in it. Your establishment, as he told me, will be two subalterns, one Sergeant Major, six Sergeants and a batman-driver-clerk. Only the 'Foyer Civique' could have thought up that

batman-driver-clerk combination and long experience has taught me that if a man could drive the betting as that he would be a lousy batman and a quite incompetent clerk, and that in any event, whatever his capabilities, no one man could satisfactorily carry out all those duties in a day restricted to twenty-four hours.

However, that was a minor point. For the greater part of a year I had done my own clerical work, I or one of the others could drive the jeep, and it was to be hoped the man would not be too useless as a batman.

What was important was the six Sergeants. In the specialised work we were to carry out they were the backbone of my team, and fortunately the ADL had been able to assure me that they had been hand-picked and were top quality. They were to report to me in the course of a few days and I awaited their arrival with interest. With a light heart I set about winding up the job I was on and preparing for the bigger one that lay ahead.

My Sergeants reported for duty and I had all six paraded before me in my office for interview. Quickly I glanced down the nominal roll and posting order which one of them had silently handed me – Serjeants Bodnaras, Ardines (recruited in Algiers 16 May 43 real name 13809823 Hoyos Abilio RUIZ alias Julio ARDINES), Swatkiwski, Dahler, Orchudesch and Badanelli, I read. Not much of a clue here as the where our secret destination was to be. Could be any place in Europe.

"Good morning, sergeants," I said. "I understand we are all to go on a little picnic together so we might as well get to know one another straight away. You have been travelling together for the last two days so will have teamed up by this. I am your Commanding Officer for this new show and I've little doubt you will soon learn my peculiarities, what I like and don't like in my NCOs and what I expect from you. To start off with I'd like to know which of you is which, and I'll just take down some particulars got my own records. Which of you is Sergeant Bodnaras?"

One man stepped forward and gave me an untidy salute, which coming from a senior NCO annoyed me. "Sergeant Bodnaras, sir," he said. There was something strange about them all which puzzled me. When I had addressed them their eyes had the attentive but non-understanding look one sometimes notices when talking in a subdued voice to those very hard of hearing. But my immediate attention was in Sergeant Bodnaras. His unsoldierly salute had irritated me I knew that I was frowning at him.

"How long have you been in the army, sergeant?" I asked.

"Sir?"

"I asked you how long you had been in the army, sergeant," I repeated sternly.

"Oh, yes, sir."

"What is wrong with you man? Don't you understand plain English?"

"H'English! Yes, I spik. Goof." He smiled engagingly.

My God, I thought. The man hasn't understood one word I've said. I wonder if any of them have! I let my eyes travel along the line from one end to the other.

"Has any one of you the foggiest notion what I've been saying in the last few minutes?" I asked.

They looked at me uncomprehendingly, silent.

"Do any of you speak French?" I asked in that language. Two of them indicated that they did and I heaved a sigh of relief. Now we can get somewhere, I thought thankfully. Sergeant Badanelli, an Italian seemed to understand my French better than the other and I used him as an interpreter.

But it was tough going. Invariably it took three of them to get an answer out of the fourth but in the end I got my records straightened out. Here is a copy of it:-

Serjt Bodnaras - Rumanian
Speaks Rumanian & Czech

Serjt Ardines - Spanish
Speaks Spanish & French

Serjt Swatkowski - Polish
Speaks Polish & German

Serjt Dahler - German
Speaks German & Polish

Serjt Orchudesh - Czech
Speaks Czech, German & Italian

Serjt Badahelli - Italian
Speaks Italian & French

Their length of service in the British Army varied from three to six weeks. All had been released from concentration camps on the Franco-Spanish border and spent two or three years in confinement there and in other centres in Europe. None could speak English and the only thing they had in common was an intense hatred of Germany and Italy.

I sent them away whilst I puzzled things out. Ardines and Badanelli I could converse with direct, although occasionally I had to use Badanelli to get some of my French across to the Spaniard. To speak to Bodnaras I needed Badanelli who translated my French into Italian to Orchudesch who, in turn, translated the words into Czech which Bodnaras knew slightly. To speak to Swatowski I needed Badanelli, Orchudesch and Dahler. To speak to Dahler I needed Badanelli and Orchudesch, and to speak to Orchudesch I needed Badanelli. Sergeant Badanelli was obviously my key man, with Sergeant Orchudesch as the second string.

To put it mildly I was intrigued. Like most soldiers in Africa it has seemed to me that Italy was the next obvious move, but clearly there was a deeper scheme afoot. Had we been going to Italy I would not have needed this League of Nations for I knew well that back in my old Training Centre in the west of England we had trained two companies of British-Italians who spoke both languages fluently. These companies would be now have a score of good NCOs with three years British Army training who could be flown or shipped out to Africa at short notice. If this team of mine was any indication we were to try a thrust somewhere further east, in the Balkans probably, a daring and ambitious project. To get in one the ground floor in a show like this was a terrific stroke of luck and I was buoyed up with excitement, and more than a little proud to have been AFHQ's choice.

When orders finally came to report to Algiers with my new team I could not get

there quickly enough. Of my two subalterns one, Langer, (240968 Hans Peter LANGER, commissioned 20 Aug 42, joined Civ Labour from 337 (A) Coy Sep 43, tos OC 2917 CLU in Jan 46) was a first class man and something of a linguist which was an additional asset. I entered the ADL's office all agog to learn where our destination was to be. The ADL was something of a playboy and fond of his little joke so I knew he was only leg-pulling when he told me we were bound for the Salerno landings and the invasion of Italy.

"That was what I'd expected, sir, before you sent those sergeants to me," I laughed back at him. "But after they arrived I realised that I had guessed wrong."

"But that is where you are going, Rhodes," he assured me seriously. "We want you to nip into Naples the moment we've winkled the German out of the place and start operations immediately."

I was dumbfounded. It couldn't be, it just couldn't be.

"Do you really mean that?" I asked. He nodded.

"But those Sergeants, sir," I protested.

"You told me they were all handpicked. They would be completely useless as a liaison between Italian civilians and British units. There isn't one of them speaks English and only two of them speak Italian."

"They'll shake down alright," he assured me breezily. "Don't take things so seriously, old boy. You'll make a jolly good job of it, I know you will."

Even after a year's experience of the "Foyer Comique" I could hardly believe my own ears. There was a big job of work to be done and we had to get cracking the moment we could enter Naples. Shake down! My God, there wasn't time to shake down. No time for training these NCOs with only an average of a months service in the army. No time to teach them English. The utter stupidity of it appalled me. The Italian campaign had not come upon us suddenly, there must have been weeks of warning at AFHQ, and all the time the NCOs who should have been earmarked for the job were there at home in England, wasted, utterly wasted. I raged, knowing the uselessness of it even as I did so.

"I never knew such a man for creating difficulties," the ADL told me airily. "Forget your blasted Sergeants and snap into it. We've got complete confidence in you at AFHQ, old chap, or you can be sure we'd never give you a job of this size. It's going to be the biggest thing we've tackled yet. Now about transport –"

It was no use arguing. That was the brush off. We did the job, of course. Four men doing the work of ten; working from daybreak until long after dark, seven days a week, knowing things weren't being done as well as they should have been but impotent to do more in the circumstances; enviously watching our American opposite numbers with staff many times as large, most of them Italian-Americans who were as much at home in Naples as they were in New York. And all the time those Sergeants sat around on their backsides, useless, eating rations, doing nothing. Only one of them, Orchudesch, even attempted to earn his pay, and he was the only one who remained with me to the end. The others were eventually, after some weeks,

'returned empty' to Algiers – and without their stripes. It wasn't their fault; they should never have been selected for the job in the first place. They were not responsible for the work that was left undone and the hundreds of pounds of British taxpayers money that was wasted on them. It seems that a certain amount of lunacy of this nature must take place in war-time. But I shall never, never understand why.

PRIVATE ROSENZWEIG

Before leaving Algiers for the Italian campaign I had a second interview with the ADL at Allied Force Headquarters, this time about my batman-driver-clerk.

"The chap seems willing enough," I admitted, "Except that he thinks 'batting' is below his dignity, he drove a laundry van or something of that sort before the war, and he is damn nearly illiterate which cramps his style as a clerk. I suppose you know he still makes a cross in his pay-book because he can't write his name? I'm not worried about a batman, we officers will have to look after ourselves, but I am about someone to do the paper work.

Because of that useless bunch of NCOs you've foisted on to me my Sergeant Major is going to have to do three Sergeants work for a living which means that I can't have him sitting around in an office."

The ADL was all magnanimity, flowing over with big-hearted generosity.

"My dear old boy, go along to the Alien Company and pick any man you want. I'll let the OC know you're coming. You'd better get out there right away as you haven't got much time to spare before you get on the road. I'm sorry about those Sergeants but there's no time to do anything about them now. Good bye, old boy, and good luck."

The OC of the Alien Company produced half a dozen men he thought would suit me, but either they were not anxious to get back into Europe or they were minus one or two qualifications necessary and my optimism was beginning to ooze when Private Rosenzweig was sent in for interview.

He was short in stature, aged about 40, and almost bald. I put the proposition to him.

"Because of security reasons I cannot tell you where we are going, except that it is somewhere in Europe. And I don't want any man with me who does not volunteer for the job. What languages do you speak?"

"I spik the Sherman most fluent. I spik mit the h'excellence der French. The Italian I spik ferry goot.

A liddle of the Slovak, I spik, und like as you listen the h'English I spik shust like der h'Englishmans."

"What were you before the war; in business, I mean?"

"Sair, perfore Hitler I haf mine own pisness in Hambour. Der h'egsport trade am I in. comes Hitler – no longer I der pisness haf." He shrugged his shoulders, "I am a Jew."

"How do you feel about going back into Europe?" I asked.

"Sair, pack into Sherman to go I am afraid. In Hamburg I haf der sister, der h'onckle undt der h'aunts. Eef I am a prisoner taken der Gestapo take undt kill my family."

"Then you will not volunteer to go with

me, perhaps to Germany?"

"Sair, can I in anutter name go I to Sherman will go wit' you. Den I am no longer for my family afraid. For mineself still I am afraid, but I will go. Sair, I am not a prave mans." He shrugged his shoulders apologetically.

I liked the little man. It wasn't only that he had the qualifications I needed, but he had guts. He had every reason to be afraid. Hadn't he already spent two years in a concentration camp?

That gave him enough reason in itself, more reason for fear than most of us has and we were afraid, too, sometimes but not honest enough to admit it. I told him that if he liked to come with me I would be glad to have him, and he marched out of the room with half an hour in which to pack his kit, his thin shoulders swaggering in a most un-soldierlike manner, and at least half an inch added to his stature.

Private Rosenzweig became my 'Admirable Crichton.' There was nothing he would not tackle if asked; more important, he did most jobs that were waiting to be done without being asked.

His one ambition was to render good and faithful service and few men have fulfilled an ambition so completely.

No day was too long, no job too menial, and his work was done in no spirit of subservience but in that of quiet dignity. In the appalling transit camp a few miles out of Oran where we stayed a few days prior to embarkation he was a godsend to me and my subalterns.

When, to begin with, the sandy waste was a burning fly-pestered hell it was Private Rosenzweig who made life bearable with little attentions and kindness which were certainly not in his line of duty as a clerk to the unit, and when a couple of days later the rains came and the camp became a swamp of red ooze it was again Private Rosenzweig who rescued pieces of our kit as they floated away in the stream which flowed through our tent and returned them cleaned in so far as they ever could be made clean again, with a cheery, "Sair, h'egscuse, plis."

The day before we embarked I took him into Oran with me to visit the British NAAFI there. This would be our last opportunity, perhaps for months, to buy those small luxuries which are so greatly valued on active service.

I carried a list of things my officers and men wanted, chocolate, toilet articles, writing paper and a host of other items.

I proffered to my assistant in payment notes in British Military currency which was all we had. But the NAAFI wasn't taking British money.

American currency, yes, with pleasure, but if we could not pay in dollars then we could not have the goods.

Once again the good Rosenzweig came to the rescue, producing from the inner recess of his battledress blouse the dollars that were so badly needed. Quite irregular, of course.

Orders had been to convert all the money we had into military currency, yet since the welfare of my officers and men was at stake I was strangely blind to my clerks apparent oversight.

On the landing beaches of Salerno, where stores were piled mountain high in hopeless confusion over a few hundred

acres of shore, it was the now invaluable Private Rosenzweig who traced and stood solitary guard over my unit equipment.

The early days in Naples were hard going. We desperately needed Italian civilian labour for British military installations, and it was my job to supply it, but the Americans had taken over the civil labour office and its large, efficient staff and were, not unnaturally, diverting all manpower to meet US Army requirements. Private Rosenzweig found a solution to that.

Surreptitiously, in the dark mornings of those late autumn days, he attached himself to the end of the long queue outside the American Labour Office and by promises, wheedling, cajolery and bribery siphoned off enough of their supply to meet our most urgent needs.

Week by week he was perfecting his English and although the accent was still atrocious his command of the language advanced by leaps and bounds.

He was, of course, too good a man to remain long a private soldier and when the opportunity came to get rid of the useless, 'hand picked' Sergeants who had been wished on me in Algeria Private Rosenzweig became Sergeant Rosenzweig, one of the hardest working and certainly the proudest Sergeant in the British Army.

Slowly the campaign in Italy moved northwards with the move into Germany becoming a possibility Rosenzweig decided it was high time he changed his name and removed all traces of his former identity.

The machinery existed in the army overseas for this to be done and one day he presented himself before his OC.

"Sair," he said. "I wish to make application to change my name of Rosenzweig and to take an English name."

"Have you decided on the name you wish to assume, Sergeant?"

"Yes, sir. I vill Louis Ross-Sweigen pecome."

"But, good God, man, that isn't an English name. You might as well remain Rosenzweig."

"Sair. I haf considered this way. If I am galled Ross-Sweigen andt you vish to sent me as an English Sergeant amongst British troops den I am Sergeant Ross. On ze udder handt, if you sendt me amongst Shermans I pecome Sergeant Sweigen. Zat is goot reons, yes?"

Our paths separated, as is the way of the army, and I last saw him in Florence carrying proudly a Sergeant Major's crown on his sleeve.

By 1946, when he was demobilised and reverted again to the status of a stateless person, with many regrets that his British army service did not entitle him to acquire British nationality, he had to the best of my knowledge performed no acts of heroism or won any decorations for bravery, which is not surprising for his lot was not cast in the thick of the fight, but I do know that for four years he voluntarily gave to England very loyal and cheerful service.

In Vienna today is an alert little business man. Very bald and with an excellent command of the English language he walks with a queer shoulder swinging strut that belies any suggestion of military service.

Amongst his business associates he is known as Herr Ross, but I shall always remember him best, and with affection, as Private Rosenzweig. ■



Collectors Corner

Welcome to our new Collectors Corner page, where I will feature various Pioneer related items that I have stumbled across. Also if you have purchased any Pioneer items, send a picture in and I will feature it below!

Report: Paul Brown
Pictures: Paul Brown

I HAVE been collecting cap badges from an early age and thought it was about time I put together Pioneer Cap badges and cloth badges with the view to getting a complete collection and getting them framed.

Little did I know that there are actually more badges than you may think and over the course of the next few issues I will go through these badges and at the same time feature other Pioneer related items that I have stumbled across. Also if you have stumbled across a Pioneer item, send a picture in and I will feature it below.

Just out of curiosity I thought I would see what the colours used on this page which are CMYK versions of Brunswick Green and Scarlet Red looked like in print.

These are the two colours of the RPCA. The original colours were in fact Wine Red and Apple Green, however due to the short supply of cotton during WW2 the colours Brunswick Green and Scarlet Red were kept and became the official colours thereafter.

However the RPCA Committee in 1948 decided to use the older colours for the standards, for which there are 168 in total.

Anyway enough waffling about colours, lets get on with Collectors Corner!

I am going to start with badges and go way, way back. Let us start with WW1.

During WW1, several large 'coolie' Corps were raised: CHINESE LABOUR CORPS on the Western Front, EGYPTIAN LABOUR CORPS in Middle East etc. After 1915 many of the Service or Kitchener Battalions became PIONEER BATTALIONS, paid extra as specialists, and in 1917 a non-combatant LABOUR CORPS was formed, disbanded in 1922.

From 1917 until the end of WW1 the Chinese Labour Corps came to Europe and risked their lives for the war effort and their vital contribution has been largely ignored.

A total of about 140,000 Chinese workers served on the Western Front during and after the War. Among them 100,000 served in the British Chinese Labour Corps.

They dug trenches, built roads and railways, unloaded munitions and carried our many other tasks essential for keeping the British Army supplied with troops and equipment.

At least 2,000 members of the CLC died during WW1, some even during the flu pandemic that broke out at the end of the conflict.

Those who died, classified as war casualties, were buried in several French and Belgian graveyards in the north of France. The largest number of graves is located at

the Chinese Cemetery of Noyelles sur Mer close to the Somme estuary in France.

I picked up a Chinese Labour Corps (CLC) Cap badge earlier this year (one on left)



However, unfortunately, I am pretty convinced that the one I bought is a fake. The one on the right above is from the Flanders Field Museum. You will notice that the typeface is different (it is less rounded). You will also note that the full points below are not rounded and the last one is not in line. They are very scarce and demand high prices.

The General Service Cap Badge was formed in 1914 for Specialists and those not allocated to other Corps. It was worn by the Labour Corps until they adopted their own crowned crossed pick and rifle badge.



Did you know T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) wore the GS Cap badge and also Walter Freud (grandson of Sigmund Freud).

Below we have the cap/cloth badge, collar badge and GC buttons of the Labour Corps. They were formed on 21st February 1917 to relieve the fighting services of duties which they had formerly carried out on returning from the front line for 'rest' periods and to assist the Services carrying out their work. This Corps was disbanded in 1922.



In the 1915-1919 Pioneer Service Battalions, formed from infantry ORs wore regimental caps and titles, but pick and rifle collars in pairs. Officers, the same, regimental collars below. You will notice that the ORs and the Officers have slightly different dies.



I hope you enjoyed this new feature, next time we will delve into WW2 and beyond. ■

Pioneer Finds...



■ The old man picked up this lovely hand painted/carved tray. We believe this dates to WW1.



■ I bought the above cigarette case for the old man some years ago. I think it is Indian Pioneer Corps? It has an incorrect spelling of 'Vincit'



■ Dougie Millar picked up a Pioneer fire bucket! The logo is WW2, but the bucket is much older.



■ A good selection of Pioneer Corps Sweetheart Brooches that the old man has collected



Bertie loved the Pioneers they were his favourite...

A WHILE ago I asked about a certain officer who I thought was a maj Swords, your good self informed me it was I in actual fact Maj Spears. A short story about Remembrance at Westminster Abbey in 1986.

While I was a young NCO stationed at RPTC I was volunteered to represent the Corps at the garden of Remembrance along with Maj Spears, We travelled to London in a black military ford escort estate myself as driver and Maj Spears keeping me right as we hit the city of London. We changed into our best dress uniforms at this beautiful old building which I think was part of the RPC Association (Ed note: this was 51 St George's Drive which we sold in 2005) and then made our way to Westminster.

Once at the Abbey we were directed to our position just in front of the RPC small poppy covered crosses in the garden.

When all the chit chat subsided every one was standing at ease as the Queen mother and her entourage were approaching the Garden, slowly but surely they were making their way up the line of all the representatives of regiments etc,

Soldiers coming to attention and saluting as Her Royal Highness approached for an exchange of words.

Continuing on up the line the Queen Mother has this big smile on her face and walks to where we are standing, myself and Maj Spears have to our right the life Guards and to our left the blues and royals, this explains the big smile then.

What happened next will stay with me for the rest of my life,

The Queen Mother came straight to Maj Spears and myself, talk about shock? I'm shitting myself here, we come to attention and salute, the Queen Mother only grabs my hand and shakes it and then whispers in my ear, Bertie loved the Pioneers they were his favourite regiment his favourite, she squeezed my hand for what seemed like an eternity and I replied thank you ma'am stood back and saluted. Her Majesty continued on through the garden.

After it was over and we were able to relax Major Spears was laughing and smiling like a Cheshire Cat, I asked him why he was laughing and he said, did you not see the look on the Guardsmen's faces as the Queen Mother approached us and not them, I think he enjoyed that, I then asked him who Bertie was, when he told me I had a sense of immense pride, I then told Maj Spears what her Majesty had whispered in my ear.

So from the Queen Mother herself, The King his Royal Highness George VI his favourite regiment was the pioneers.

I dropped Maj Spears back at the Association building while I made my own way back to RPCTC smiling all the way in this shitty little army black escort.

Martin Thomas

The WO2 taking the parade was proud to have Chuka Khan on his parade square

THE FOLLOWING are memories of being on tour in Northern Ireland. I did two and a bit tours, the bit was an emergency tour tacked on to the end of a roulemont tour due to the outbreak of the Gulf War and our relief being cancelled.

All my tours were at Kinnegar, I was in 187 Coy and worked with men from 187, 206 518 and 522 Coys. There were some great blokes and we had some great times. I know there was a very serious side to NI tours and we should never forget the sacrifices and loss that it caused, but my own experience of being on tour was a taste of "real" soldiering and adventure.

We were the Guard Force at Kinnegar working 24 hrs on and 24 hrs off with one extra man on each shift. It meant that every three weeks you got a day off (your 24 hr off, then your day off followed by your next 24 hour – 3 days in a row). We managed the main gate, carried out escort duties and did local confidence foot and mobile patrols in Hollywood and East Belfast. These tours took place between 1989 and 1991.

On one of these tours the Guard Commander "Yorki" (I will not give his full name in case people disapprove) had the idea to keep people switched on and keep morale high. It was "The Dick on Head", dick on head at the time was a well-known saying about honey traps – it was a warning not to get too drunk and forget where you are and what you are doing and definitely not to wander off to somewhere you don't know, especially being encouraged to go with a woman who seems very fond of you.

A log book was maintained and all misdemeanors were entered and those with the most at the end of a three shift period would win the dick. It consisted of a 10" strap on Dildo and was worn on the head with the straps over their ears and under their chin. This award was carried out in the NAAFI over a few beers and it had to be worn for about an hour to the amusement of the other customers.

As I mentioned earlier we had some real characters, one a man from 522 named Tibsy had a unique sense of humour, everyone who met him said the same. There was a Pte Khan a Lancashire lad of Pakistan origin, he was also from 522. He told me about the time at Kineton when they used to parade in coveralls wearing a stable belt. One day he put on his coveralls and someone had written "Chuka" in felt pen across the left-hand side breast pocket, apparently the WO2 taking the parade was delighted to have Chuka Khan on his parade square.

One day, like a fool, I let it slip that I used to work in the building trade so I found myself with the task of hanging a dozen regimental plaques along a corridor in the HQ block. To do this I was given an electric drill that Noah used on the ark and a masonry bit that must of come from a Christmas cracker. If that was not bad enough the walls were of blast proof concrete, so after four hours into a half hour job Pte Gibson came to see me. He brought me a pint and asked why I was not in the NAAFI. As I cleaned up he went off to nose around the empty and unlocked HQ block and returned with a large book. He gave me a pen and said sign here. I did and if anyone ever sees the visitors book that was in use in 1990 you will see that as well as royalty and politicians, wee Giddy and Brummy Moreton also visited the HQ.

As well as the individuals I've mentioned there was Scouse Hughes, he only had one eye – people must remember him and probably know how he had lost his eye. There was Gordie Thompson and many others.

One day I was walking past the travel agents in Hollywood and looked at the flights only specials in the window, so I booked one and flew home for a couple of days. On another occasion I got the train to Dublin and kept my fingers crossed on the way back just in case someone had left a bag of cement or a gas bottle near the train track at Newrey, that would have resulted in a bit of a walk. I used to catch green buses and black taxis over there, it was a bit disconcerting the first time you are in a black cab and it pulls over to pick someone else up while you are in it, but that's how it is there.

I remember just before my first tour and while attending a course at Simpson Barracks a couple of well seasoned lads took me to one side and said something along the lines of, "Listen Ginge, we know that you have only just come out of the TA, but going to Ireland is nothing to worry about, you get a pay rise, you don't have to pay for food or accommodation, just keep your head down and get on with your job and when you come home you will have saved a few thousand pounds."

Well, when I got home I was skint, I'd open a Burton menswear account, taken out an overdraft and got a local girl pregnant, so apart from that they were absolutely right. I loved being a Pioneer. Yours faithfully

N Moreton

(Keep the Pioneer Flame burning= it's a great publication)

Confined to barracks ! Never give up...



■ Pioneer Harry Heddon on his wedding day

I WAS 22668174 HL (Harry) Heddon, having done my National Service in the Depot at Wrexham. I served as a Regimental Policeman and the Commandant's personal bugler from 1952-1954.

At present I am confined to barracks with the fear of corona virus, being in the high risk category as I am 86.

I recently spoke on the 'phone to an old comrade, ex Cpl Neal, who also served in Wrexham at the same time. He is a member of your Association and has sent me some back issues of your newsletters to keep me occupied. I am reading same with interest.

Prior to National Service from the age of 14 I was a member of the Devonshire Regiment Cadet Force, also a bugler in their Corps of Drums and rose to the rank of Sergeant. On call up for National Service I was put in training as a future NCO, but once the powers that be found out my ex cadet record I was asked to join the newly formed Corps of Drums, so when my squad passed out I was already in the Band.

On demob I was given the chance to go back to the Cadet Force as an adult trainer, this I took up and also became their Corps of Drums Band Master. I was then approached by the Devonshire Regiment TA and asked to join their Band and Drums with the option to carry on taking the cadets. This I did and served for many years in which time the Regiment amalgamated with the Dorset Regiment.

On leaving the TA I joined their Regimental Association and was kept in uniform to play at funerals and reunions etc. I used to play last post and reveille at the Cenotaph in London on reunions. On Remembrance days I was in big demand, but am sorry to say my bugles are now laid to rest.

I hope this letter is of interest to ex members of the Corps of Drums. Yours faithfully H Heddon

PS. I enclose some photos which I ask you to kindly return thank you.

Harry Heddon



■ Dougie Durrant

Picture: Dougie Durrant

DURING THESE difficult times lockdown in Lisburn has been very difficult for me. Where my normal routine would be pop to the gym 5 times a week followed by a visit to Mary Peters' track for an hour or two of throwing the shot and discus.

But we were unable to do any training so I had to buy a set of weights for a home workout but like bog-roll any weights for sale were on the black market or at an extortionate price.

Thanks to a plea on Facebook for any loose weights a good friend came up with to 35kg dumbbells which enabled me to do some kind of workout. With a lot of spare time with nothing to do you simply dwell on the past and with the death of two good friends I found myself falling down

into that dark pit of which I had climb out quick as I've been there and done that before and trust me it's not a nice place to be.

I take comfort in that I have 4 dogs and a field to walk them in. I've always had a passion for photography but unable to get out, I messed around with photo-shop and selling a few pictures online.

Life over time came a little less unrestricted which gave me a chance to get in the gym again and get out with my camera. In early September I throw in the Northern Ireland senior championship coming second in the discus and shot, not bad for a 62 year old.

Never give up life's too short.

Dougie Durrant

I now have a wee bit more info

THANKS NORMAN, John Wilson was not just my uncle he was my friend, he was 14 or 15 years older than me but when I was a small boy of about 7 he made a seat on the bar of his bike and took me for miles on it to the coast and to the hills.

When I got older we went walking in the hills (that's a habit I retained all my life, for example I'm 94 but today in this sunny weather I went walking for 5 or so miles in the new forest, where I live.

My father explained where John was buried in Haywards Heath and I often drive there to pay my respects especially on Remembrance Day .

When I saw the picture of his name on the war memorial at Lochgelly where we lived, I was surprised that his regiment was not mentioned, as most other Regiments, I will try to find out why it was not.

Some of my family were killed in the Great War. My great grandfather had 3 sons John Plunkett James Plunkett and my grandfather. James Plunkett was in the RAMC and was killed a couple of months before the end of that war, I managed to find where he was buried in France. John Plunkett was killed in the Navy , he was an AB sailor, I tried to find what ship he went down on but it was difficult to sort out the different department to search. Both their names are on the same war memorial.

I was hoping to pass as much information about my family to my great granddaughter, but I'm afraid she will have to make do with what I can provide.

Norman , it has been kind of you to make the search effort, I now have a wee bit more information.

John Plunkett

Truly amazed

HELLO AGAIN, and well I'm totally amazed. I did not realise you had sent your email so quickly and what you have sent is truly remarkable, I could never have found that information online without your help and myself and my mother are very grateful.

We will be continuing to research I'm guessing for many months to try to make our little folder of my granddads army career. We cannot thank you enough, for my mother to know (and I honestly just printed it for her to read first was lovely). We will be buying the book / books you mentioned and leaving you a donation for your time and knowledge and hope it goes somewhere to help others. Thank you so much Norman.

I'm truly amazed and can't find the words.

Ian Furness

84 years young

HI NORMAN and son. Just a few lines to let you know I'm still here I think, ha ha. Lately I've had a few falls and it's not drink – just as usual my shoes are too big! (I'm still not used to not wearing boots). Got back from hospital with 8 stitches in my head, split bone in my left arm and sprained elbow. It was nice to talk to you the last time I was in Bicester.

When I left the Sgts Mess I walked up to the cookhouse talking to a man I didn't know, when we got there, I asked him if he was coming in and he replied no thank you, I'm going to the Officers' Mess. I didn't know who he was (but he was a lovely man), I was that surprised I didn't think to ask who he was, I wish I had.

Well Norman if I'm still here for the next reunion I will try and come. Sorry about the writing and spelling (dementia). All the best
Ted Frost (84 years young now)

Uncle's Record

HELLO NORMAN, I can't thank you enough for the help, and time you have put in writing out my Great Uncle's service record. It is brilliant, I will now go and try and to find out more information at the places he was stationed. Thank you Norman Regards
Kim Allen

A legend passes



Picture: RPCA Archive

THE FOLLOWING letter was sent to all COs of those who took part in the funeral of WO1 Jenkins MBE: Sir's, Ma'am's, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Please find attached a sincere thank you letter from the family of Mr Jenkins MBE. FUNERAL OF WO1 JENKINS MBE PIONEER 100 YEAR OLD LEGEND

As Head of Trade, I would like to say thank you to all the Commanding Officers who released their Pioneer Soldiers to conduct the funeral of Mr Jenkins. His last wishes had been to have fellow Pioneers to carry his coffin and support his family. We all felt very proud and honoured to be able to facilitate his wish and be there. I appreciate that everyone is busy and the gesture did not go unnoticed by the family.

Given the tight turn around, the lads commitment was second to none. It was great to see that despite them all now part of the wider RLC their loyalty to the old boys of RPC is still undisputed.

I would like to take this opportunity to make a special mention of WO2 (SSM) Soper for working out all the finer details of the day and communicating this to both his family and the funeral director. This ensured a seamless and professional funeral that we can be proud of. Regards R Clarke

"Dear WO1 Clarke, My name is Alision Baynes, the granddaughter of the late WO1 John Jenkins MBE. I am writing to you to express my family's sincere gratitude for the participation of the Pioneers from the Royal Logistic Corps in my grandfather's funeral. This would not have been possible if they were not released by their bosses and this small gesture made a huge difference, the RLC Pioneers gave him a send off that he would truly be proud of.

My grandfather joined the Royal Hampshire Regiment on the outbreak of World War 2, he then joined SOE to conduct beach reccees across France prior to D-Day. He landed on sword beach as a Pioneer Platoon Sergeant and fought in the

Battle of Caen, Battle of the Bulge and was one of the people to liberate the Jewish prisoners held in the concentration camps at Fallingbistle. After the war he joined the local TA regiment and served with them up until his "forced" retirement at 65. He was awarded an MBE for his service in the TA. He recently volunteered at the D-Day experience in Southsea lecturing children of his experiences.

He was selected to be the lead in the D-Day 75 celebrations where he received a standing ovation by the Queen and heads of state! Throughout his life he was a proud Pioneer, and we were all incredibly proud of him. After he passed away on the 17th December 2019, I was asked by my mother to organise the funeral. Despite the Pioneers disbanding, and many of the men being spread all over the country I was amazed by the "Can do" positive response I got from you. At late notice and during Christmas holidays 15 RLC Pioneers stepped up and were released from their duties.

We were all humbled by this, and it was lovely to see the Army family come together for my grandfather. Please pass on my family's gratitude to each of them and to their Units for releasing them. They all conducted themselves to the highest standard, positive comments have been made in the local press regarding their turn out and how they all bought a level of honour and dignity that a D-Day veteran deserves. The ceremony exceeded all our expectations, thanks to the hard work and diligence of you and your team. It is something that will stay with all the family for ever.

Finally, I would like to thank you for presenting my mother with the folded Union Flag, and the original Royal Pioneer badge. It was a very kind gesture and they are both items I know she will cherish. We wish you all the very best and hope to see you at the Pioneer Weekend in June.

Alison

28 years ago...



■ Chris Swift, before and after!

Picture: Chris Swift

ON THIS day 28 years ago (*Ed Note: this was written on Remembrance Sunday*) I was dropped at Epsom Station by mum and dad to start my journey at Depot The Queen's Division, Bassingbourn.

A huge thank you to Chrissie and the

girls for supporting me and to all of you I have met on the way I will raise a glass - definitely some of the best people on the planet. To my Pioneer brothers I salute and thank each and every one of you. Always.

Chris Swift

THE PIONEER

■ **MANY THANKS** for sending me my RPC Newsletter, I was so pleased to see so much work and effort that had been put into this newsletter, thank you. I would like to let you know that the mouse is on page 13 on the right hand side sitting on the metal barrier in front of the blond lady. Yours
JE Rayner.

■ **THANKS FOR** the magazine, it's great. I would also like to thank you for what you've done for me the past few months. Have a nice Christmas and happy New Year. Kind regards
KJ Culley

■ **NORMAN,** , thank you very much for your very quick response and the information you have provided. I do have his service record, but obviously it just contains very basic details. The War Diaries pages are the best information I have so far and are really helpful. Many thanks.
Robert Rudd

■ **MANY CONGRATS** on the magnificent magazine which arrived yesterday – I thoroughly enjoyed reading the various articles, seeing the photos of the various events, so well attended, as well as catching up with those who have sadly passed on. I am sure I speak for 100's of retired Pioneers when I say we owe you and Paul a very big vote of thanks for all your work in producing The Pioneer, organising the various social activities, attendance at the Cenotaph Parade, both the Officer and Sergeants Mess Dinners, not to mention Reunion Wkends and AGMs – the list is endless and simply would not happen without you. My very best wishes for an excellent Christmas and New Year to you and family. Yours in appreciation,
Garry Cooper

■ **THANK YOU,** for the magazine always interesting to read. Yours faithfully
Mrs P Pitt



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

Best photo is one of Billy!

HI DAD,

Have been through all the photographs that we have, trying to pick what I think is the best photograph for the front page.

Unfortunately after trying every photo I keep going back to the same photo and have some bad news for you.

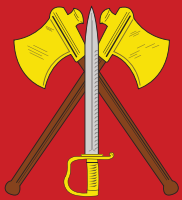
The best photo is the one of Billy in his hi-viz, with his arms folded and tatoos on

display. A cracking photo by Adrian Worth.

Can you also send Adrian a copy of the newsletter when it is finished.

Perhaps you can put some kind of warning before people open their envelope as it us likely to put a lot of people off their breakfasts when they open it! :)

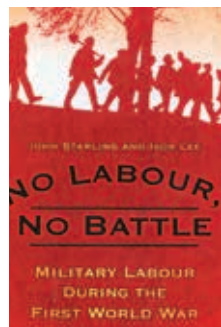
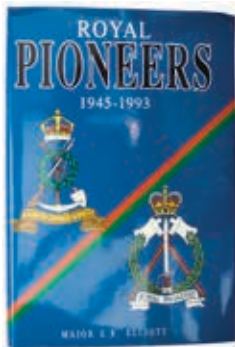
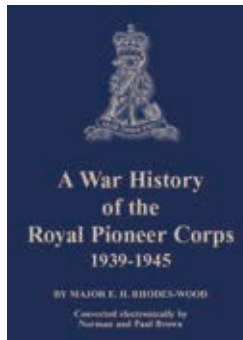
Paul Brown



Association Shop



Please support the RPC Association and place an order today...



VISIT THE NEW PIONEER SHOP AT

www.facebook.com/pg/royalpioneer corps/shop

More items are being added all the time - there are new Pioneer red and green tops and even Pioneer red and green socks!



Pioneers were of great importance in the area

THE RLC received the following email:

Dear Sir

As agreed during our telephone conversation, I send you the necessary information.

I am a teacher in the Primary School "De Duizendpoot" in Meerhout, Belgium. Our old school building is being demolished since we are building a new primary school.

When stripping one of the old classrooms, we discovered wall paintings made during the second world war by British soldiers.

In attachment you will find photographs of these paintings.

What we know about this period is that Meerhout has been liberated by the 15th Scottish Division, the Gordon Highlanders. We think the painter, A.B. Hales was maybe a soldier of the 78 Coy PC (Royal Pioneer Corps?). They were of great importance in the area for the rebuilding of the bridges across the Albert canal.

On the lady's hat we see the letters ATS.

My fellow teachers, the principal and the local community were surprised and charmed by these murals (partly covered sadly enough by paint and wall stucco) and thought maybe we could try and find the painter or his relatives. I've already contacted the British Army, the British consulate and the Imperial War Museum. The latter directed me to you.

I wonder if you could help us find and/

or contact relatives of the painter, or other members of the division?

We have photographs of the murals which I would be happy to share with you.

We would be much obliged if you could help us in any way you can. Yours truly
Nancy Hermans

Ed note: we only had one AB Hales serve in our Corps during WW2 and he was 13113276 Alfred Bertie Hales, date of birth 12 Jun 09. He enlisted at Cambridge and joined 5 Centre Pioneer Corps for training on 5 Mar 42 and served until 20 Jun 46. The diary of 78 Coy shows they served in the following locations after landing in Normandy:

12 Jun Landed in France and moved to NONNANT

7 Aug Moved to LE LION VERT

5 Sep Moved to Belgium – location not shown

24 Jan Moved to Holland – location not shown

7 Mar Moved to Germany

5 Apr Moved to Eibergen Holland

14 Apr Moved to Bentheim

16 Apr Moved to Steinfeld, Germany

19 Apr Moved to Bassom

11 May Moved to Rockeinckel

26 May 45 Moved to Stocken

War Diaries normally show the location of the Coy HQ, they may have had detachments in other locations



Long Lost Trails...

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

PHOTO 155 COY

The photo below right was taken in 155 Coy in 1940 – can anyone recognise any persons in photo, if so please let Darren Gray know (email: tinsoldier101@hotmail.co.uk)

EX SGT JACK OLDHAM

I didn't know that you try to find old serving friends. I am wondering now, at aged 84, if there is anyone who served with me at Burningsstone, 206 Coy Scarborough WOs' or other ranks from 1959 to 9163 ex Sgt Jock Oldham. Contact: adam.oldham@btinternet.com

SGTS MESS, BICESTER

Vince Lucas is trying to obtain a mess photograph taken at the Sgts Mess, Graven Hill in 1989 or 1990. He was promoted the

day of the dinner and he thinks he is the only one wearing No 2 Dress – if you can help please contact RPC Association

NICOLAS BLIGHT

Danny Thomas is trying to find Nicolas who served with him in the Def Coy 1 (BR) Corps, Bielfeld – contact Danny. Thomas385@mod.gov.uk

MARK LEVY

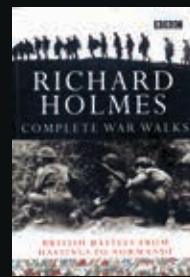
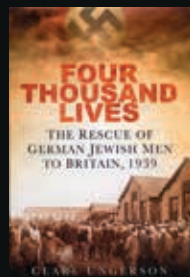
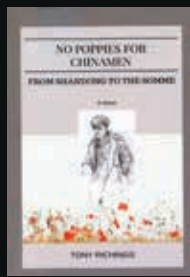
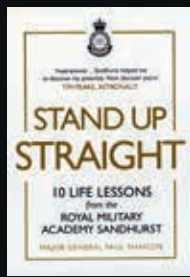
You will notice on the Last Post page that unfortunately Mark died on 6 Nov 20 at the early age of 55.

His nephew Nathanael Gardiner-Levy is trying to contact anyone who (in his own words) "Has any nice memories of him".

Could you please send them to Ngardiner.levy05@outlook.com

**TRYING TO FIND A LOST PIONEER?
THAN SEND US THE DETAILS AND
WE WILL PUBLISH THEM HERE...**





The Human Kind

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

THIS BOOK which is a series of short stories was published in 1953 is one of the books by Alexander Baron (the most famous of which was "From the City, From the Plough"). It is understood that some of the stories are based on his experiences whilst serving in the Pioneer Corps during World War 2. He was 13042620 Pte Joseph Alexander Bernstein who joined 3 Centre Pioneer Corps for training on 25 Jul 40 and initially

served in 172 Company. He was posted to 243 Company on 14 December 1941 and saw service in Sicily and Italy before returning to UK in time for D Day. He landed on 6 June 1944 with his Company. The following is an extract from the War Diary of his unit on that day: 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. He served until 19 February 1946.

THE HUMAN KIND
AUTHOR: ALEXANDER BARON
ISBN: 978-0-948238-47-5

Stand Up Straight

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

THIS book shares ten simple but transformative lessons that every officer is taught during their time at the world-famous Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst (RMAS). Modern and counter-intuitive – ranging from making your bed and ironing your shirt to improving resilience, emotional intelligence and grace under pressure – Stand Up Straight draws on first-hand battlefield experiences as well as Sandhurst's key leadership principles. Maj Gen Nanson served as Commandant RMAS and GOC Recruiting and Initial Training Command. During his 30 year career he has served in The Troubles, the Gulf War, the Bosnian War, the Iraq War, and the war in Afghanistan. (Ed note: recommend reading not only for all those who apply to undergo the 44 week officer training course at Sandhurst, but those who wish to improve their leadership skills)

STAND UP STRAIGHT
AUTHOR: MAJOR GENERAL PAUL NANSON
ISBN: 978-1-529-12481-1

Psychic Soldier

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

ALTHOUGH he didn't know it at the time, Bob Curry's life was spiritually guided from the very beginning. When he felt hopeless and stuck in an abusive household, a school trip to an army base showed him which directive to take – paving his way to a fully-fledged career in the British special forces. There he took outstanding risks for the Queen and country alongside the SAS, and was personally commanded by Prime Minister at the time, Margaret Thatcher for his efforts. And though he had been seeing and communicating with the spirit world for many years, it was only later on that he began to recognise the value of this important gift. This inspirational memoir shows how one man went from a childhood of severe abuse to a celebrated and long military career, while nurturing a psychic ability that would go on to help a lot of people all around the world.

THE PSYCHIC SOLDIER
AUTHOR: BOB CURRY
ISBN: 978-1-4997-9888-3

No poppies

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

DURING WW1 140,000 Chinese labourers were contracted as civilians to perform logistical tasks on the Western Front. Captain Charlie Armstrong, a Geordie coal miner, is sent to Shandong where he becomes involved in the recruitment and training of Chinese 'coolies', later sailing back to the Front with a Chinese Labour Corps contingent he helped to train. This is a story of one man's struggle to find his place in life while dealing with the mindless horror of war, and of the men of the fledgling Chinese Republic as they strive for recognition for both themselves and their new nation. Tony Richards is a Chartered Accountant who enlisted in the Australian Regular Army at the age of forty-nine to go to Cambodia with a UN Peacekeeping mission. He developed a specific interest in the CLCs when attending a wedding in Shandong Province.

NO POPPIES FOR CHINAMEN – FROM SHANDONG TO THE SOMME
AUTHOR: TONY RICHARDS
ISBN: 978-152-109-3108

Four Thousand Lives

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

IN NOVEMBER 1938 about 30,000 German Jewish men were taken to concentration camps where they were subjected to torture, starvation and arbitrary death.

These men had been released from concentration camps in the aftermath of the infamous November Programme on the proviso that they would leave Germany immediately, often without their families.

Arriving at Dover in southern England, the men were driven by bus the short distance to a previously disused World War I army camp on the outskirts of the Kent town of Sandwich.

"We were welcomed with jubilation" wrote Lother Nelken in his diary

The Kitchener camp had, over the previous four months, blossomed into a small town housing Jewish male refugees. Many, like Nelken, had been arrested and sent to Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen and Dachau after Kristallnacht.

The camp was the concrete manifestation of a softening of the British government's hardline approach to those fleeing Nazi persecution.

Amid public and parliamentary revulsion at the terrible events of November 1938, and under heavy pressure from the Central British Fund (CBF) for German Jewry (now

World Jewish Relief), the Home Office agreed to admit thousands of Jewish refugees, albeit under stringent conditions. As a result, the Kindertransport saw 10,000 unaccompanied Jewish children brought to Britain.

The rescue itself was a huge logistical undertaking. The CBF had agreed to arrange the refugees' transport and accommodation and, because the men wouldn't be allowed to work, to provide them with financial support while they were in the UK.

The Home Office had also demanded that the men leave Britain and emigrate within 12 months.

The Weiner Holocaust Library holds the original diary of Phineas May, the camp's welfare officer, in which he alludes to the dreadful heartache and suffering endured by the camp residents, plagued by worry about their families.

Also included in the library are examples of the camp magazines produced by the residents, correspondence and photographs.

This book tells the remarkable story of how the grandes of Anglo-Jewry persuaded the British Government to allow them to establishment a transit camp in Sandwich, East Kent, to which up to 4,000 men could be brought while they waited for permanent settlement overseas.

The whole rescue was funded by the British Jewish community, with help from

American Jews.

Most of the men had to leave their families behind. Would they get them out in time? And how would the people of Sandwich – a town the same size as the camp – react to so many German speaking Jewish foreigners?

There was a well-organised branch of the British Union of Fascists in Sandwich. Lady Pearson, the BUF candidate for Canterbury, was President of the Sandwich Chamber of Commerce and Captain Gordon Canning, a prominent Fascist and close friend of Oswald Mosley, lived there and he and his grand friends used to meet there to play gold. This background adds to the drams of the race against time to save lives.

This book is not just a story of salvation, but also a revealing account of how a small English community reacted to the arrival of so many German Jews in their midst.

(Ed note: this camp was later to become No 3 Centre Pioneer Corps, a large number of these "Aliens" were later to join the Pioneer Corps)

**FOUR THOUSAND LIVES –
THE RESCUE OF GERMAN
JEWISH MEN TO BRITAIN, 1939**
AUTHOR: CLARE UNGERSON
ISBN: 978-0-7524-9793-9

Complete War Walks

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

RENOWNED historical Richard Holmes takes us on a fascinating journey through time to visit battlefields in Britain, northern France and Belgium, vividly recreating the atmosphere of their bloody and turbulent history.

Dates such as 1066 and battle names such as Waterloo and Dunkirk may strike a chord of familiar nostalgia, but the details of the historic events associated with them often remain vague or forgotten. From medieval Britain to the end of the Second World War, twelve battles including Hastings, Agincourt, Bosworth and the Somme were chosen by the author for their historical and political importance,

representing such major wars as the Wars of the Roses, the English Civil War, the Napoleonic Wars and First and Second World Wars.

Many of these battles have created their own enduring mythology as a result of their far-reaching consequences, and many of these decisive campaigns have battlefields that remain striking to this day.

With his expert knowledge of weapons and warfare, and using specially commissioned maps, he provides a clear picture of the events that led up to each battle, the conflicts themselves, and the people who fought them.

Using practical "views of the field", he travels the battlefields as they exist today, pointing out their places of interest, paying tribute to those who fought there, and bringing history to

life.

(Ed note: I received the following extract from an email when supplying information to a family member of a Pioneer:

"as a point of interest if you have seen the cover to the book " War Walks " by Richard Holmes my Grandfather is actually on the cover, he is the soldier crouched holding his rifle , my grandmother kept the original newspaper cutting for years in a frame which I now have, it's actually a film still from an IWM film called The True Glory. Every time I watch it I keep pausing the film. Kind regards Gary Breckons.)

COMPLETE WAR WALKS
AUTHOR: RICHARD HOLMES
ISBN: 0-563-48717-8



The Last Post

Since the last newsletter it is with great sadness to report the following deaths

DAVIES DAVIE (23388718) EX PTE OCT 19 (AGED 81). SERVED 26 SEP 56 – 18 SEP 58

HARRIS TERENCE (24137159) EX CPL 20 JAN 20 SERVED 1969 – 1991

LINES KEITH COLIN (24406638) EX SGT 15 FEB 20 (AGED 62) SERVED 1976 – 518 Coy, 23 Regt and 103 Sqn 168 Regt (V)

WEST MN (MAT) (24729094) EX PTE 13 MAR 20 (AGED 45) JOINED 1985

LANKSTEAD FREDERICK SIDNEY (24116780) EX PTE 19 MAR 20 (AGED 69) JOINED 1968

LINGWOOD ANTHONY WILLIAM (2342787) EX PTE 7 APR 20 (AGED 79) – EX ADEN VETERAN

DUNNING GARY (25011713) EX SGT (AGED 49) SERVED FROM 1992-2012

HARVEY JOHN EDWARD (23682146) EX PTE 10 APR 20 (AGED 79) SERVED 1959 – 1968

WALLBANKS MARK STANLEY (24603586) EX PTE 12 MAY 20 (AGED 57) SERVED 1981 – 1984

JONES MARTIN CASE (23262950) EX PTE 15 JAN 20 (AGED 82) SERVED DEC 57 – NOV 59

SULLIVAN ARTHUR (13056535) EX CPL 16 APR 20 (AGED 100) SERVED JUN 40 – SEP 46

MEAD JAMES WILLIAM (23971945) EX SSGT 17 JUN 20 (AGED 74) SERVED 1964 – 1986

HUNT BRIAN EDWARD (23526752) EX SGT 10 JUN 20 (AGED 82)
Served from 1960 and on leaving the regulars joined the Pioneer TA until Nov 81)

WHARTON JOHN (23534505) EX CPL 26 JUN 20 (AGED 81) SERVED FROM 1958-1960

DESMOND BRIAN (23996325) EX PTE 25 APR 20 (AGED 73) SERVED FROM 1965 – 1977 (EX ADEN VET)

DOWNIE FREDERICK (FRED) THOMAS BEM, (23902672) EX WO2 (AGED 73) SERVED 1962-84.

Awarded BEM in 1979 whilst an instructor at HQ 23 Group Training Cadre.



HENDERSON JAMES STEWART (24686448) EX PTE 6 APR 20 (AGED 51)

Served as a dog handler 1984-1992



O'NEILL TERENCE MICHAEL (24040262) EX PTE (AGED 74) 10 JAN 20 SERVED 19 DEC 74 – 5 DEC 80

DICKSON JOHN JAMES (24075142) EX PTE (AGED 71) 16 MAR 20 SERVED 1972-78

BOWDEN IAN ANTHONY (24338282) EX PTE (AGED 62) 12 DEC 19 SERVED 1970 – 1976

WINN ROLAND (23136058) EX CPL (AGED 83) 19 OCT 20 SERVED 1955-57

LEVY MARK (24829763) EX CPL (AGED 55) 6 NOV 20 SERVED AS RPC, RLC PIONEER AND MPGS

MARK ERIC WILLIAM (13116112) FORMERLY MARK ERICH MEYER (13804176) (AGED 98) SERVED

Served from 15 Oct 40 and promoted Sgt and attached to the Combined Services Details Interrogation Centre until he transferred to Int Corps on 8 Jul 44. He was one of the secret listeners at Trent Park. In 2012 he became the poster boy for Helen Fry's book 'The M Room' republished as 'The Walls Have Ears' in 2019 and he appeared in a television documentary on the secret listeners. At the launch of Helen Fry's book (Ed note: I attended this book launch with Lt Col John Starling) he received a standing ovation after a short speech in which he apologised that he was a little deaf – ironically for a listener!

MARK ERIC WILLIAM (13116112) FORMERLY MARK ERICH MEYER (13804176) (AGED 98)

GIBSON COLIN ROY (24493327) EX CPL (AGED 60) 21 OCT 20 SERVED 1977 – 1993

Paddy McPhillips writes: „A farewell to Gibo- A Pioneer Legend

I was saddened to learn of the passing of



Roland Winn



Mark Levy

an old army buddy who became a very dear friend. Colin Gibson, affectionately known as Gibo!

This is my tribute to you dear friend. Where do I start, I first met up with him at 206 Coy in the 70's. We clicked straight away and everywhere I went Gibo was there too. We would watch each other's backs; it was like me and my shadow. If ever you got into a scrap, whether he was drunk (which was a very usual occurrence) or sober you would always rely on him to be there to help out. Most of our tours were with 518 and 187Coys and included Northern Ireland, Belize, BAOR and beyond. If you were feeling homesick, down or had been in a scrap he was the one to raise moral and have your back to normal. There are many many stories I would like to share about our friend but as this is a family magazine and I can't put X-rated stuff in it I will keep those memories to myself and have a chuckle when I remember them. Little snippets that would definitely be banned by the admin crew (Norman and Paul) lol but Big C in Belize was a corker!!

Some of the quotes I have read on Facebook from fellow Pioneer Vets who served with him have been very moving proving what a lovely chap he was, here are a few. Good times were had sober or drunk! Life and soul of the party! Never a dull moment when he was around! If anyone could raise moral when the chips were down yer man could! Always full of

humour! Fantastic sense of humour! One of the best!

He was this feck off character you could never hate. Always game for a laugh and a funny fella who made you happy at the worst of times. He kept our spirits up and looked out for those that needed a little push here and there.



The corps has lost one of the best characters and I was proud to have him as one of my friends. Gibo you are now at the end of your journey and as the song says "You did it my way(your way). I will leave the last words from your Gibo that I got from his Facebook page " Love me or hate me, once we meet , you will never be able to forget me" I am proud to say you were my friend , one of the best and my life was better for having known you and I certainly won't forget you!!

JENKINS JOHN MBE (13072166) EX SGT 16 DEC 18 (AGED 100) SERVED 15 AUG 40 TO 26 AUG 46 IN 223 COY.

Served from 1 Nov 40 in Pioneer Corps In the Nov 19 Newsletter we published details of him at the 75th Anniversary of D Day. His football club issued the following statement following his death: Portsmouth Football Club are mourning the death of John Jenkins, who has passed away at the age of 100.

The D-Day veteran had worked as a boardroom steward for many years and continued to be a familiar face at Fratton Park after stepping down from the role.

He started supporting the club in 1928 and is one of the few fans to watch Pompey lift the FA Cup at Wembley in both 1939 and 2008.

Chief executive Mark Catlin said: "On behalf of Portsmouth FC, our directors and the Eisner family, we wish to offer our sincere condolences to John's family.

"John was a well loved and welcome member of the Pompey family and as recently as the last home game, was in the

boardroom celebrating with others the stories of his life.

"He impacted on the lives of so many and I am sure that the sadness felt at John's passing by all of us at the club today, is being replicated in many places where he had such a positive effect on those he connected with."

Growing up in Southsea, John worked as a Cunard bellboy as a teenager, later becoming a sergeant in the Royal Pioneer Corps.

He took part in the Normandy landings in 1944 and landed on Gold Beach on June 6, as British troops joined Allied forces to begin the liberation of Nazi-occupied France.

John worked as a trolley bus driver after the war, then joined the naval services, where he remained for 35 years.

He played a key role in the commemorations for the 75th anniversary of D-Day last summer, taking to the stage to address the Queen, world leaders and other dignitaries.

John told them: "I was 23 when I landed on Gold Beach. I was terrified – I think everyone was. You don't show it, but it's there.

"I look back on it as a big part of my life, although I was just a small part of what was a very big machine.

"I'm honoured to be stood here in front of so many other veterans. You never forget your comrades because we were all in it together.

"It's right that the courage and sacrifice of so many is being honoured 75 years on. We must never forget."

John celebrated his 100th birthday with a party at Fratton Park last month, with guests including former Pompey chairman Milan Mandaric.

He was played a video showing a compilation of messages from current and former Blues players, managers and staff.



As well as being awarded an MBE and the Legion d'Honneur, John was named Portsmouth Volunteer of the Year in 2016 for his work with the city's 'D-Day Story'.

He also carried the Olympic torch from Fratton Park in 2012 and, three years later, became the oldest person to abseil the Spinnaker Tower.

John will be sadly missed by everyone at the club and our thoughts are with his family and many friends.

TRAVIS STUART (24315881) EX SGT 3 DEC 19 (AGED 64. SERVED 1972 – 1993

An exceptional judo champion who fought in the Olympic Squad for Great Britain. The following newspaper cutting is an example of his skills:

12 Dec 86 – Bicester Advertiser
Medals galore for Pioneers
Army judo enthusiasts based near Bicester grabbed a host of medals when

they took part in two major individual open events.

The 23 Group Royal Pioneers judo squad took part in the Midland Area Open championships held at Birmingham followed a week later by the Western Army Open Championships which took place at Bristol.

In the two events the Pioneers' squad, which gained nine medals, competed against members of judo clubs all over Britain, including many top national Great Britain squad players.

The Pioneers' squad came away from the Midland Area event with five gold medals – Cpl Stuart Travis won the under 95 kilo and open categories and Ptes Kevin Dorse, Jed Rennoldson and Vince Williams each finished top of their points sections.

And by winning the open category, Cpl Travis was considered to be the best player of the championships.

Squad manager, Capt Christ Johnston said, "It was a very successful event for the squad as a whole. Apart from the four gold medal winners, the other six squad players also did exceptionally well in their categories against some excellent and strong opposition."

The other six member of the squad were Ptes Steve Lee, Steve Bailey, Andy Blaylock, Kevin Martin, Darren Pettit and Mark West.

"It was an exceptional effort from three members of my squad –Pte Dorse, who took one of the five gold medals, and also Ptes Pettit and West – because all three are novices and had only been learning judo for about five weeks up until the championships, which was their first major event," added Capt Johnston.

The Pioneers' squad added a further four medals to its haul in the Western Area event.



Cpl Travis took another gold medal by winning his weight category, and both Ptes Dorse and Bailey gained silver medals by being the narrowly losing finalists in the weight section finals.

Pte Williams added to the squad's medal tally with a bronze in his weight category.

Capt Johnston said, "Again all credit is also due to the other players in the squad who fought extremely hard throughout the day and only narrowly missed getting into the medal positions."

**BARRON ROBERT HORNBY (ROB) (11062301)
EX PTE 22 FEB 20 (AGED 98) SERVED 1942 TO
1946.**



The following appeared in the Lancashire Evening Post:

D-Day veteran Bob Barron, who received France's highest military decoration for his part in the Normandy landings, has died in Preston following a short illness.

The war hero, who also fought at Arnhem, the Battle of the Bulge in Ardennes and was amongst the first troops to cross the Rhine into Germany, was 98.

Bob was presented with the Legion D'Honneur in 2016 in a ceremony at Fulwood Barracks. Consul Philip Daniel handed over the medal as a mark of gratitude from the French people. At the time the old soldier said modestly he had only played "a small role in a very large team effort".

"I was lucky to survive the conflict without injury and I always remember, every day, my comrades and friends who weren't so lucky.

"I realise how fortunate I have been over the last 70 years to see Europe grow out of that terrible conflict in freedom and peace."

Preston North End fan Bob, who had supported the club for more than 80 years, died in Finney House care home - his room overlooked the Deepdale Stadium.

Nephew Michael Barron said: "Uncle Bob was a remarkable man. He enjoyed his life to the full. He was someone who had a lot of fun and was a real character.

Sadly he got flu in January and it developed into pneumonia. He was in hospital until three days before he died.

"He was transferred to Finney House and we got him a room overlooking Deepdale. He had supported North End since he was young and the club very kindly gave him a VIP day out at a game not so long ago. He loved it."

Bob was born in Sollom near Tarleton and was called up by the Army in 1942, initially to the Royal Artillery before transferring to the Pioneer Corps.

Their role was to help the Royal Engineers construct temporary bridges at the forefront of the Allied advance across Europe.

On D-Day he landed on Gold Beach near the village of Arromanches. Back in 2016 he recalled how sea sick he and his fellow troops were as they waited for hours in the choppy waters of the Channel to finally reach land.

One of his clear memories of the day was being anchored next to the battleship HMS Rodney as its big guns fired deafening salvos at the German fortifications.

After landing on Gold Beach one of the Pioneer Corps' first tasks was to help construct an emergency airfield between the towns of Tilley and Bayeux. They were

under constant mortar fire as they worked in the open.

Bob was then involved in the battle for Caen before the invasion forces pressed on through northern France. Again the Pioneer Corps helped build bridges and clear obstructions to keep up the Allied momentum.

At the ceremony to present him with the Legion D'Honneur, Bob said he was "deeply moved" by the award and thanked the French president and the people of France for recognising his "small" role in the liberation of their country.

**ATKINS JAMES KENELM MBE (14461136 AND
478949) 13 APR 20 (AGED 92) SERVED 1944 –
1982**

(Ed note: Regimental Associations do not have access to an individual soldiers/officers records we therefore do not hold details of his former service)

"Jimmy" joined 196 Coy as CSM in 1956 and stayed with that unit until promoted WO1 and appointed RSM of 522 Coy in 1958 and then posted to the RPC Depot, Wrexham as RSM in 1959, and was RSM when the Depot moved to Northampton. In 1962 he was awarded the MBE, his citation reads:

"WO1 JK Atkins has been the Regimental Sergeant Major of the Depot, the Royal Pioneer Corps, during the difficult period of transition from a National Service to an all-Regular unit, and his problems of discipline have been considerable.

Not least among his difficulties has been the task of building up a spirit-de-corps peculiar to the Sergeants' Mess of a Regular unit, but he has succeeded in achieving this. He has, moreover, exercised a very great influence for good over the Corporals and men, some three thousand odd, who have served at the Depot over the past three years.

At all times he has placed the Service and his Corps before himself. He sets efficiency as his goal, but it has always been tempered with humanity. In all these activities he has exerted an influence, and achieved an effect, beyond the call of duty, and he is an example to the Warrant Officers of his Corps. His loyalty is exceptional."

In 1961 he formed the Northampton Branch of the RPC Association and organised its first Dinner and Dance at Sywell Airport on 8 Dec 61. (Ed note: it is pleasing to report that this Branch is still active).

In 1963 he was awarded the Long Service and Good Conduct Medal (Ed note: knowing Jimmy's sense of humour and his mischievous nature this was some achievement!).

In 1964 he was posted, again as RSM, to HQ 23 Group RPC, Bicester and stayed at 23 Group when he was commissioned as a QM in 1965.

He stayed at 23 Group when he returned to the Depot (now RPC Trg Centre) as QM in 1969.

In the 1970's the Trg Centre held a large Bonfire and Firework Display in 5 Nov, in 1973 one of the soldiers on camp decided to light the bonfire the day before. Jimmy using his many contacts managed to organise the building of a new bonfire that day ready for the display.

In 1974, after 5 years in Northampton, he

returned to 23 Group at Bicester as QM and in that year he was promoted Major.

The following is an extract from the report on the RPC Skill at Arms Meeting 1976:

"Another encouraging feature of the Meeting was the sportsmanship shown by competitors and the almost non-existence of that 'bookmanship' which can mar an event of this nature. Allied to this was the imperceptible way in which the Meeting became a social event. This manifested itself particularly in the evenings in the All Ranks Club – referred to by some as 'Jimmy's Gastatte'. This name stemmed from the hard work put in by Maj Jimmy Atkins in relation to all administrative matters and the excellent results. His one failing was a continual misappreciation of the stocks required to keep the Gastatte in business! He had to send back to Base on three separate occasions to satisfy the customers. "In 1977 he attended a Civil Labour Course and was then posted as Admin Officer HQ 13 Group in Bielefeld and stayed there until 1979 when he returned as QM RPC Trg Centre, Northampton where he remained until 1982 when he finally left the service.

Jimmy always attended the Past and Present Officers Dinner – last year was the first one he could not attend because of illness.

The Corps lost a "character"

There are many stories about Jimmy, the following is an extract from Cloggy Compton's book:

"There was a character in the Corps called Captain Jim Atkins, normally known as Tommy Atkins. In 1056 he had transferred as a SSgt, into the Pioneers from the Parachute Regiment. He had been a PJI (Parachute Jump Instructor) but broke both of his ankles in a bad jump. He soon became one of the two RSMs in the Corps, later receiving a quartermaster's commission in 1961, and was always playing jokes on his colleagues.

After quite a few years as RSM, he knew our family well. Whenever he saw Beryl and myself out shopping in Bicester, he would shout across the street, "Can I carry your bag for you Sergeant Major? Or would you sooner she walked?" Beryl said that she would brain that Jimmy Atkins one of these days."

Whilst QM at the Depot a certain Major had a low sports car who would come into camp and drive under the barrier. Over a weekend Jimmy lowered the barrier – you can imagine the result! ■



And finally...

Head of trade for all Pioneers, SSgt Patterson gets stuck at Sennybridge, Pat Morley on the phone and a Pioneer lawnmower...

Report: Norman Brown / Paul Brown
Pictures: RPCA Archive

CONGRATULATIONS to WO2 Steve Soper on his appointment as Head of Trade for the Pioneers still serving in the Logistic Corps. He has sent in the following message:

It's an absolute pleasure and honour to be writing to you all as the new Head of Trade of the remaining Pioneers still serving. Firstly I'd like to pass on mine and I'm sure all of the guys that are still serving our most sincere thanks to WO1 Russ Clarke for the amazing tenure he put in as HoT, he's certainly made my job easier by handing over a well-oiled machine.

I can't continue without also thanking both Brig D Clouston and WO1 Rob Bierton for their continued support and council, I'm sure between them I'll be kept well grounded.

As an update of the comings and goings of the red and green machine; the past few years have been painfully slow regarding the promotion and posting prospects around the RLC, it finally came to a head late last year where Clarke and Rob managed to strike a phenomenal deal with APC whereby a number of the troops have been offered a career progression lifeline.

In September 2019 a meeting took place in the Corps Central Sgts Mess hosted by APC, where the offer on the table was a transfer in their current rank to a number of other trades around the RLC, that over the past few years have realised what great assets they have by having Pioneers amongst their ranks. Not only the offer of transfer for those with over 4 years colour service remaining, but additionally as part of the deal up to 6 years of a career extension was put on the table, allowing the time to qualify within their new trade and have time to still progress up the promotion ladder.

To date 14 pioneers have taken up the offer of switching to trades such as Driver, Logistic Specialist, and Postal and courier to name a few. Once all the transferees have moved on to start their hopefully successful second careers there will be 32 remaining flying the Red and Green flag proudly across the RLC.

There's no denying that there has been some tough times since the disbandment of 23 Regt in 2014; but at the time of writing we have 8 WO1s, 8 WO2s, 11 SSGts and 19 Sgts and Cpls,

posted across 29 different units. Not too shabby for a trade that now makes up just 0.3% percentage of the 15023 soldiers in the well manned RLC.

I'd like to finish this short update by congratulating the following on their selection for promotion over the past year.

John Patrickson on LE commissioning
Gaz Furlong - WO1 RSM
James Hildreth - WO1
Mike Smith - WO2 SSM
Frank Gerard - WO2
Brian Hinton - WO2
Micky Hart - WO2
Danny Ravenscroft - WO2 SSM
Graham Fisher - WO2 SSM
Everisly Emmanuel - WO2
And finally wishing the following all the best for their future after completion of their colour service in 2019 and early 2020:

Rob O'Hare
Wayne Roberts
Paul Robson
Mark Greenhalgh
John Bell
James Gaylard
Stuart Eason
Scotty Andreis
WO2 Steve Soper

MICK Tickner found a photo of SSgt Patterson in Sennybridge in Feb 99. 518 Sqn was field firing and Pat was part of the safety staff.

Sennybridge is always boggy but on that day he managed to find a particularly boggy bit.



ISPOKE to Pat Morley on the telephone, he sends his regards to everyone and is looking forward to receiving his copy of The Pioneer Newsletter.

When I was going through the picture archive the very same day I stumbled across a picture of Pat! Must be fate! Pictured at Longmoor SF Base. Look forward to seeing you soon Pat.



THE old man gave me his Honda lawnmower to fix. It had multiple large holes either side and was in a sorry state and had seen much better days

After treating the rust, much fibreglass, a service and a paint job, I have now given him it back!





And finally 2...

Ten facts on D-Day, Army Council Instructions, Duty Done, The Table of Death and Dusty !

Report: Norman Brown / Paul Brown
Pictures: Norman Brown / Paul Brown

TEN facts on D-Day. It does not stand for what you think – the term D-Day is used by the Armed Forces to refer to the beginning of an operation. The 'D' stands for 'Day', meaning it's actually short for 'Day-Day' (which is nowhere near as catchy).

2. Britain was not alone. In addition those from the UK, D-Day forces included sailors, soldiers and airmen from the USA, Canada, Australia, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Greece, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland and others.

3. Even the Allied Forces couldn't beat the weather. The D-Day invasion was actually planned for the 5th June, however, in true British fashion, the weather was too bad for the ships to set sail. It was therefore postponed until the day after.

4. Hitler had been preparing. The

D-Day landings weren't a simple matter of invading a series of beaches. They involved breaching Hitler's Atlantic Wall – a series of 'impenetrable' defences stretching 1,670 miles from Norway to Spain.

Much of this wall is still intact. Concrete turret defences, anti-landing obstacles and more can still be found all across the coast.

5. It wasn't the easiest option on the table. The Axis actually considered Normandy to be one of the least likely places for the Allies to attack. It had one of the furthest crossing distances from the UK, and no port.

This is precisely why they chose to invade there. They invented and constructed two artificial harbours to solve the port problem, and transported 7,000 tonnes of vehicles and goods over them each day.

6. Equipment had to be specially invented. As the invasion was the first of its kind, there was no existing equipment with which to carry it out.

Not only were the Mulberry Harbours invented so were the iconic landing crafts. These had a ramp that dropped down into the sea, meaning troops didn't have to scramble over the side to get out.

7. The South of England was transformed. The jump-off point for the attack was on the South coast of England, and the bottom half of the country was transformed into one large army camp in preparation. Civilian and diplomatic travel was restricted, and journalists were constantly monitored.

8. Fake news played a big role. It was impossible to hide the coming attack from the German intelligence. The allies therefore ran operations to confuse them on when, and where, it would take place.

They leaked fake plants, set up fake camps and sent fake coded radio messages. On the morning of the 6th June, the Allied forces bombed Calais to give the illusion they were readying for an attack.

The French Resistance then cut telephone lines to stop news of the invasion reaching the German High Command. German intelligence wasn't sure whether the attack was real even as it was taking place.

9. Landing wasn't the first step. The first part of the invasion was conducted by air.

British and American air-borne divisions landed behind enemy lines, capturing the Caen Canal Bridge- later renamed Pegasus Bridge – to stop German reinforcements. Capturing the bridge was no small task, and re-enactments now pay homage to the paratroopers on special commemorative occasions.

10. The news reached Anne Frank in the annex. Listening on a secret radio, Anne recounts there was "great commotion in the Secret Annex!" upon their hearing about the attack.

"Hope is revived within us", she wrote, "it gives us fresh courage, and makes us strong again". Sadly, Anne's hiding place would be found by the Nazis before that liberation she dreamed of could take place.



Time to Stand Down - The back of Chris Bunn's Headstone.
RIP Chris.

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
- Collectors Corner
- And much more!





Can you spot the mouse?



ARMY Council Instructions govern the very life of a soldier. At the War House very, VERY senior officers, red-tabbed and beribboned, sit in solemn conclave and decide that this shall be done or that shall not be done and the results of their deliberations are printed by the hundreds of thousands and shipped all over the world.

In the sweating heat of a Burmese jungle, the frozen islands of the Arctic, the waterlogged mountains of Italy and the shell raked fields of France harassed adjutants read these portentous and momentous decisions which they mark in red pencil for the immediate attention of worried Commanding Officers and hollow-eyed Quartermasters. Staff Officers on every battlefield go into secret session. Guns are withdrawn from the line for involved adjustments to be made to them.

Here and there someone packs his kit and sets off across the seas on His Majesty's lawful occasions. Certain documents are burned behind closed doors and before witnesses. One man puts up red tabs and another takes his off. Oh: a very serious thing is an ACI and to be respected as such.

Wars must cease a moment whilst they are read and studied.

Many tons of priority cargo must lie waiting on quaysides to give shipping space to the millions of sheets of paper on which they are printed over the signature of the Secretary of State for War.

We received one today. The Adjutant's few remaining hairs turned slightly greyer. He tiptoed in to the Colonel's Office and with a trembling finger drew it to the Old Man's attention. The Colonel became very grave and called a conference of all officers.

"Gentlemen," he said. "An ACI has just been received with which you should all immediately be acquainted. It is not for us the question the orders of the Army Council and I am sure that the loyalty and integrity of you all cannot be questioned.

No matter to what extent this Instruction may affect us as individuals we must, as soldiers, ensure that it is enforced without fear or favour.

The continuation and favourable outcome of the war throws on each of us responsibilities which it is our duty to carry out without consideration of the personal risks involved.

You will remain standing with heads uncovered whilst I read the Instruction which has arrived within the past hour."

I do not know how the others were affected for I was watching in a sort of stupid fascination a vein pulsing madly on the Colonel's left temple. He suddenly looked an old man, as if the

vigour had been drained out of him. The Orderly Room was quite silent, even the air had a feeling of being suspended. One remembers moments like this; the impression of them remains throughout the years in clear cut outlines.

All over the world similar conferences would be taking place as men – some young with the down on their cheeks still soft and girlish; others old in the service of the Empire to which their lives had been dedicated – as men listened tensely and with pride to the solemn words of the distant High Gods of War.

We were surrounded by the peace of an Italian garden, but many of these others would have the beat of gunfire in their ears and the chatter of machine guns as a throbbing background, or the whine and whistle of a falling bomb growing ever louder and louder, and half of their minds would be judging the spit second of the explosion whilst the other half was focused on the solemn pronouncement they were hearing.

It was for this we had given the months and years of our lives, for this we had left our homes and loved ones and the comfort and security of our civilian existence.

At times it had all seemed a pitiful waste, but in such a moment we became aware of the tragic necessity for all the discomforts and heartaches which are born of war.

We at least had been spared for this one hour; so many others sleeping

eternally in the ditches and fields of the five continents and beneath the restless waters of the seven seas would never know the thrill of it.

The Colonel gave a little grunting cough and the paper in his hand trembled and made a gentle whispering sound.

One of the men was whistling outside as he swept the driveway, the broom going swish, swish, swish as it licked the gravel.

A passing lorry, changing gear recalled us the first wailing notes of an air raid siren. The Colonel read, gravely, unemotionally.

"No expense to the public will be admissible in connection with the fitting of ATS suspender ends."

We had sworn to fight to the finish!

THE old man sometimes frequents the local cricket club in Northampton for the odd pint on a Friday (until lockdown came in!).

They sit at the Table of Death!



■ You didn't think that we would go through a whole newsletter without a picture of Dusty did you! At the Civil Service Club, Cenotaph Parade 2019. On behalf of Mikie and Dusty the Royal Pioneer Corps Association would like to take this opportunity and raise a glass to you this Christmas! Hope to see you all in the New Year

Picture: Paul Brown



LABOR OMNIA VINCIT

Chris Buckoff '20