

the



the newsletter of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association

# Pioneer



April 2011

[www.royalpioneercoops.co.uk](http://www.royalpioneercoops.co.uk)

**“He will be forever  
in our thoughts...”**



**Charles Henry Wood**  
09/12/76 - 28/12/10  
R.I.P.

**PLEASE  
SUPPORT THE  
DERBY  
DRAW**

Full details  
on Page 3



**Cenotaph Parade**  
Page 5



**Deployment Training**  
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**Regimental Boxing**  
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**Christmas Fun Run**  
Page 32





■ Garden of Remembrance, Westminster Abbey Picture: Paul Brown





#### Front Cover

St Johns The Evangelist Church, Middlesbrough

Picture: Supplied



**Inside Back / Back Cover**  
How 265 Coy won two medals including that of Cpl J Scully

Picture: The Hornet

**C**HRISTMAS festivities were abruptly curtailed when the sad news of the death of WO2 Charlie Wood was announced. He was killed by an IED in Afghanistan on 28 December 2010. His repatriation at Wootton Bassett was, according to the locals, the largest they had witnessed. Four coaches had travelled from Bicester and the town was a mass of 'Red and Green' ties. A large number of Association members also attended. His funeral at Middlesbrough was also well attended with approx 480 seated in the church and another 200 standing at the rear, there was also a large crowd outside the church in addition to those lining the streets of the town and around Middlesbrough's Football ground, Riverside. Further details are shown on page 64.

It is pleasing to hear that the town of Wootton Bassett is to be granted the title 'Royal' in recognition of its efforts to honour UK servicemen who have been repatriated through the town since 2007.

Two weeks after we received the sad news of WO2 Wood we heard that another member of the search team had been seriously wounded in action. Pte Stringer, also of 518 Sqn, unfortunately suffered serious injuries on 11 January 2011 and had to have multiple amputations. We have heard, that in true Pioneer spirit, he remains cheerful and is making good progress. Our thoughts and good wishes are with him.

Thanks to all who purchased tickets for the RPC Association Christmas Draw which made a profit of £3,500, this money helps the work of the Association. Details of the lucky winners are shown on page 6. As usual tickets for the Derby Draw are enclosed with this Newsletter please give this your support. If you are purchasing tickets yourself you can, instead of writing your full name and address on the counterfoils, simply put the number which precedes your name on the envelope in which your Newsletter arrived.

Also enclosed is a booking form for the Reunion Weekend, this must be received by 16 June 2011, late booking will only be accepted in very exceptional circumstances. This year's Reunion will be bigger and better than ever, although planning is still ongoing it is envisaged that the events on the field will be varied and enjoyable. The Veterans v The Regiment football match will once again take place, unfortunately the Veterans 'Manager' Keith Burrows is unable to attend this year he has passed the appointment over to Paul Scott, if you would like a game please bring your boots!

On page 12 you will find details of the competition to spot the Cuneo Mouse, it is hidden somewhere in this newsletter (and it's not the one on Page 66) - good hunting!

I hope you enjoy the varied content in this Newsletter, articles are always welcome - why not put pen to paper or fingers to keypad.

**Norman Brown**



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## The Royal Pioneer Corps Association

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## PAST EVENTS



■ THE 64th Past and Present Officers Dinner was held on Friday 15 October 2010 and 76 Officers attended.

The guest of honour was Colonel Rufus McNeill who gave a brilliant speech on current operations involving the Army in general with particular importance on the RLC. He is a former Adjutant of the 23 Regiment and knows the role and importance of the Pioneer trade well.

■ THE WOs & SNCOs Pioneer Reunion Club Ladies/Generation Dinner Night was held on Saturday 26 October 2010, this was the first opportunity for the RSM of 23 Pioneer Regiment and also Chairman of the Reunion Club to meet some of the members.

A good evening was organised by WO2 Charlie Wood who unfortunately was killed in Afghanistan two months later by an IED.

■ THE FIELD of Remembrance on 11 November 2010 had a large number standing behind the Corps Plot (Number 169) and our only in Pensioner Mickey Hull and SSgt (Now WO2) Cheung standing at the front of the plot.

After the short service and inspection of the plots by HRH The Duke of Edinburgh both Mickey Hull and WO2 Cheung represented the Corps for the short service inside Westminster Abbey.

Once again two daughters of Sgt James Scully GC stood alongside members of the Corps.

The Royal British Legion decided two weeks prior to the event that tickets would be required, it is not known if a similar requirement will be imposed this year it is therefore advisable to apply to the RPC Association for a ticket if you intend to attend this year.

■ THE NORMAL London Lunch followed the Field of Remembrance held at the Marquis of Westminster House in Wilton Street, Victoria. Twenty four personnel sat down to a very enjoyable meal.

Once again members from both 23 and 168 Pioneer Regiments attended.

It certainly proved a long day for Col Pat O'Connell, the first train from Birmingham to London was cancelled and the second was 40 minutes late. On the underground the train came to an abrupt halt and it was explained that there was a line problem and men were currently working to fix it.

When it started again it quickly came to another halt and it was announced the train would have to wait for the men to leave the tunnel.

On arrival at Westminster Abbey he was just about to pass through security when the gates were closed – the Duke of Edinburgh had arrived. His return journey was not too bad until his arrival back at Birmingham his normal route home had a diversion and instead of the usual 40 minutes it took him two and a half hours!

A long day indeed for a man who was to have his 80th birthday two weeks later – belated happy birthday Colonel!

Following the lunch a number decided to escort our In-Pensioner home to make sure he arrived safely – he did and we found the bar still open!

After being made very welcome we had a long chat with other In-Pensioners.

# Pioneers pay their respects

## Fallen remembered at both Roade and London



■ Pioneers return to their home in Northampton

Picture: Nostalgia Group

ON 14th November a handful of ex Royal Pioneers made their way “home” to Northampton to march in the Royal British Legion Remembrance Day Parade in the village of Roade which as you all know is only a stone’s throw away from the site of what was once Simpson Barracks our Training Centre.

The idea was put forward by Cpl Kevin “Digger” Young a former MHE Instructor and who is a member of the RBL in Roade. There was a great turn out of ex Pioneers and many had travelled long distances to be there and march once again alongside their old friends. The church service in the local church was dignified and solemn as we gave thanks in remembrance of those who had made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

We fell in outside the church and Capt Mel Smith marched us across to the small memorial in the village square where Maj Patrick Fleming read the lesson. At the stroke of eleven o’clock we all fell silent and stood shoulder to shoulder with friends we had served with during our time in HM Forces and “remembered fallen friends”. Wreaths were then laid at the memorial and John “Basher” Barlow broke ranks and marched smartly forward to lay a wreath on behalf of the Nostalgia Group to the fallen of our corps. We were then brought to attention by Maj Fleming and marched past the memorial and up the main road to applause from the some considerable amount of people who also had come to pay their respects to our

glorious dead, so with heads held high medals jingling and proudly displaying the badge of the Royal Pioneer Corps we made our way back to the church and were fell out.

Hands were shook and many hip flasks were passed around purely for medicinal purposes to keep out the cold and then off to the local watering hole for a few pints of fizzy water, the odd joke or two and then we all made our way home and agreed to return next year to remember the fallen and once more to come home to Northampton.

A special mention must be made to Mr Kevin Young and his wife Anne-Marie for extending such great hospitality and making us so welcome, to Capt Mel Smith for marching us across to the parade (“thanks Sir!”) and to the RBL in Roade for allowing us to march in their parade also thanks to Maj Patrick Fleming.

“We Will Remember Them”







■ Members of the Association at the Cenotaph London

Picture: Paul Brown, Norman Brown

**S**TANDING solemnly in the middle of Whitehall, visitors could be forgiven for passing the Cenotaph by unnoticed. But every November it becomes the focus of Britain's Remembrance Service (the closest Sunday to 11th November).

The service commemorates more than one million men and women from Britain and the Commonwealth who died in the two World Wars.

The monarch, representatives of the Church, State, the armed and auxiliary forces, all gather to pay respect to those who lost their lives defending the freedom of others. Hymns are sung, prayers are said, and the two-minute silence is observed.

Wreaths of poppies are then laid on the steps of the Cenotaph. Her Majesty the Queen lays the first wreath at the foot of the Cenotaph and bows, followed one by one, by other adult members of the immediate Royal Family, who bow if in civilian dress, or salute if in military uniform.

The next to lay their wreaths are The Prime Minister, the leader of the Opposition and leaders of other political parties. They are followed by other people laying wreaths.

The ceremony ends with a march past of war veterans; a poignant gesture of respect for their fallen comrades. Twenty

three members of the Association marched in the RPC Association Contingent last November with Mr Joe Johnson (ex WO2 who was attending for the first time) laying the wreath on behalf of all Association members.

Unfortunately a few members had to drop out at the last minute because of sickness including our usual drill instructor, Mr Ian Dewsnap, as his gout had returned – he blames it on standing on wet grass at the Field of Remembrance. (Ed note: I blame it on the port!)

Unfortunately, once again, the BBC on their coverage of the event failed to mention our Corps despite a summary of the Corps being sent to them well before the day. Hopefully this will be rectified this year.

We always have a few spare tickets for this event so if you would like to attend please drop a line to the RPC Association and your name will be added to the list of attendees.

Literally meaning 'Empty Tomb' in Greek, the monument was originally built of wood and plaster for the first anniversary of the Armistice in 1919.

The memorial you see today was designed by Edward Lutyens, it was created from Portland Stone and was unveiled one year later in 1920. The inscription simply reads "The Glorious Dead".

Did you know? There are only two cenotaphs in Britain. There is the one in Whitehall, London and the other one is in Aberdare, Wales. All other war monuments in Britain are war memorials.

Barely a month after the service at the Cenotaph, on 9 December 2010, in a grotesque insult to those who championed the very freedoms which allowed them to stage their protest, a baying rabble of masked and hooded troublemakers turned a student demonstration into anarchy.

They defiled a statue of Winston Churchill by urinating on it, ripped flags from the Cenotaph – the nation's sacred memorial to those who died in the name of liberty – then lit fires and sprayed slogans on the ground in the shadow of the Houses of Parliament.

It was the desecration of the Cenotaph which broke all taboos. Four weeks ago I stood here to watch thousands pay their respects to those who died in two world wars, and to remember in prayer those who gave their lives in conflicts that followed.

All that meant nothing to the dark-haired figure who climbed the base of the monument – using the inscription on a bronze plaque as a foothold.

If anyone had planned this as a strategy to cause outrage, it could hardly have been more disrespectful.



## FUTURE EVENTS



■ **THE 39/93 Club meet at the Red Lion Hotel Fareham twice yearly, usually March and October.**

They have negotiated a discounted rate for the accommodation. They always hold a dinner on the Saturday evening. Further details from Club Secretary, Les Rowley, on 07955 237932

■ **THE WOs & SNCOs Pnr Reunion Club** are once again organising a trip to the Army v Navy Rugby at Twickenham on 7 May 11. A booking form has already been forwarded to Club members

Details of the Ladies/Generation Dinner which is normally held in October have yet to be finalised, details will be forwarded to members when known.

■ **THE reunion weekend at Bicester will soon be upon us. The date for your diary's is 1-3 July.**

A booking form is enclosed with this Newsletter please submit by the closing date - 16 June 2011. It is appreciated that all cannot be accommodated in St David's Barracks and many will have their accommodation in St George's.

It is hoped to provide mini-buses, as we did last year, between the two locations. However, if you wish to book your own accommodation a list of hotels/B&Bs in the Bicester area can be provided. Full details of the Weekend are not yet known but it is anticipated that it will be similar to last year's with a full programme of events on the sports field during the Saturday afternoon. One of the popular events in the last few years has been the Veterans v 23 Regiment Football match, if you would like a game simply bring your boots. The match will follow the format of rolling substitutes.

■ **THE Past & Present Officers Dinner** will be held on 29th July.

Please note date as this is much earlier than previous years because of the deployment of 23 Pnr Regt in Oct 11. To attend simply submit your name (and cheque to the value of £20) to RPC Association, cut of date for attendance is 14 July.

■ **THE field of remembrance is 10th November. Last year the British Legion issued tickets for entry to the Field and it is envisaged that they will probably do so again this year. Tickets can be obtained from the RPC Association.**

■ **THE London Lunch** will be held on 10th November.

As usual we will be holding a London Lunch at the Marquis of Westminster Public House, nr Victoria following the Field of Remembrance.

■ **THE Cenotaph Parade this year is 13th November. Tickets for this event can be obtained from the Association.**

■ **RESULTS from the RPC Association Christmas Draw 2010. Well done !**

1st Prize £1,000 D Brown  
Ticket No 44084, Oxford  
2nd Prize £500 P Snell  
Ticket No 04202, Blackpool  
3rd Prize £200 O James  
Ticket No 02210, Bicester  
4th Prize £100 D Howcroft  
Ticket No 21849 Southall  
5th Prize £50 S Snell  
Ticket No 37801 South Shields

# Providing support

## Latest news from 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC



■ **Regimental MATT Camp**

Picture: Supplied

**T**HE REGIMENT continues to provide support to Op HERRICK in three key areas. C-IED Herrick Search Teams (HSTs), Command Support Troop (CST) (AKA Force Protection) for Combat Logistic Patrols (CLPs) and Mortuary Affairs (MA) Teams. Each role is very different but equally key to success in Afghanistan.

The CST is currently commanded by Lt Will Butcher. The troop is attached to 13 Air Assault Support Regiment. There have been large steps forward with the vehicles and weaponry available to CLPs, troops are required to be trained on as many of the platforms and weapons as possible to maximise flexibility. They had to hit the ground running as their arrival in theatre coincided with UK troops handing over Sangin to US forces. Operations often take several days to complete. Lt Butcher hands over the mantle to Lt Murphy in March.

The Regiment is providing two complete HERRICK Search Teams and also a team providing training in theatre to both UK and Afghan forces. The majority deployed in November. The teams have been deployed supporting several different BGs. Often living in austere Patrol Bases and carrying weights in excess of 80 Kgs. The troops are responsible for searching key areas for

IEDs. These areas include everything from main supply routes, trade routes for local nationals to compounds to allow local nationals to return to their homes.

The Mortuary Affairs team assist medical staff ensuring that casualties are clear of weapons, ammunition and explosive. This allows the medical staff to focus on treating the casualties. The team also assist preparing fatalities to return home, working closely with SIB to ensure that details are correctly recorded. This is an emotionally demanding job which our troops continue to perform very professionally.

### PIONEER SEARCH TEAM 18 – THE STORY SO FAR

LCpl Adam Thomas (Scribe and 2IC Team 18)

In St David's Barracks, Bicester a year ago when we were warned off that we were tasked to come out to Afghanistan as a High Threat Search Team, it all seemed quite daunting. But now that we are here doing the job, it really isn't that bad!

It all started on 7 November 2010 when our Hercules landed in Joint Operating Base Camp Bastion in the early hours of the morning. After a couple of days grace to settle in to Camp 252, we began our in Theatre Training (ITT) which is a period of acclimatisation while teaching each





■ Regimental Boxing Competition

Picture: Supplied

soldier arriving in theatre the basic, up to date, tactics, techniques and procedures that everyone must know and follow such as battlefield first aid, zeroing weapons and a counter insurgency brief, which will never be forgotten thanks to an over excitable American Army Sergeant whose teaching style including soldiers acting different parts and him providing some serious sound effects.

Upon completion of ITT, it was time to start Role Specific Training (RST) in order to iron out any creases and assess the teams efficiency in a variety of different scenarios. We began our final day of this RST in high spirits having had a successful time, however as we neared the end of the compound clearance disaster or maybe stupidity struck! It was time to pull some debris by remote means using a rope, so LCpl Thomas secured the rope around the items and then took up position at the head of the rope with the other 6 members of the team taking hold behind him. Now LCpl Thomas made sure he had a good grip on the rope not realising that it was looped around his hand, so on the word 'pull' the weight of 6 men pulling against an immensely heavy object, resulting in severed tendons and no skin left on LCpl Thomas' hand followed by a nice trip to the Bastion Hospital and a team fine (crate of fizzy drinks) for his stupidity.

With the RST complete we were now operational and ready for our first tasking at FOB Ramrod, an American FOB on Route 1. The job involved a series of 2 team area searches to enable a number of

Patrol Bases (PB) and Check Points (CP) to be built. It was on one of these searches that we had our first find in Afghanistan as Pte Tidmus cried out "FIND!" We followed procedure and called for the IEDD team who duly went forward to dispose of the find. After an hour of painstaking waiting we got our first glimpse of what we had found ... an American ration pack! And we thought our rations were bad, it seems the Americans are so bad they bury them! At least it proves .. if its buried we will find it! Next stop was Main Operating Base (MOB) Price and another two team operation, however this time it was a 2km route in the town of Gereshk called the Bandi Bauq Road.

Our job was the isolation of the route and the team was joined by Lt Col Davis and an army photographer keen to see what the guys go through. And see they did, as off we went 8 men, keen as mustard, to get the job done. Six and a half hours and one broken rib later (sorry Sir) we re-emerged at the end of the route changed men, cold and wet men, broken men .. the ginger tabbing machine (Cpl Martin) had broken us all!!

Once our job was done, like the A-Team of old, we moved on to our next job to help those in need. However this job had a much more personal aspect for the team as we were sent to PB Niahdullah to meet up with the other Pioneer advanced Search Team in order to finish a two team route search of Route Ayrshire. It was on this route that our beloved Sergeant Major (SSM) and friend Charles Henry Wood

was killed in an IED blast. When we arrived, there were many tears, however one thing was clear, the Pioneer Advanced Search Teams were going to finish the route SSM Wood started...Pioneers started it and Pioneers finished it! With the route complete and our tribute to SSM's memory achieved, our team was given the task of remaining in PB Niahdullah as a replacement for the out-going Pioneer team. Since this time we have been extremely busy, being called out along with IEDD Team 7, on almost a daily basis not to mention continuing with a number of planned search operations aimed at improving the freedom of movement for not only coalition Forces (CF) but also for local nationals who want a better and safer country in which to live.

With this busy schedule it was no surprise that we found ourselves on an Operation over the new year period and in particular sleeping in a field along with IEDD 7 and the infantry, on New Years eve.

As we broke the ice from our sleeping bags at 0500 hrs on New Years day it was clear that this was definitely a unique start to a New Year and not one we are likely to forget..but hopefully never repeated again.

Since being here we have also proved that if it is buried we will find it, as Pte Bonougou and Pte Rooke found their first IEDs, for which we were happy to pass over to IEDD 7 in order for the devices to be neutralised.

Life in the PB is somewhat basic with a



## NEWS IN BRIEF

■ **HUNDREDS MORE** British servicemen and women will receive operational campaign medals under new plans announced by the MOD in August 2010.

At present, members of the Armed Forces who serve for 30 continuous days qualify for Iraq and Afghanistan campaign medals. Following a review, those who have served for aggregate period of 45 days are also eligible. These changes will be backdated to the start of both operations – 11 September 2001 for Afghanistan and 20 January 2003 for Iraq. Examples of Service personnel who could now be eligible include members of the aeromedical evacuation teams who accompany injured patients back to the UK.

Under the new plans, personnel who deploy for short periods of time will be allowed to build up accrued days to achieve an aggregate qualifying period of 45 days service.

Ex-Service personnel who believe they may be eligible, should contact the MOD Medal Office by calling the JPAC Enquiry Centre 0800 085 3600 or email [Medals@SPVA.mod.uk](mailto:Medals@SPVA.mod.uk)

■ A NEW factsheet 'Older Veterans Living in Scotland' was recently launched by Age Scotland in partnership with Poppyscotland.

The factsheet provides information on finance, health, housing, remembrance and employment, as well as Service-related information on veterans' rights, medals and Service records. It also includes a directory of ex-Service charities offering support to veterans in Scotland.

The factsheet is an all-in-one resource for veterans and support agencies working with the Armed Forces community in Scotland.

Poppyscotland Chief Executive Ian McGregor said, "Veterans advice needs can be multiple and complex and it is gratifying to see that Age Scotland has recognised the issues that members of this group can face. We hope this factsheet will go a long way to addressing the difficulties experienced by some of our older veterans".

To obtain copies of the factsheet visit [www.agescotland.org.uk](http://www.agescotland.org.uk) or telephone 0845 8330200.

■ **NEW GUIDANCE** produced to help GPs support veterans' healthcare needs more effectively.

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP), The Royal British Legion and Combat Stress have launched guidance to support GPs in identifying and meeting the healthcare needs of veterans more effectively – including accessing the priority treatment to which all veterans are entitled for Service related conditions.

The jointly produced guidance for GPs looks at how best to care for veterans' physical and mental health after they have left the Armed Forces and rejoined civilian life. It provides useful advice on medical records and accessing priority treatment, along with dedicated sections on a wide range of matters. The Royal College of General Practitioners sent out electronic copies of the guidance to all GP surgeries, covering their 42,000 members. The guidance is available to download on the following websites  
[www.rcgp.org.uk](http://www.rcgp.org.uk)  
[www.britishlegion.org.uk](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk)  
[www.combatstress.org.uk](http://www.combatstress.org.uk)



■ Naming of Scully Club by DRLC

Picture: Supplied

number of luxuries such as flushing toilets and showers being nonexistent, which means hyper vigilance when making sure you don't mix the buckets up!

Any way it's now time for me to finish this letter and go back to watching the flames in our little fire, drinking coffee and talking about what our first meal will be once back in the UK.

### REGIMENTAL BOXING NIGHT, ROYAL VISIT AND GENERAL NEWS

On the 18 November a Regimental Boxing Night was held and once again proved that Pioneers always provide good boxers.

A week later HRH the Princess Royal made a visit to the Regiment.

There were many cold mornings setting up for the rehearsals but it was all worth it when the Princess Royal visited the various stands and displays.

The Regiment truly showed its colours and really got the message across about

the unique diversity the Pioneers have.

On 17 March 2011 the new Director RLC, Brig MG Hickson OBE ADC, paid his first visit to 23 Pnr Regt where he visited various stands and displays which explained the varied work that the Regiment is currently committed to.

During the visit he presented WO2 Reg Lane with his 'Warrant' in the WOs & Sgts Mess where he also had a chance to meet members of the mess.

He then visited the Dining Room which was to be re-named "The Scully Club" in memory of James Scully GC.

Two of his daughters had travelled from London to witness the unveiling of a plaque inside the Club.

He then presented various medals to members of the Regiment followed by the award of Corps colours to Capt Andrews for his achievements in Orienteering, this was followed by the presentation of the trophy to the winners of the Commando Speed March, another first for the Regiment.





■ Christmas activities with the Chain Gang

Picture: Supplied

#### 144 SQUADRON

Back in July on the Sqn MATT Camp when Cpl Simcod suggested running the New York Marathon it seemed like such a great idea that he convinced Capt Mat Young and the OC, Maj Charlie Fraser, to join him. However, on the day and approaching the 22 mile point realisation dawns that running 26.2 miles is actually a crazy idea. If it wasn't for the fantastic support (about 2 million people lining the route), the collective determination of all the runners (all 48,000 of them), or just Pioneer spirit and personal pride, the temptation to give up could have been too much. As it was the team stayed together until the 23 mile point and all finished in 4 hours or under, and within 3 minutes of each other. It was a fantastic feeling to finish a marathon and for it to be in Central Park was the icing on the cake. To restart weary legs the next day the cultural visits were conducted on foot, much to the dismay of Capt Young, and included many of the iconic New York landmarks: the Empire State Building, Ground Zero, Statue of Liberty and Times Square not to mention more traditional forms of relaxation. It was an unforgettable experience that, despite the heavy training, would be recommended to anyone and which has so far raised over £2,000 for charity.

#### 518 SQUADRON

The last few months have been a frantic time for 518 Sqn. September saw the Command Support Tp deploy in support of 13 AA on HERRICK 13, commanded by

Lt Butcher and employed as force protection for the CLPs. With the handover of Sangin DC to the American Forces, the first 3 months of their tour has been particularly busy. In October Cpl Ballantyne and Pte Davies deployed to Camp Bastion in the mortuary affairs role and are currently supporting the medics. November brought the deployment of 2 C-IED High Threat Search teams commanded by Lt Lowry and SSM Wood and the mobilisation of 3 of our Search team reserves, Sgt Spear, Cpl Beecham and Cpl Jeapes. It is with great sadness that we have to report the death of WO2 Charlie Wood who was killed by an IED on 28 December 2010 (Ed note: see article on page 64). More bad news followed two weeks later when Pte Stringer was also badly wounded by an IED and tragically lost both legs. Latest news is that he is making good progress and the people who have visited him at Selly Oaks say that he is in good spirits.

#### 522 SQUADRON

It has been a busy few months for 522 Sqn as they begin preparation for deployment on Op HERRICK 14 in a variety of roles. 14 Tp has been balancing time between the Regiment and RMB Chivenor - the home of Commando Logistic Regiment - who they will be providing FP support to next year as it deploys as the CLSR. October saw then conduct an intensive LFTT package at Lydd, followed immediately by deployment onto STANTA for the CFX. Credit to the grit of the Pioneers, they

were praised by OPTAG and their RM counterparts for their professionalism and well-rehearsed drills, both in the VLP FP role and also a dismounted infantry role they found themselves in during the exercise.

This was followed swiftly by the CATT, where the majority of the Troop found themselves supporting both the Landing Force Support Party (LFSP) and 45 Sqn from 2 LSR as they conducted 48 hr CLPs inside (relative) comfort of the simulators. For most of the Tp this was the first time they had experienced the CATT, and found it useful and enjoyable, though Pte Standing did comment that the graphics did not quite live up to Call of Duty on his X Box!

Following the CATT the Tp was split between CALFEX (where again they supported the two CLP Sqn) and DST Leconfield.

Here the lads were introduced to the vehicle of choice: the MASTIFF PPV which will become their mobility and protection for the duration of the tour. Both drivers and commanders alike left DST with the utmost confidence in the capability and the protection the MASTIFF offered, though driving the 26-tonne beast cross country on NVGs and IR cameras did take quite some getting used to! The Tp has most recently completed much of their comms trg prior to deployment, with a substantial amount gaining their HF/VHF qualification, and begun to welcome the first of the soldiers from 168 Pnr Regt(V) who will be attached to the Tp for the tour.



## NEWS IN BRIEF



■ **THE MOD** has improved the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS).

The period in which anyone injured in service can claim compensation was extended in August 2010 from five to seven years from point of diagnosis as part of a series of changes to the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme.

The change, which came into effect on 3 August, is one of several to be introduced following the recommendations from the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Review, carried out by former Chief of the Defence Staff Admiral the Lord Boyce last year.

The Review, which was assisted by an independent scrutiny group which included Service charities, medical experts, serving personnel and veterans, announced its recommendations for improvements in February this year.

Further information is available through a number of AFCS communications products. These can be downloaded via the SPVA website [www.veterans-uk.info](http://www.veterans-uk.info)

■ **A NEW** service, part funded by the MOD, to help bereaved Armed Forces families through the inquest process was launched in July by The Royal British Legion.

Independent Inquest Advice provides free, independent and expert legal advice and assistance from professionally qualified lawyers to support bereaved Service families through what can be a confusing and frustrating process at an already difficult and painful time.

For further information email [ila@britishlegion.org.uk](mailto:ila@britishlegion.org.uk) or call 020 3207 2144 or 020 3207 2137

■ **THE ROYAL** Hospital Chelsea is not owned by the Government and has to use its own resources to maintain and refurbish and modernise the Chelsea Pensioners' accommodation and facilities.

The Chelsea Pensioners' Appeal charity was established to enable the Royal Hospital to raise funds for this vital modernisation process that will enable it to make the RHC a fitting home for Chelsea Pensioners in the 21st century and beyond.

Phase 1 has been completed on time and on budget and has delivered the splendid Margaret Thatcher Infirmary which was officially opened by the Appeal's Patron, His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, in the presence of Baroness Thatcher, in March 2009.

Phase 2 has just been completed and has given 34 Chelsea Pensioners a new home in the new style en-suite berths of Long Wards 23/24 which was officially opened on 10 Jun 10 by the Duke of Gloucester.

Phase 3 has started and seeks to modernise the remaining berths in the main East and West Wings.

With a total projected cost of £30M this financial challenge is nearly as great as the one they have just completed.

Many supporters have already started to rally round and make gifts to the Appeal fund, but they have a long way to go.

To find out how you can help the Appeal or to receive more information about the plans or make a donation please contact: [davidhellens@chelsea-pensioners.org.uk](mailto:davidhellens@chelsea-pensioners.org.uk)



■ The Princess Royal presents operational medals

Pictures: Supplied

### 15 TROOP

Also preparing for deployment this year, has had a very different PDT to date. Employed as a series of counter-IED search teams, the Tp has been working hard to qualify all personnel on HERRICK Search Course run by the Royal Engineers. In addition to this, they have attended the Sqn MATTS camp and run successive ranges in order to qualify all ranks on the weapon systems they will be using in theatre. They have all also undergone VHF/HF trg and completed the Team Medic's Course, as well as deploying on their own CFX.

Despite the relentless tempo that now coincides with training for operational deployment, the Sqn has still managed to take part in all Regimental activities. Of note is the Regtl Boxing, in which 3 members of the Sqn fought, despite being immersed in courses and trg. The long hours of training and dedication paid dividends as all boxers represented the Sqn extremely well, with Pte Stebbings setting the standard with a furious opening bout, and Pte Standing pleasing the crowd by defeating his well-matched

opponent in the ring. Lt Dave Slater.

### 187 SQUADRON

Another extremely busy period for 187 (Tancred) Sqn, with a mixture of deployments, exercise and tasks. Cpl Poole and his HERRICK Search Team have safely returned from Afghanistan after successfully becoming the first CIED Search Team deployed to Afghanistan. A role which is at the forefront of defence and a role in which they performed admirably. Additionally, the Sqn also deployed 2 Mortuary Affairs teams to Camp Bastion in support of the hospital. An unfortunate task but an appointment that the dreams displayed their true professionalism. 10 members of 3 Tp were also attached to 12 LSR Regt as part of the Comd Support Tp as the Sqn now starts to conduct PDT.

Cpl Mummery provided sterling support to the UKSF on Ex Desert Thunder in Oman. The Sqn now continues to switch fire towards selecting a Tp to complete the High Threat Search course in the New Year whilst building up training for Op HERRICK 15.





■ The winning "Speed March" Team with their trophies

Pictures: Supplied

## 206 SQUADRON

206 Sqn has had a busy and exciting period with a Royal visit from Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal. At the beginning of November Sgt Garbett took a team down to Salisbury Plain to take part in the Land Capabilities Power Demonstration (LCPD). The LCPD was for all the Arms and Services throughout the Army to show off just what capabilities they had and what role they play in the Army as a whole. There were many Government officials and high ranking officers attending the demonstration, and they were all impressed by the skills and the diversity the Pioneers had to offer.

At the Regimental Boxing Night the Sqn provided 6 fighters and Pte Goode and Pte Nye both won their bouts. Unfortunately 2 fighters were unable to compete on the night as LCpl Wood broke his nose the week before the competition night.

## THE COMMANDO SPEED MARCH - 2011

The Army Commandos were formed in June 1940, at a time when the British Empire no longer had a single ally in the field, and when the British Army had been compelled to quit the continent of Europe as a result of the disastrous campaigns in Norway and the Low Countries. While the germ of the idea had originated in the brain of Lt Col Dudley Clarke RA, as early as 4th June, 1940, it was Winston Churchill himself who, not content with a purely passive defensive, actually ordered their formation. In a minute of 18th June,

1940, he wrote: "What are the ideas of C-in-C, HF, about Storm Troops? We have always set our faces against this idea, but the Germans certainly gained in the last war by adopting it, and this time it has been a leading cause of their victory. There ought to be at least twenty thousand Storm Troops or 'Leopards' drawn from existing units, ready to spring at the throat of any small landings or descents. These officers and men should be armed with the latest equipment, tommy guns, grenades etc., and should be given great facilities in motor-cycles and armoured cars." The first Commando raid took place only five days later. (For the interest of those reading this article, many Pioneers volunteered for service with the Commandos, particularly those from the Alien Companies, some of whom served with distinction with X-Troop, No 10 Inter Allied Commando. Pioneers also supported the Commandos on many occasions including the attack on the island of Walcheren and in Normandy.)

By 1942, the Commandos had become so effective that a Commando Basic Training Centre was established at Achnacarry House, home of Donald Cameron, Chief of Clan Cameron, near Spean Bridge, Fort William in the Highlands of Scotland. On arriving at Spean Bridge by train, Commando recruits would be force marched the 7 gruelling miles from the train station to the grounds of Achnacarry, most of which is uphill; those unable to keep the pace and complete the route within the allocated one hour would be about-

turned and Returned to Unit (RTU).

In 1996, in honour of the high traditions of the Commandos, the Association of British Military Parachutists decided to organise an annual Commando Speed March competition in aid of the Commando Benevolent Fund, Airborne Forces Charities and the British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association (BLESMA). The march follows the exact same route that the Commando recruits took over 60 years ago and is 'run' in military combat boots carrying a bergen weighing 36lbs. The competition is open to all military personnel (including foreign teams) and is highly contested each year, especially amongst the Green and Maroon bereted fraternities. The winning team receives the Commando Speed March Winner's Trophy which is a replica of the Commando Memorial at Spean Bridge.

On 5 March 2011, 23 Pioneer Regiment were the first RLC unit ever to take part in this prestigious event. Over 30 units and 160 runners had arrived at Spean Bridge Railway Station and with the absence of the much feared 2 Para, teams from units such as 7 Parachute Regiment RHA, Force Protection Group Royal Marines, 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery, Commando Training Centre Royal Marines, 24 Commando Regiment Royal Engineers, 23 SAS and 4 Para were all eyeing up the usual competition. The team of seven competitors from the Pioneer Regiment, seemingly under far less pressure than the other teams, had received only two weeks



## NEWS IN BRIEF



■ **THE TROOPS to Teachers** initiative is a new programme announced by the Department for Education which aims to bring more Service Leavers into the classroom.

Utilising the Teach Next programme to attract high quality graduate Service Leavers to train as teachers via a replacement programme for the current Graduate Teacher Programme.

Getting non-graduate Service Leavers into teaching via a guided pathway to Qualified Teacher Status.

For those who do not wish to teach, getting Service Leavers into schools as mentors.

The programme is very much at the development stage, it is hoped to report on progress in future Newsletters.

■ A NEW bi-annual brochure has been produced to raise awareness of resettlement across the Service community and within the MOD.

The Connect brochures have been distributed across Career Transition Partnership (CTP) Regional Resettlement Centres, Education and Medical Centres, Service Resettlement Advisers, HIVEs and across MOD.

The first issue includes a foreword from Lt Gen Sir William Rollo, Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Personnel & Training), and provides information on all aspects of resettlement, the services CTP provides for Service leavers, and the further support available to veterans.

Contact can be view on CTP website: [www.ctp.org.uk](http://www.ctp.org.uk)

■ **CONNECT AIMS** to raise awareness of charities who will help veterans with employment support for life.

The Regular Forces Employment Association (RFEA), The Officers' Association and The Officers' Association Scotland, in addition to their integral work as part of the Career Transition Partnership, are able to provide employment help and guidance to all ex-Service men and women throughout their working lives.

If you are a veteran and require job finding assistance, please contact the Central Employment Team helpdesk on 0121 236 0058

An enhanced website has been launched, new features include interactive tools to assist those going through the resettlement process and a wealth of information for all across the Service community. For veterans who have already made the transition to civilian life, the site will be a resource that can be re-visited at any point for a wide range of useful information and job finding support.

■ Can you spot the Cuneo Mouse. Terence Cuneo painted 'Sword Beach' which shows the activities of the pioneers who were among the first British troops to land on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day. In most of his paintings Cuneo hid a small mouse which was his trademark and somewhere in this Newsletter we have hidden a Cuneo mouse and it's not the one on Page 66.

Names of correct entries will be entered into a draw and the first 'out of the hat' will win a prize. It is intended to draw the winning entry during the Reunion Weekend. Entries should be submitted (by letter, email or telephone) by Fri 1 July 2011.



■ WO2 Reg Lane receives his Warrant

Picture: Supplied



■ SSgt Orrell receives his LS&GC from the Princess Royal

Picture: Supplied



■ Capt Andrews receives his Corps Colours from DRLC

Picture: Supplied

of preparation due to other commitments and had only joined together as a team on the mini-bus journey to Fort William.

The race was a painful blur, however the Pioneer's showed spirit and determination equal to that of the wartime Commandos, achieving an unexpected first place and becoming winners of the Commando Speed March 2011.

Individual placings:

LCpl Beadle	2nd
Pte Rice	25th
Capt Andrews	5th
WO2 Lane	44th
Pte Joyce	14th
Capt Murray	85th
LCpl Stephen	16th

### AWARD OF LS&GC TO SSGT (SQMS) ORRELL

SSgt Orrell received his LS&GC from HRH The Princess Royal during her visit to 23 Pnr Regt RLC on 26 Nov 10.

He joined the army on 29 July 94 and completed Phase One Training at Pirbright before moving to his Phase Two Combat Infantryman's Course at the Infantry Training Battalion Ouston. Phase Three Training was completed at Deepcut and he was then posted to 522 Sqn 23 Pnr Regt.

He then completed an Op Banner tour in Northern Ireland with 38 Field Regt RE in Londonderry. On return to 23 Regt he was attached to 518 Sqn for deployment to Bosnia on Op Resolute with some of the first NATO Troops into Theatre.

He completed a second tour in Bosnia in April 1996 and in 1997 was posted to the RLC Mobile Display Team on

promotion to Corporal where he travelled the country with the team promoting his trade and the wider Corps.

In September 2001 he was posted to the Pioneer Trade Wing at Deepcut teaching bricklaying, concreting and scaffolding to over 300 Pioneers.

On posting back to 23 Regt he was employed in Regimental Operations until June 2005 when he was posted to 518 Sqn as a Troop Sergeant. In 2006 he was deployed to Oman on Ex Desert Eagle where his troop helped train 16 Air Assault Brigade before they deployed to Afghanistan. In 2007 he was deployed on Op Telic 10 as a Multiple Commander in the Umm Qasr Patrols Company. During this tour his troop uncovered a substantial hide of Improvised Explosive Devices. He was then given the responsibility for the internal security of the Defence Internment Facility and the welfare of prisoners and was responsible for 170 Iraqi detainees all the while being subjected to a constant barrage of indirect fire attacks.

On his return to 23 Regt he was to take the Regimental lead of the Duisburg Gates Memorial re-build task in Abingdon, where he planned, prepared, designed and initiated the task.

He was then posted to 170 Pioneer Squadron as the Squadron Quartermaster. He deployed on Op Herrick as the SQMS of the Kabul Support Unit with responsibilities ranging across Northern Afghanistan.

He once again returned to 23 Regt in 2010 and was appointed SQMS 206 Pioneer Squadron.





■ 168 Regt try some "Hot" Training

Picture: Supplied

# Deployment training

## The latest news from 168 Pioneer Regiment Royal Logistic Corps

**W**HILST THE Regiment continues to support 23 Pnr Regt on Op HERRICK, the Op TOSCA deployment in Oct 2011 is firmly on the radar. The majority of training is now focussed on a deployment that will see 93 members, from all ranks, of the Regiment join 23 Pnr on the UN mission in Cyprus.

The training commenced with Ex PIONEER FOCUS at the Longmoor Urban Training Centre (UTC). The initial phase was supported by SSgt Ringer and his personal safety public order (PSPO) trg team from 23 Pnr Regt. The Sqn were instructed in the tactics and formations of PSPO and probably more enjoyable for most, the use of the baton and riot shield. Lt Cahill and WO2 Dawson's troops saw petrol bombs a plenty and potatoes were the rioter's missile of choice until they ran out. Thereafter the UTC apple tree was stripped to provide more missiles. This phase culminated with the visit of one 2 star, two 1 stars and three ½ stars. The Adjt would have found herding cats easier. Darkness brought no respite, multiples patrolled the UTC buffer zone where they encountered a full range of TOSCA type scenarios; although clearly some of the

Greek and Turkish accents left a lot to be desired.

The final phase of the exercise saw the 2nd half of the Regimental strap line "The Fighting Artisans" come to the fore. Using our heavy plant equipment, SSgt Povey's team cleared a football pitch sized area of rubble to enable a new baton gun range to be built. The bricklayers were up against the elements laying blocks for the UTC clearance house. A troop, led by Sgt Jones, were despatched to Yardley Chase to construct FOB sangers and ATR Pirbright had its command task area revamped by Sgt Barrett and his team. Not content with this, the Trg Maj, Maj Mark Stuart was also putting the command element of the Regt through its paces on a 24/7 TOSCA based CPX. They soon became used to the UN phraseology, although SSgt Holmes' daily rendition of "Day 2, 3, 4 in the ADE house" was clearly more akin to Big Brother.

While you are reading this the Regt will have completed four Op TOSCA based training weekends, ranging in location from Longmoor to Otterburn to Thetford. The lads have been instructed on language skills, the political and social

nuances of Cyprus, potential violations and how to deal with them and also run and tabbed a fair distance to get fit. June 2011 will see the Op TOSCA focussed ADE in Nesscliffe culminate all the training into the last chance for the lads to prove themselves to the Trg Maj Mark Stuart that they are good enough to deploy to Cyprus. Competition is fierce as not all will be selected.

The Regt has been fortunate to be visited by Brig Hickson as DRLC. He saw the National element of the Regt undergoing artisan trg in Grantham. Brickwork, carpentry, cuplock tower and power tools were all evident; and he was also brave enough to join in.

Between Asst Comd Th Tps and DRLC, Volunteer Reserve Service Medals and clasps were awarded to 12 members of the Regiment and Sgt Scott was awarded a GOC Th Tps Commendation.

Members of 104 Pnr Sqn in Middlesbrough decided to escape the smog of Teesside for the fresh air of the Lake District. Capt Anselm Allen led the intrepid bunch of hill walkers up Scafell Pike and instructed them on the black art of micro navigation; it must have sunk in



## NEWS IN BRIEF



■ No-one chooses to suffer the pain of unmanageable debt. We are bombarded by advertising which tells us what the good life looks like and credit which offers us a way to have it all now.

Any of the following can indicate a debt problem that needs addressing:

- Payments are being returned unpaid, regular lateness in paying bills or only ever making the minimum repayment.
- Having to use a credit card for day-to-day purchases or for cash withdrawals.
- Borrowing money to pay off or repeatedly rescheduling debts.
- Struggling to pay priority bills – mortgage, rent, council tax etc.
- Being regularly stressed about money.

There is nearly always a solution to a debt problem. It may require tough decisions and hard work, but it is possible. Working through the following steps is making a good start on the road to financial recovery.

1. Don't ignore debts
  2. Be honest
  3. List debts and draw up a budget – make a list of all debts. Prepare a statement detailing income and expenditure, taking time to produce a realistic estimate of all things money is spent on. An interactive budget planner is available: [www.creditaction.org.uk/budgetbuilder](http://www.creditaction.org.uk/budgetbuilder)
  4. Prioritise debts – prioritise paying those bills for which non-payment will result in loss of home, liberty or essential goods and services.
  5. Check benefits and tax code – visit the CAB site [www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk) A useful calculator is available at [www.turn2us.org.uk](http://www.turn2us.org.uk)
  6. Maximise ability to repay – decide on main financial commitments, cut down on non-essential spending.
  7. Get help if needed – after doing a budget and reviewing expenditure, some people feel able to manage their own debts. Credit Action's self-help booklet can be downloaded free from the website detailed above. There are several sources of FREE, independent help for those who need further assistance.
- Consumer Credit Counselling Service (CCCS) 0800 138 111
  - Debt Remedy at [www.cccs.co.uk](http://www.cccs.co.uk)
  - National Debtline 0808 808 4000 Online at [www.nationaldebtline.co.uk](http://www.nationaldebtline.co.uk)
  - Local Citizens Advice Bureau – their website (see point 5 above) has a postcode search for the nearest branch.

Media advertising and marketing telephone calls offering assistance with debts are generally from companies that charge for their services.

Even if the initial advice is free there will be a cost to any action they take.

They don't provide a better service than those listed above.



■ 168 Regt using its heavy plant equipment

Picture: Supplied

as they all returned in one piece.

Three members of the Regt, Lt Nicky Hemsworth, 2Lt Matt Croton and LCpl Alan Dalton were selected to represent the TA on Ex CARIBBEAN ENDEAVOUR. Circumnavigating the Caribbean on a Tri Service yacht for two weeks. Clearly a crap job but somebody had to do it. No photographic evidence however at least one of them was rumoured to have fed the fishes on at least one occasion! They all had a fantastic trip and planning is already going ahead for next years event.

The "chunkies were on the piste" again this year when the Regt Ski team consisting of SSgt Rushbrook, Sgt Strong, LCpl Drysdale, Ptes Donnelly, Pierson and O'Brien took part in the Nordic competition of Ex SKI RLC.

No silverware for the bulging Regt trophy cabinet however they did come back with bruises the size of small countries and also LCpl Drysdale managed to injure the tendons and muscles in his right arm, never mind there's always next year.

The current CO, Lt Col Steve Caldwell will reluctantly relinquish command of the Regiment on 1 April for pastures new at MOD Main Building. His successor is Lt Col Andy Parry, a pioneer veteran of old.

### EXERCISE PIONEER TRIANGLE 100 Pioneer Sqn, 168 Pioneer Regiment.

Ex Northern Pioneer took place in Northumberland from 16–18 Sept 2010. The exercise consisted of a team of 6 riders transiting the triangular route from the main Squadron Headquarters at Cramlington travelling north to C troop TAC located at Berwick upon Tweed then South to B troop TAC at Hexham a sum total of 179 miles.

The exercise was conducted in 3 stages and 8 legs with a steep hill section during stage 2. A 6 man team made up of 4 Squadron members and 2 from RHQ completed the route with guest riders slipping in at the various legs. Each guest rider cycled between 13 and 17 miles depending on which stage and leg they completed. The hill climb section was

only completed by the 6 man team.

The aim was to get as many members of the Squadron to take part in an exercise with a difference, to test physical stamina and endurance, whilst visiting the troop locations.

All main team members and the G4 party formed up at the TAC at 1600hrs on 15 Sept 2010 to set up, check equipment and bed down for the evening, but not before the SQMS Ian Christie and his team presented us all with a substantial Pasta meal and a couple of glasses of wine, just the start needed to get us in the right frame of mind before the main event.

A full English breakfast was just the start we needed, after which the 6 riders set off from Squadron Headquarters at 0815hrs 16 Sept 2010 to ride the first 20 miles through built up areas, heavy traffic and a varying degree of different road surfaces and of course the 1 or 2 obligatory hills. The first stop and the beginning of leg 1 was at the car park at the Marina Public House in Amble whereupon the mobile G4 Team under the guidance of SSgt Joe Howe had a more than welcoming brew and a seat that was more than the switch blade type seat we had just used for the first 20 miles. After a short break and the collection of the 2 guest riders we set off along the more scenic coastal route. This saw us transiting some wonderful coastal scenery passing by the first of the Northumberland coastal castles at Warkworth. The main attraction to this leg was not the magnificent Castle but the stream line and stealth appearance of the first guest rider Lance Armstrong Lachs who found the leg extremely difficult but is congratulated on an excellent effort; he would not give up and kept going, not bad for someone who last rode a bike many years previously. The leg ended at the small village of Embleton. Once again we were met by the G4 Team who had the added bonus of our lunch which has to be said was substantial. After a 30 minute lunch break and the onset of some extremely dark clouds we set off on leg 2 with the addition of 2 guest riders. This leg once again had some very pleasant coastal scenery, high hedges with 1 or 2





■ The permanent team riders on Ex Pnr Triangle

Picture: Supplied

hills. It was not long until we were in a head on wind, this was especially strong whilst riding close to the sea at Seahouses moving north past the magnificent sight of Bamburgh Castle. Once past the castle the riders moved onto the small hamlet at Elwick. After a short rest and hot brew we once again picked up the final 2 guest riders for the day and set out for the TAC at Berwick. This leg had a few hills and an especially long gradual rise to the outskirts of Berwick, not for the faint hearted especially for the 6 riders who had completed the full 68 mile of stage 1. The ride into Berwick saw our first spell of rain and the first mechanical fatality, that said the rain only lasted 10 minutes but Sgt Mark Williams totalled the bike pedal crankshaft. This was repaired at a local Halfords which is managed by one of our TA soldiers, Pte Hutton. The riders arrived at the TAC to a very well organised scene with the drill hall set up for the riders with camp cots erected and personal kit placed close by. The team set about checking equipment and organising themselves ready for the start of Stage 2. That evening saw all the team and support staff chill out have a few refreshments followed by an excellent curry made by the soon to be married LCpl Chambers. Once all were fed and watered it was time to turn in and have a restless night due to aches, pains and the phantom snorer.

Reveille day 2 stage 2 saw the start of a very cold morning that was soon forgotten once we had a full English breakfast and prepared ourselves for the stage ahead. This stage saw the 6 riders leave the TAC and climb the ever rising hill out of Berwick a stern test for the older members. The first 15 miles to Lowick was a pleasant country ride with 1 or 2 hills and some lovely scenery. The ride from Berwick TAC to leg 1 of stage 2 was soon

upon us and yes you guessed it SSgt Howe was there to meet us with the brew and this time 3 guest riders from C troop. After a 10 minute break we continued on our way, this time through a valley wedged between the Cheviot hills on one side and sprawling rolling hills on the other this was an extremely quiet stretch apart from the crunching of SSgt Hutches gear cogs shuffling about trying to decide which gear he wanted. There was as you have come to expect a few hills that were quite steep. The 3 guest riders enjoyed this leg and completed it in fine form. The end of this leg rest spot was in a lay-by close to the main Wooler to Rothbury road. Once again we had a 10 minute stop, a photo shoot and 2 fresh guest riders for the next leg. The next leg was ridden in a fairly fast pace mainly due to the fact that most of it was flat and on a newly laid main A road. This leg finished at the main riverside car park in Rothbury where we again met the G4 team and our packed lunch, this was a feast to behold, Pork pies, huge growlers, chocolate, crisps, drinks and of course some fruit. The riders quickly settled themselves down for lunch and all seemed well until Staff Howe noticed that we had a riders lunch still untouched, we quickly carried out a head count and yes we were one rider short, this was strange as Capt Place swept up the rear riders to bring them into Rothbury and did not see any stragglers, it was soon sorted and nearly all to a man said its Jim the SPSP but then again who else would it be! Jim obviously stayed in his bubble or balloon and rode straight on heading for any town beginning with an R we caught up with him at Rochester (only joking), but there's always one. The mobile G4 team quickly set out to find him and bring him back for lunch, no harm done but it gave everyone a smile.

After lunch it was the Hill climb section of some 15 miles that would only be completed by the 6 permanent riders. This section was extremely difficult with 4 out of the 6 riders having to actually walk short distance on one or two of them, but that takes nothing away from the achievement as they had already completed 130 miles or so.

Once on top the views were exceptional; seeing the Cheviots and the surrounding countryside in the afternoon sunshine more than made up for it. This particular section finished at a large lay-by just past the English Heritage site at Wallington Hall. The final leg of stage 2 began and once again saw the addition of 2 guest riders 1 of which was the OC on his Massey Ferguson mountain bike.

He seemed well up for it as we set off on the final 17 mile leg of open country roads, high hedges, a few hills and some very nice scenery. On reaching the TAC the G4 team had once again set up our camp cots and deposited our personal kit by our beds. After checking the bikes and showering we sat down to our last supper and a few beers before a few more beers whilst relaxing watching the training DVD Karate Kid (the new version). After a very bad nights sleep and the movement of personnel trying to get out of the sound range of the Phantom snorer (OC). Reveille was soon upon us and that full English breakfast.

The team formed up for the final stage of the ride back to the Squadron Headquarters at Cramlington. This stage would be 2 legs each with 2 guest riders however the OC volunteered to complete the final 2 legs which was commendable to say the least especially as he was unaware that the first leg had 3 slopes to conquer. The 2 guest riders soon got into the groove and seemed relaxed. We



## NEWS IN BRIEF



■ **THE HEROES** return scheme has been extended to 2012.

Through the scheme, Second World War veterans from the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Republic of Ireland can apply for travel and accommodation costs to visit the places across the world where they saw active service or to take part in an official commemoration in the UK.

War widows and widowers of veterans are also eligible, and carers and spouses can also receive funding to travel with veterans.

The big Lottery Fund has committed over £1 million in extra funding in the year ahead for the Second World War veterans to make their personal battlefield commemorative journeys to the places they saw action.

The additional funding for the Heroes Return grant scheme came on the day the Fund named the 50,000th individual to benefit from the scheme.

The extra funding for the scheme will help ensure veterans still to apply are able to journey in the year ahead to revisit the scenes of Second World War events, such as the forthcoming 70th anniversary of the Battle of Crete.

**Contacts** – for information and details of how to apply for a Heroes Return 2 grant call 0845 00 00 121 or visit [www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/heroesreturn](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/heroesreturn)

■ **SERVING PERSONNEL** and recent Service Leavers are reminded to make the most of the opportunity to claim Enhanced Learning Credits (ELC) to help gain new qualifications.

The ELC scheme allows registered members to make a total of three claims towards the cost of courses and qualifications.

All people who registered for membership and completed four years qualifying service – from 1 April 2000 or date of enlistment if later – are eligible to use the scheme for up to ten years after leaving the Armed Forces, if they have any of their three claims left.

ELC may be used to gain qualifications at Level 3 and above.

The maximum value per claim is £1,000 for those who served four to seven years, of £2,000 for those who served eight years or more. In all cases, claimants are expected to pay at least 20% of the course costs.

**Contacts** – for full details of the scheme, visit [www.enhancedlearningcredits.com](http://www.enhancedlearningcredits.com)

■ **THE ROYAL** British Legion has donated £5 million to help cover the running costs at the Army's Personnel Recovery Centre in Edinburgh.

The pledge forms part of a £50 million grant from the charity that is aimed at providing care for wounded, injured and chronically sick Armed Forces personnel.

Spread over ten years, the money will assist in meeting the operating costs of four Personnel Recovery Centres to be established in the UK as well as covering the capital financing for a bespoke facility in Germany and the creation of The Royal British Legion Battle Back Centre.

The state-of-the-art, 12-bed Scottish facility is based at Erskine's Mark Wright House and further centres will be created in Colchester, Catterick and Tidworth. They will be built by Help for Heroes and operated jointly by the Royal British Legion and the Army.



■ Ex Pnr Triangle with guest riders riding past Bamburgh Castle, Northumberland

Picture: Supplied

pedalled through Hexham high street passed the hospital and onto Corbridge, we crossed the River Tyne past the Angel pub and onto our first climb out of the town before turning off the main route and into the countryside for some peace and quiet. It was not long however before we hit a steep climb that both Joe Rushbrook and I had forgotten just how steep it was and by God I found it steep climbing to a bridge over the A69.

Once we reached the top and stopped to gather our breath we set off again transiting some excellent countryside and especially quiet roads with high hedges which gave some respite from light crossing winds. After about 9 miles we stopped for a photo shoot against the backdrop of 3 reservoirs. We then moved on to Harlow hill aptly named as it was short but extremely steep and required some strength to get over it. Once at the top there was a 1½ mile stretch of straight down hill before hitting the long steep hill at Two Hoots which was a challenge. All Guest riders had conquered the Roman road hills this an achievement in its own right.

As we came to the final drop off and pick up we rested and had a hot brew before picking up the final 2 guest riders and our first female rider. This leg saw us skirt round Darras hall and ride through the centre of Ponteland to take the long road back to Cramlington and the finish line. On entering the outskirts of Cramlington the riders closed up and all entered Fox Barracks together crossing the finish line marked suitably by the Finish banner attached to 2 herringboned Landrovers flying the Regimental and Squadron flags, not to mention the masses of crowds.

Once all equipment and riders had been accounted for cleaned down and showered the Squadron and all the supporters enjoyed some beers and a magnificent BBQ bought and cooked by Brenda and Joe Daniels, as far as BBQs go this was one of the best ever, well laid out and a superb spread just what the doctor ordered for all the riders and their supporters, to you both many thanks.

This exercise was primarily aimed at doing something different, to try and get as many Squadron members involved and to test their endurance on a bike across some outstanding beautiful country side while also trying to raise some funds for the ABF, the Soldier's charity.

The exercise was a huge success and achieved the aim. However as with all these type of events, they don't just happen and without the support of the guest riders, the permanent 6 man team and the excellent G4 support team this would not have been possible. To you all I would like to express my sincere thanks for what I can only describe as an excellent exercise executed with precision and style.

**Credits and Thanks** - Lt Col S J Caldwell – CO 168 Regt for authorising the Exercise

**Permanent Team Riders** - Lt Col S J Caldwell, Capt L Place MBE, Capt A Pickering, WO2 Reeves, SSgt Rushbrook, Sgt Williams

**Guest riders** - Major JMW Forest-Anderson, SSgt Hutchison, Sgt Derries, Sgt Foster, Cpls Williams & Jackman, LCpls Chambers, Heather, Lachs & Trevillion, Ptes Stewart, Brown & Sanderson

**G4 Home team** - WO2 (SQMS) Christie, SSgt (SQMS) Walker, Mr Joe Daniels, Mrs Brenda Daniels, Mr Tommy Dean, Pte Stewart

**G4 Mobile team** - SSgt Howe, Sgt Foster, LCpl Lachs, Pte Hirst

**TAC G4 Support (Berwick)** - SSgt Hutchison, LCpl Chambers

**Specialist ES Support (Berwick)** - Pte Hutton

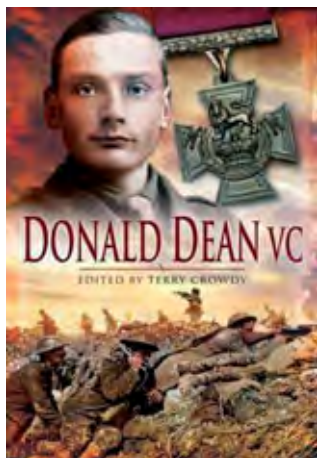
**ES Support team** - SSgt Mercer  
**Clerical support and Presentation Design** - Mrs Jackie Wallace

**Exercise Directors and Planning Control** - Capt L Place MBE & SSgt Rushbrook

**Exercise Route Recce team** - Capt L Place MBE, SSgt Rushbrook, SSgt Howe

**Special Thanks** - To SSgt Rushbrook for all his assistance and effort put into the planning and execution of the event. To all those who supported the event and donated money to this worthwhile cause The ABF - The Soldiers Charity





# Colonel Donald Dean VC

In the October 2010 Newsletter we reviewed the book "Dean VC" by Terry Crowdy. The author and the publisher have given us permission to publish Chapter 10 entitled Madagascar from the book. They have all also given all members who wish to purchase the book a discounted price of £15.99 (this includes Postage) simply quote DEANVC on your order. Details are shown at [www.pen-and-sword.co.uk](http://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk)

Report: Norman Brown  
Picture: Norman Brown

**M**Y 5 Group AMPC reformed at Clacton after a brief stay at the Pioneer Centre at Caister where we were assigned to coastal defence. We were one of the very few units of the British Army that was formed, disciplined and armed back from France during a period when there was near chaos in the Army. Although armed we were only armed in a very modest way as we only had what we collected and come back with from France.

As we were getting nowhere at Caister we asked for and received permission to go to Clacton where we originally formed our Group HQ. There we received several additional companies and then were attached to 11 Corps which had its HQ first of all at Bishops Stortford and later near Newmarket.

I set up my Group HQ at Buntingford as a convenient centre on 4 June 1940 and had companies spread over Essex, Herts, Beds, Cambs and parts of Hunts and Suffolk. At times my command exceeded in numbers an infantry brigade. We were largely engaged in airfield construction, maintenance after bombing, camp construction, etc. as well as RE and stores depot work. I had sent to me the first company of conscientious objectors wished on to me by the Director of Labour, now Major-General Friend. They were called 'Non Combatant Corps' and all officers and NCOs were found by the Pioneer Corps.

When they first came to me they seemed disappointed that they were not being treated any differently from my other companies with the exception that they were not allowed to handle 'offensive material' but as no one gave me a definition of this I took it to be weapons and ammunition only. They had apparently been fully expecting to be martyrs for the sake of their principles. As far as I knew they were all genuine and were mostly well educated. A very big proportion of them later transferred, at their own request to other branches of the army, some even to combatant units.

Being for the moment at any rate on home service, and Sittingbourne being in a most doubtful area, I got Marjorie and the two children up into a furnished house, 'Rest Harrow', at Westmill on 16 July. We tried furnished rooms in Buntingford for a short time before we got this house. We took Rest Harrow for a year at an agreed rent, with the option of taking it for a longer period after that at a reduced rent, but when it came for the reduced rent the owner, a Mr. Davies, decided to turn us out on the grounds that he wanted it himself. As by this time we had become most

friendly with Jack and Bee Murray who owned Coles Park they arranged for us to take over The Dower House there.

One evening while we were at Rest Harrow an enemy plane flew overhead and I heard the whine of falling bombs, a sound with which we were all too familiar. Marjorie was for the moment indignant with me as I pushed her down on the kitchen floor quickly and lay down with her. Several bombs fell with thuds, two of them within a few yards of the house but they were delayed action. I went outside to see just where they were and found them far too close for safety although they had buried themselves out of sight. We quickly picked up young Susan who was in bed and by this time neighbours and Home Guard had arrived and they invited us to spend the night at their houses; I with a Colonel Greg and Marjorie & Susan with Guy and Lorraine Morris. The bombs went up presently and made huge craters and much of the garden was sprinkled with clods but the house was not damaged so we returned there next morning.

One night while still at Rest Harrow we had a girl friend, Peggy Priestley staying with us, when about 1 am, the phone rang. I dashed to it as at that time we were expecting an invasion at any moment but the call was from one of Peggy's Air Force admirers in Scotland who had booked a call hours before and had not cancelled it. I hastily pushed the phone into Peggy's room on its long wandering lead and shut the door as far as possible but we could not help overhearing her refusing a proposal of marriage. The young officer flew down a few hours later and repeated the proposal but was still refused.

Not so long after this the phone rang one night: "Duty Officer at Corps speaking, CROMWELL". I told him that I did not know what this code word meant so he must be more explicit if it required action on my part. He assured me it required urgent action but said that he could not possibly say over the phone. I accordingly phoned up the CO of a nearby RASC unit but he had no secret code book either. I then phoned up the CO of an artillery unit but he was on leave and although they had a secret code book the CO had gone off with the key to the safe in his pocket. I phoned back to Corps HQ and told the duty officer that I was unable to find out what CROMWELL meant and unless Corps sent me instructions I could do nothing and that I was going back to bed. It was of course a premature warning of imminent invasion which never materialised. (With the Battle of Britain at its height, the moon and tide indicated

there would be favourable tides and moon for a landing between 8 and 10 September. In order to bring Home Forces to a state of readiness the Chiefs of Staff issued the Codeword CROMWELL just after 8pm on Saturday, 7 September.)

Work continued as usual in a Pioneer Group for by this time we had settled into a routine. One of my scattered detachments showed an unduly high proportion of 'sick' so I went up there to investigate. I found that there was no Army MO near so the detachment had been put under the local medical practitioner who was a woman. I told her that in my opinion she was being far too kind hearted whenever any man reported a minor ailment, and I gave her a few details of 'sick' men who had gone off for the day enjoying themselves. After this a man almost had to have a broken leg before he got excused duty.

Being between London and so many Air Fields enemy planes were constantly passing overhead and during the Battle of Britain in September 1940 particularly they were a bit careless in their bomb dropping when they wanted to unload in a hurry. We did everything we could to assist the local Home Guard in their training. The local platoon was administered by Colonel Greg who was a sergeant in the Home Guard but always wore his Sam Brown as well as his Sergeant's stripes. One day a plane made a forced landing near us so I hurried over to help if necessary. I was told that it was piloted by either a foreign spy or that the crash had made him deaf and dumb. As I saw the plane was one of our fighters I asked the pilot, in English if he was hurt. He said "I am a Pole in the RAF and my

English is so bad still that I was afraid that the Home Guard would shoot me as a spy if I opened my mouth!"

While we were stationed here all Pioneer Groups were given a second-in command which was very

desirable as I had in my Group over 3000 men scattered round 6 counties. My second in charge was a Major Cannon, late of The Queens, a first class soldier and a very nice man.

A very big exercise was held called BUMPER which was the usual type with Red Force invading and Blue Force defending, or the other way round. The defending force anyway was under Corps Commander 'Snowey' Osborne and because of secrecy his HQ did not issue the addresses and phone numbers of his various Units. Battle HQs until the last moment but they included in the distribution several of the 'enemy' formations thus informing the enemy of where to seek them. A mobile force of the

**'A man had to have a broken leg before he was excused duty'**



attackers did a swift right flank swing and arrived unexpectedly at Osborne's HQ but a staff officer just had time to rush down to the gate and stick up an 'Out of Bounds' notice. 'Snowey' Osborne was retired after this exercise, to my personal pleasure.

Finally in March 1942 the time came for me to go abroad again. Marjorie stayed on at The Dower House while Michael and Susan went to school but spent their holidays there. Marjorie continued to be a great source of comfort to Jack and Bee Murray who were cut off by petrol shortage and war restrictions from so many of their friends. Michael had a Four-ten shotgun and learned to shoot in Coles Park where he had permission to shoot any grey squirrels he could. Susan went to a day school in Buntingford where she met Rosemary Cannon and later they went off together to Princess Helena's. Michael then went to board at Haileybury.

The War Office ordered No. 5 Group HQ to embark once more for active service, for an unknown destination. A slight indication was given by ordering that tropical kit should be drawn. This was quickly followed by order that we should move in two parts, the first consisted of myself as Commanding Officer; Captain J.G. Morley (Adjutant); Lieutenant. M.F. Browne (QM) and 10 other ranks. Major H.C. Cannon, the second in charge was to follow with the remaining 8 ORs including the RQMS and bring the Group transport which then consisted of 1 staff car and 1 motorcycle.

The reduced Group HQ left Stanstead, Essex for the port of embarkation on 20 March. We embarked on M/S Sobieski, a Polish merchantman, on 21 March 1942 at Glasgow and found ourselves to be part of 121 Force trained in Assault Landings and the Sobieski carried a number of landing craft in addition to usual ships boats. Much speculation naturally followed as none of the other units had been issued with KD.

On 23 March we sailed at 1500 hrs and joined a large convoy off Greenock. Most of the army personnel fully expected a landing to be made by 'force' and most of them had much practice of this in mutual cooperation. It appeared that there were no Pioneer companies included in the Force so we could not understand why a Pioneer Group HQ was required.

First we sailed west round north of Ireland well into Atlantic and then turned south. Our boat was No.2 in 6th line. I counted 26 vessels in convoy in sight plus the escort. Circling the convoy there were a number of destroyers (I saw 6 at once), a cruiser and aircraft carrier also with escort. We went round with OC Troops and the ship's captain on Ship's Inspection and saw more corners and dark holes than one normally believes existed. I was invited to take meals in future with the ship's officers and OC Troops; incidentally the food on board excellent in quality, change of menu and cooking. I was asked to take charge of all 'Details' on board of both officers and OR's of army and Royal Marines. I had some difficulty in finding all my 'Details' which consisted of some 460 of all ranks from 17 different units but as I went round daily with OC Troops on his daily 'procession' of inspection I found them all in time.

For the first four nights we had to sleep in our clothes, for security reasons. The washing water was only put on for 1 hour in mornings and 1½ hours in evening. Although I wished Major Bellis (my cabin

mate) would have gone to bed a trifle earlier, as he also slept late I got clear of the bedroom and lavatory before he rose. One set of K.D. and topees were issued to all troops when at sea and they were told that a change would be issued on arrival.

We arrived off Freetown on 6 April and left on 9 April without being able to land. As we entered the harbour we saw our first view of Africa and I noted white bungalows on hillsides, many palm trees, native bum boats, and clouds low on hills. The town itself was at the foot of some hills and straggled up the hillsides with more hills and a range of mountains in the distance. At one spot near the entrance to the

harbour is a tropical island close inshore, with one spot, a sandy beach running up to palm and banyan trees exactly like coloured cinema pictures. There was much fun caused by the bum boats with green bananas being elicited away from ships by hose pipes.

We were warned to wear clothing over our arms and knees towards sundown because of mosquitoes. The weather was very close and sultry. The stifling heat on board a stationary ship, so near the Equator, after blackout, must be experienced to be believed. It was so great that we sat playing cards in shirtsleeves and shorts (or trousers) perspiration poured off us but during day it was not so bad. We crossed equator on 11 April at 10.12 hrs but owing to tropical rain the usual ceremonies did not take place.

We reached Durban on 22 April. The buildings make it look like a miniature New York as some of the skyscrapers went up to about 16 or 20 stories. There was a brilliant green on bluff sheltering harbour, a brilliant blue sky and sea, white or cream buildings and yellow sands. The men were given shore leave until midnight. Every opportunity was taken to do route marching and toughening up after a month at sea.

In the afternoon I went shopping using rickshaws and taxis. The town was not blacked out and after dusk, which falls early, there was the constant undertone of crickets over the docks and the whole town - a sound not noticeable during daylight where it is perhaps drowned out by other noises.

On 24 April we made a route march in morning to North Beach. We allowed the men to buy fruit for lunch: grapes at 6d per bunch, pears, apples, bananas, pineapples, avocado pears etc. (oranges 1½ to 2d each as the crop was short). In the evening I met Dr and Mrs Eddington friends of the Padre and had dinner at their house at 7 p.m. I tried the local drinks i.e. brandy and ginger ale, pale sherry (very sweet) and Van Der Hum (a liqueur similar to Cointreau). On the afternoon of 25 April the Padre and I were driven by Dr (Miss) Eddington to the Valley of a Thousand Hills, which is part of a native reserve. En route I saw cane, mealies, palms, bananas, pineapples, orange and lemon trees, blue gums, mimosas etc.

On 27 April I had dinner at a club, went to the cinema in the evening at the Playhouse. 4,000 Australians came into port so all bars closed at 6pm and hotels at 10pm as the town had previously had a convoy of Aussies through and knew what to expect. Tried a paw paw at dinner time at Club also avocado pears. Also bottle of Witzenberg white wine. Much discussion was rife as to the final destination but no general disclosure of plans was made,

however I was told by an Australian officer, met by chance in the club, that the objective was Madagascar and he was laughed to scorn when I professed ignorance. So much for our careful security measures!

The Force left Durban on 28 April so suddenly that 3 orderlies who were emptying rubbish ashore were left on the quay but were put on board when the ship stopped to pick up some 'R' boats. After putting to sea, a conference was held when all senior officers were told the destination and plans but were not allowed to inform the ORs until 2 May by which time they knew already of course.

Madagascar is the fourth largest island in the world being over 1000 miles long and 350 miles across at its widest point. It possesses only three good harbours namely Diego Suarez in the north, which is unconnected by either rail or road with the capital Tananarive, Majunga in the west, which is connected by unmetalled trunk road only with the capital and Tamatave which is on the east and is connected to Tananarive by both an unmetalled trunk road and by a single track railway.

The natives, who are called Malgache, are extremely mixed in type and vary from the chief tribe, the Hovas, who probably originated in Asia and are a superior and gentle type who would prefer to poison an enemy rather than stab him and who mostly become minor civil servants, down to rough and woolly types in the South who are not averse to cannibalism.

The plan in brief was to land at Courier Bay on the west side of the northerly tip of the Island and march east to take the large town and harbour of Diego Suarez from the land side. We subsequently found out that the French were expecting this but owing to the numerous reefs, small islands and submerged rocks, they did not think it feasible for large ships to get close inshore at night.

By the help of two very stout hearted Britons, who had worked for years in Madagascar and had reconnoitred this approach in a small yacht, and first class seamanship by the Royal Navy who laid a trail of marking buoys, the convoy crept in on the night of 4/5 May.

On 5 May reveille came at 02.00 followed by breakfast an hour later. As daylight dawned we found ourselves among islands on the west coast of Madagascar. Leaflets calling for the surrender of the French were dropped on the local French Army Airfield shortly followed by bombs which destroyed most of their aircraft. Landings were made on three beaches as dawn broke and resistance was offered by the French Senegalese Regiment and a battery perched on the top of a pinnacle of rock, nicknamed Windsor Castle, which was apparently a most difficult target for our Naval Gunners.

Twice a white flag was flown from it and twice our troops were fired on when they went to occupy it. The Pioneer Group HQ occupied itself in the way usual on assault landings but instead of having any Pioneer companies who knew this work it had to supervise the work of a mixed bag of spare drivers, gunners and details from about 12 units, men who had never landed stores, vehicles, ammunition, petrol, food, water, etc. on a beach from a landing craft before.

After the first few hours there was no more fighting near the beaches and the chief difficulty was to find strange men who did not relish the hard work which was new to them, and in that temperature, and work that they reckoned was not their job.

## **'Twice a white flag was flown and twice our men were fired on'**



Meanwhile, the attack moved forward and after a fierce struggle, in which the British had over 500 casualties, the airfield and whole town, docks and harbour at Diego Suarez were captured.

On 6 May at 04.30 I was told to get onto the Main (Blue) Beach at once to take charge of all working parties unloading and despatching ammo, food, water, vehicles, RE materials etc. Which proved most necessary. It was a tropical beach of yellow and fringed with scrub and trees. We quickly formed our camp under a tree and bushes. Everyone soon caked with sweat and red dust. I went to sleep at 11.45 pm under a wonderful tropic sky.

This wonderful landlocked harbour, with a narrow easily defended entrance, was stated to be large enough to hold the whole Allied Navies, while there was a dry dock which could take a cruiser.

The French had not particularly wished to fight the British, nor they them, but while hostilities were in actual progress private sentiments went for nothing, however after the surrender there was a philosophical acceptance of hard facts by both sides and even a small measure of cooperation for the mutual good.

It was found that the Allied blockade of several years had produced acute shortages of all articles not produced on the island; no clothes, or materials of any description were on sale in any shop and one chemist even had a notice in his window which stated, (in French), 'Repairs to toothbrushes from 5 francs'!

British supply ships came alongside the quay in the harbour for unloading and dumps were formed for the Force. When we unloaded the bales of clothing to issue the second set of KD, which by this time was most urgently needed, the bales were found to contain not tropical kit as expected but greatcoats, woollen underclothing and blankets none of which we needed as the former were not worn in such a hot climate and we had all brought our own blankets. We hoped that Iceland or Murmansk enjoyed our KD!

In consequence most men were supplied with articles of captured French tropical kit in lieu, which created still further variations in the British uniforms. The order then in force, and strictly enforced, was that all ranks must wear topees because of the dangerous sun so near the equator and this was only disregarded by the senior officers entitled to wear red bands round their caps, thereby proving presumably that even nature has respect for army rank.

5 Group HQ set up a civilian labour office and supervised the work of native PoWs (Malgache only, as the Senegalese were fighting men who could not be trusted to work for the British). The work at the harbour was supervised initially by personnel of a Docks Operating Company but they were insufficient in number to do the actual work so 5 Group arranged with the Monsieur Jacques, the local manager of the company who owned the docks, for him to supply 100 of his Arab dock labourers daily to assist. This arrangement worked for exactly one week when the Arabs all went on strike and refused to work any longer for their French employers.

It was found that these Arabs were from Yemen, on a 2 years contract which had expired some time before, but they could not be repatriated owing to war conditions. 5 Group HQ then took over all these Arab dockers and requisitioned their barracks and compound with everything in it which

was found to contain certain families and even a mosque. Fortunately the Arabs did not know that Army regulations strictly forbade the requisitioning of any religious buildings, so all was well.

The Group QM rose to the occasion and a ration scale was made up for these Arabs and then drawn from the RASC. They were rather doubtful about the correctness of it but had to pass it as they could not prove it to be wrong. There was some difficulty in getting all the Arabs to work when required but Group finally worked out that rations were issued only for the numbers at work, plus an allowance for families, so 'no work no rations' kept them up to scratch.

No one at Group HQ could speak Arabic and none of the Arabs could speak French but one Arab spoke a little English so we made do in the usual Pioneer manner. This worked for a few days until a Sea Transport Officer [STO], Cdr Griffiths stated that he was responsible for unloading and loading all ships and that he had made a contract with the Compagnie Maritime de l'Afrique Orientale for this work. Force told Group to hand over the Arabs once more and the STO to carry on.

The result was that the Arabs struck again and work at the port was at a standstill. I was ordered by Brigadier Lush (who had no executive powers at all) to re-engage the Arabs and work them as the French company had failed to carry out the contract for clearing the ships as made with Commander Griffiths. With the aid of my stalwarts at Group HQ I did as asked and from then onwards the Arabs worked with little fuss under direct command of the Pioneer Group.

Each Arab was issued by Group with a homemade identity card, on which his thumb mark was placed, this was stamped daily as he entered the dock enclosure and on these numbers food was issued and later each man was paid on his number of days worked as shown on his card. I fixed the rates of pay for the Arabs, taking into consideration the housing and feeding provided, after consulting local employers who were not very co-operative, and these rates were paid by Group weekly with money obtained through their imprest account from the Force Paymaster who paid over Madagascar Francs taken from the local banks rather than use prepared Occupational Currency.

The Paymaster objected to this on the grounds that there was no authority so I asked the Force Commander, General Sturgis of the Royal Marines, to put me in Force orders as Acting Assistant Director of Labour. This the General did. As A/ADL I then authorised certain rates of pay for Arabs and civilian Malgache labour and sent a copy to the Paymaster. After this Group drew any money needed, quoting the authority of the A/ADL and everyone was satisfied.

When the first payment was made each Arab had to receipt with his thumb mark after receiving his money. A number of them continued to hold out their hands after the paying officer had placed the money in them and it was some time before one gathered that they were waiting for the officer's private rake-off to be taken back as they had actually received in full the money promised. They then offered it to the Pioneer who was taking thumbprints as it was evident that the officer did not do this personally; they finally went off amazed when no one deducted anything.

Meantime labour demands from all services were on a very large scale and as

civilian labour was difficult to obtain, and very unreliable anyway, Group collected daily up to 2000 PoWs from the neighbouring camp, split them up into suitable parties and saw that at least one could speak French before handing them over to the employing services who had to provide escort, which was rarely needed in actual fact. This arrangement worked only as long as the working sites were within reasonable marching distance, but many were not, so something further was needed and naturally the Force Commander expected Group to find the answer.

About this time also trouble was raised by a Frenchman who said that he was the local representative of the Red Cross and that Force was breaking the Geneva Convention by making POWs handle offensive materials. This was quite correct of course so again the Force Commander asked me to find the remedy.

The answer to the difficulties was obviously to form labour companies of some description, and I had several times been requested permission either for the importation of same or for permission to recruit locally. I was told that the matter had been referred to the War Office but had been turned down.

I then suggested to Force that Malgache PoWs might be released from their French Army engagements and formed into labour companies under Group HQ. As the matter was urgent General Sturgis finally agreed to this as long as they were civilian labour companies only and a start was to be made with 500.

Accordingly I chose a camp site on a state farm where the only buildings were some good piggeries. Permission to use this was then sought but although on active service, believe it or not, Group had to get consents from or to notify the following:

1. Force AA & QMG,
2. Town Major,
3. REs for water,
4. The Anti-Malarial Officer,
5. The Political Officer,
6. Hygiene Officer,
7. ADMS,
8. RASC for rations,
9. Force Transport Officer,
10. RAOC for tentage,
11. RE Dump for tools,
12. The ADL so that I could be quoted as being in favour.

I also had to get out and duly authorise rates of pay for various ranks.

These matters all being complied with the following day myself and my adjutant visited the PoWs camp where 500 Malgache from various units, under native NCOs and one native Sergeant Chef were drawn up. The French officer who had agreed to cooperate read out to them that they were temporarily released from the French Army. I then shouted out in my best French: "You are no longer PoWs but are free men and will work for the British Army for pay; by the right quick march."

The column then moved off to its new camp site and as it passed along the way a number of wives, official or otherwise, who had apparently been lurking in the undergrowth, fell in behind with their worldly goods upon their heads and straggled after their men folk, which rather spoiled the martial appearance of the parade. When they arrived at the camp I decided to put the single men into tents and that the men with expected wives and/or children must build huts in the adjoining field. This was done but, as was found later, an initial mistake was made in not having town planning from the start.

The 500 were split into sections of 100

## **'Repairs to toothbrushes from 5 Francs!'**



each as an easy unit for work and were placed under 5 Pioneer privates from Group HQ, clerks, storeman, batman, etc. This arrangement proved so satisfactory that the process was repeated, and size of sections increased, until there were 2000 natives in camp, plus hundreds of women, some children, goats, chickens, etc.

The authorities said 'why keep a POWs camp for a few natives when they appear to stay unguarded in a Pioneer Camp?' The balance of approximately 1000 PoWs were therefore handed over to Group who now proudly had 3000 men in their mobile labour companies some 500 wives etc. And soon easily the largest native village in that part of Madagascar. The whole became known soon as 'Dean Force.'

Sanitation among the men was adequately dealt with but was a problem with the families until I picked out the wife of the sergeant chef, pinned onto her the same badge of rank as her husband's and appointed her in charge of all women and children. At the same time she was put on the pay roll but as nothing was said about this, and the paymaster did not know the difference between male and female Malgache names, all was well.

Rice and meat was drawn but the camp had to grow its own vegetables to feed the hungry mob. It was found that the last contingent of ex-PoWs included nearly 300 Comorians, men from the French Comoro Islands in the Indian Ocean between Madagascar and Mozambique, fierce fellows who were all Moslems and therefore required separate rations, cookhouses, etc. They were all old soldiers and did not get on well with the Malgache so it was decided to work them in the dock area alongside with the Arabs of the same faith.

The actual work of making out payrolls and paying as well as rationing and administering 3000 men without their own officers, plus dealing with families and doing the same for the Arab dockers and odd civilians working for various services, HQ and messes, proved too much for only 3 Pioneer officers and the devoted and overworked 10 Pioneer ORs so Force was asked to attach various officers and ORs from Details.

This Force did but the personnel were constantly changing and at one time included several South Africans who spoke very little English. Force decided to form a battery of French 75 guns but several of the breech blocks were missing, believed buried by the French on the arrival of the British. For several weeks abortive search had been made for them but the French officers would not tell where they were. Hearing about this I told his Sergeant chef to parade any natives from the battery in question. I then said to them "Do you remember where you hid the breech blocks"? They said "Yes" so I said "Jump into this lorry and one of you show the driver where to go and then bring the breech blocks back here". This was done and the guns put into order.

The next demand from Force was for native drivers for this battery. Luck again favoured Group as some of their native Pioneers were the late drivers, who were even able to round up some of their battery mules. So together with certain gun numbers, all fitted out with the new French uniforms, Group helped substantially to assist in reforming the battery.

One Malgache Pioneer had stolen from him, while sick in camp, a sum of 845 francs which was his life savings. An enquiry revealed little except that the Group CO was convinced that the

Malgache all knew the thief but would not tell a white man. The judgement was that all the 80 odd suspects should have 10 francs each deducted from their pay, which was then due, and this was done next pay day. Two days later it was learned that the men had all forcibly collected their 10 francs from the thief!

Among the numerous jobs done by the native Pioneers was making an airfield. At least that was the order, but it was found that an airstrip was all that was required and this was done in record time because the wind obligingly blew in one fixed direction for 6 months and then still more obligingly blew from the exactly opposite quarter for the next half year. Work was done for the Royal Navy at times as well as for the Army and RAF. One of the least pleasant jobs for the Pioneers was grave digging because after the fighting ceased in that area malaria claimed many victims.

Considerable excitement was caused on the night of 30 May when a tanker was torpedoed and sunk in the harbour and the Ramalies was also hit by 2 torpedoes, this battleship also being in the harbour at the moment, but though considerably damaged was not sunk. It was then thought that it was done by a French submarine. Guns were fired at imaginary targets and for a few minutes alarm reigned.

One ship fired her 6" gun at a whaler picking up swimmers and it was also fired at by a pom pom on the battleship but fortunately there were no casualties from this. Troops 'stood to', the Force Commander signalled to the Ramalies asking if any help was needed by the admiral on board signalled back in a typical naval manner declining help with thanks and inviting the general to breakfast that morning.

It was feared that this presaged a general rising by the local French, and I was asked what troops I needed to deal with possible trouble among my ex-PoWs Pioneers. On doing the rounds of his camp I found everyone apparently asleep. It subsequently proved to be a Japanese submarine that had done the dirty work.

Later some East African transport arrived on the island and I was loaned a van driven by an Askari so had to learn some Swahili. Private Guinness was a Group clerk who could speak French did particularly good work during this period and, although a British private, was known by the natives as the 'Sergeant Major'. One day after he had dealt in quick succession with Arabs, Malgache, Lascars from the sunken tanker, Afrikaans-speaking South Africans and French in the normal course of his duties, he threw up his hands exclaiming "Oh for a second Day of Pentecost".

Another job for a party of native Pioneers was cutting poles in the forest at Joffreville. This lush section was a great change from the arid dust-swept area round Diego Suarez as it was on hills which caught considerable rain. There was much competition between the members of Group HQ to visit this pole cutting job. The lemurs occasionally seen in these forests, together with the crocodiles in the lakes and rivers, were the only wild animals ever seen in Madagascar though some of the reputed 10,000,000 cattle were wild enough.

On 6 June the Christening of the baby son of my French foreman, Stannier took place. As he was Roman Catholic and I Protestant I did not act as godfather as originally arranged but gave presents and

took an aperitif there. That same day I went to Orangea to the site of new landing ground with 2nd Lieutenant Thomas.

Later that month a Lt Col West commanding 2 Bn South Lancs Regiment went to my Labour Camp and without reference to me cancelled my orders (given after consultation with Force HQ) to certain NCOs put up to 'Acting unpaid Local rank'. These NCOs were from his battalion but had been attached to me 'for all purposes'. Not content with this he complained to Brigadier Festing who sent for me, although he had no authority to do so and viciously attacked me for giving such A/U/Local ranks. He was so obviously in the wrong that I stood up to him and finally got a half apology. Later Lt Cols West and Thatcher visited me in the mess when we tried to settle the matter. Lt Col Elmslie (AA & QMG) told me quite unsolicited, that army support I might desire from Force HQ would be freely given to me. I showed Elmslie the letter signed by himself instructing that Acting Unpaid Local rank would be given to all attached NCOs.

At the end of July an East African Military Labour Group HQ together with the HQ of 3 of their companies arrived and relieved 5 Group of much of its worries, so Dean Force was handed over to them. On 8 August, Major

Cannon and the 8 ORs, who had formed the rear party when Group left England, arrived at last. They had left England on 24 May and had spent 4 weeks in Durban as the ship they left there in after two weeks developed engine trouble and had to put back again.

Before we left Diego Suarez a newly formed Battalion of King's African Rifles was brought in as a garrison to relieve the British troops due to go on to Ceylon or India and for the Askaries to continue with their training at the same time. It was rumoured that only a few weeks prior to their arrival they had been in their primeval forests in East Africa but be that as it may, they had certainly had little training and had seen few white men before joining up.

A battalion of a certain famous Scottish regiment was detailed to meet this KAR Battalion at the docks and to see them fed and happily bedded down for the night, in a way quite normal in the British Army with new arrivals. To the astonishment of most of these black Askaries they found white private soldiers for the first time. Up to then they had believed that white men could only be officers or WOs. By the next morning however they had worked it out logically in their own minds that there were different tribes of white men. The chief one called English found all the officers and sergeant majors while an inferior tribe called Scottish produced only private soldiers.

When we first landed in Madagascar we came prepared with Military Occupation Currency to be used if necessary but right from the start we found sufficient local paper money in the banks in Diego Suarez for current use and as most of this kept circulating and coming back into the banks it was re-used time after time. However we finally began to run short of small paper currency though we still had a few notes of one million francs each, which were no earthly use to us, so on the wireless we contact the Bank of Madagascar Head Office in the island capital of Tananarive, (this used to be called Antananarivo in my school days), which was some hundreds of miles away and still in French occupation

**'The men had forcibly collected their 10 Francs from the thief!'**



of course, asking them whether they would give us change in small notes for 5 notes we held of 1,000,000 francs each.

The governor of the Island refused our request indignantly but evidently the bank pointed out that if we were forced to put our occupation currency into circulation in the Island it might well upset the currency for years, so, whether or not the governor gave permission the Bank agreed to cooperate. Accordingly the Bank officials set forth and travelled along hundreds of miles of dirt roads and crossed numerous rivers and finally arrived at our outpost line. The British Army blew the 'cease fire'. The Paymaster went out in his jeep into no-man's-land and met the bank official, handed over 5 notes and received in exchange 5 large sacks of small denomination notes. Both cars turned about and hostilities nominally restarted.

While still in Diego Suarez we had a certain number of nursing sisters in a British hospital and they soon demanded starch for their uniforms, head coverings, cuffs, etc. Now this was one thing that no-one had thought of providing and none was on sale in local shops and it would have taken weeks to get out from South Africa even. General Sturgis asked 'Dogsbody Dean' to do something about it. I thought hard and finally went to some French Roman Catholic sisters and asked what they did for starch. They explained that they made their own out of rice so I got the recipe and all was well once more.

The original hard core of regular French Army officers who positively refused to cooperate, when we first arrived and had taken the town and area of Diego Suarez, were a bit of a problem so it was decided to send them to England but we never knew whether they were PoWs or were to be sent into France.

However they and their wives and children were put on board a ship bound for England, their women wore all their jewellery when going on board, what we did not know but someone told us that it was their custom as they did not have to pay duty on what they were actually wearing. A fair number of unofficial wives tried to go on the ship with their 'protectors' and there were some tearful scenes when we stopped them. However when the ship cast off and was still in sight they dried their eyes and made a rush to my labour recruiting office on the quay side and demanded that I find them similar positions with British officers and were quite indignant when I told them nothing doing. Some of the French wives stayed behind as they had apparently changed partners without the formality of a divorce but that was not our worry.

The British navy brought into harbour an Italian merchantman and included in the crew were 4 natives from Eritrea. These were locked up separately from the Italians and no one seemed to know what to do with them. I asked for permission to give them jobs if I found them suitable and this was thankfully given to me. I found that they had been stewards and decided that they could well be used in officers' messes if they wished. They were only too happy about this and told me that as the British had conquered their country they considered that they were British subjects and should be treated as such. This seemed fair enough if that is what they really thought, so I had them released without delay and used them as mess staff.

The Political Officer who arrived with

Force HQ was a Brigadier Lush accompanied by several British Army Officers, also from Egypt, whose job appeared to be 'Civil Affairs' or in other words to look after the interests of the civilians against the Army. A few weeks later a civilian, Mr Grafty-Smith arrived, appointed apparently by the Foreign Office, to do exactly the same job. Grafty-Smith thereupon ousted Lush from his office and took Lush's staff car. After a while, Lush flew to East Africa and returned with greater powers and reversed the situation, taking car and front office once more.

This dual appointment continued, under strain, until we had gained control of most of the Island when Lord Reading appeared on the scene as a third and overriding Civil Affairs Officer to sort out the impasse. As I left the Island at that time I never did hear who finally came out on top. We had a number of South African Army and Air Force come out to us and apparently there was a strong move on the part of South Africa to take over control of the whole of the operations in Madagascar with, in the private view of many of us, the idea that after the war they would continue to exercise control or even ownership there. This appeared to be countered by the appointment of General Willy Platt, Commander-in-Chief in East Africa, who tried to boss everybody and everything even after South Africa sent an Infantry Brigade and a section of their Air Force to replace units of the British Army sent to India.

On 2 August, I had occasion to go to the Sacred Lake at Anivarano. The story that I was told was that many years ago the village of Anivarano contained a number of wicked people. The crisis came one day when a witch called at the village and asked for food and water which was refused to her by nearly all the village; the refusal of water was too dreadful to think about. Finally a family on the other side of the village took her in and ministered her wants. The witch warned this family to go the hill and stay there for the night. She then cursed the village and that night the curse operated and the whole of the village sank into the ground and became the present lake while the inhabitants, instead of being drowned were all turned in to crocodiles with immortal life. The good family, with a few friends they took with them, were all saved.

Every year since then the good family, and then their descendants, arrive at the same spot by the lake where there is a grassy low bank, on the anniversary of the destruction. How long this took place I could not find out but it was 'a long, long time ago'. Arrived at the special spot on the given day they kill, cook and eat half of a bull they then clap hands in unison and chant when some of the crocodiles come up out of the lake and eat their share of the bull. The largest crocodile, said to be more than 7 metres long, (say about 23 feet), is the headman of old. None of the relations are killed by the crocodiles but any stranger is most likely to be killed and eaten. The skulls of the bulls are then stuck on a pole and left to rot away in time. I saw a number of these skulls but not the ceremony.

I also saw a tree with many hundreds of flying foxes hanging on it which when disturbed flew round quite close, the largest having bodies about 15" long with a wing span of about 36". They can fly 1/2 mile with apparent ease as they did not

hesitate to fly across part of the lake.

On 23 August, the whole Group HQ sailed from Diego Suarez with 121 Force, who had handed over to East African Units and proceeded to Mombasa, Kenya. Our Force arrived there on 26 August 1942. Actually we docked at the port which is Kilindini. This was so that we could prepare for the next phase in occupying further ports in Madagascar which might cause us serious trouble if they were occupied by Japanese and so cut our vital life line round Africa through the Mozambique Straights. I was on the trooper Dilwara. In the afternoon I went ashore to stretch my legs, do some shopping and look around. It was very hot indeed. I found prices very high and many articles quite unobtainable. Next day I walked to Fort Jesus which was on an island, now joined to the mainland by a causeway. This and a coastal strip were leased to Great Britain by the Sultan of Zanzibar for £12,000 P/A.

Fort Jesus, believed to have been built by Portuguese in the 14th century after a previous expedition had been massacred by the Arabs. The Fort changed hands several times over the years with slaughter of the garrison each time. The Sultan's pink coloured flag was flying through the fort was then being used as HM Prison.

At the end of August we took part in Exercise TOUCHSTONE which was a practice assault to test the defences of Mombasa and as a rehearsal for a landing at the Madagascar port of Majunga. I was an umpire in the exercise. It was hot but bearable. While in Mombasa a local paper printed the news that all mail for the Middle East, which then included us, posted in London and Home Counties 18/30 June 18 was lost by enemy action so that accounted for some of our missing letters from home. We also heard that the 13th Infantry Brigade en route from Madagascar to India developed 800 cases of malaria of which 54 proved fatal.

On 5 September, our Force sailed from Kilindini to make a forced landing at Majunga on the West Coast. 5 Group HQ Pioneer Corps left Major Cannon (my second in charge) and a small detachment to do ditto at Tamatave on the East Coast. My party arrived off Majunga 10 September. There was not much resistance at Majunga when we attacked but much confusion. The French officer in command there, together with the mayor, would not capitulate until we had made a considerable show of force and landed an assault party and fired a few rounds of naval gunfire over the town into the bush behind. French honour being thus satisfied they capitulated but this did not get through immediately to all their troops who were the usual mixed lot of Malgache who did not want to fight anyway and Senegalese who fought well and a few French who formed a kind of defence force but were really armed civilians.

My orders were to get ashore immediately fighting permitted and help get guns and vehicles ashore at 'Green Beach'. Once more no labour was allotted to me for this purpose and no boat to take me ashore. I was supposed to be able to work ruddy miracles and being a Pioneer often did. I managed to get ashore when Brig. Festing's 'R' boat came back for medical supplies as I slipped on board with my batman, one Private O'Connor, who was a first class soldier in times of danger or difficulty as long as he did not come over all Irish with the sorrows of a nation on him, which could only be drowned in whatever liquor was available at that moment.

## **'The French would not capitulate until we had made a show of force'**



When O'Connor and I landed chaos prevailed as usual but fighting had stopped at that particular point although there was still a bit of shooting going on further along in the town. I got hold of a party of Malgache soldiers who were still armed but who did not seem to worry as they presumably reckoned that they need not fight without their officers directly ordering them to do so and they had none with them, so I led them down to 'Green Beach' with O'Connor bringing up the rear as 'whipper in' if needed and to see fair play for me. We stacked their rifles and O'Connor stood guard over them and within a few minutes the landing craft with guns, etc. started touching down and we got them, also ammunition, petrol, etc. ashore. It was a very near thing but we made it in time.

I was later joined by my Adjutant, Captain Morley, my QM, Lt. Browne and the rest of my Group HQ party so we found an improvised PoWs compound and put our native soldier workers in. As the shore was soft sand it had been arranged that rolls of wire mesh track would be needed and as these were so important they were stowed first of all in the bottom of the ships and everything else on top at Mombasa so naturally they were last off. To save the situation I had about 200 yards of reinforced concrete ornamental fencing hacked down and laid on the sand to get the wheeled traffic up the shore. The RA drivers were available to drive their vehicles ashore but when it came to cars and lorries we found the drivers were being landed separately and had not arrived, so Morley, one man of mine who could drive and I had a most hectic time climbing aboard the LCMs (Landing Craft Motor) as soon as their flaps were down and driving the vehicles madly up the improvised hard strip, which was now showing signs of hard wear, on to a hard road where we left them and doubling back for more. Although it was now evening it was still unpleasantly hot. We got ashore all that was due that day and then sank down exhausted to sleep where we were in the open.

Next morning work on unloading was resumed at dawn but even now the drivers did not turn up so we continued as before. An hour or two later, General Sturgis strolled along and said "Have you seen General Platt this morning"? When I said "No", he said "Then you are the only senior officer in the force that has not been told off by him this morning".

Later that day I was informed that Brigadier Lush had laid a complaint that I had 'wilfully damaged civilian property in tearing down the concrete fencing round the playing field! That day and onwards I collected labour gangs formed from PoWs, civil prisoners (natives of course), Arab dockers whom we paid, and also other paid civilians. Meantime, Major Cannon with the other assault party had reached Tamatave on the East Coast which was taken after only a few token rounds had been fired by our Royal Naval guns. Major Cannon organised very large numbers of civilians there for general work and repairing roads and railway.

A military force from Majunga was fighting its way towards the capital, Tananarive.. We stayed in Majunga for a week or so while Brigadier Dimoline and a Brigade Force, which included some King's African Rifles, were pushing their way up, opposed mainly by the Senegalese, the biggest battle being by the Betseboka River

Bridge where no quarter was asked for or given by either of the opposed fighting Africans.

Force HQ stayed in Majunga also and when they suggested sending more vehicles and supplies up to Brigadier Dimoline he sent back a signal "that he wanted bodies, not stores". A short time afterwards he sent an SOS for petrol so several lorries were loaded up and sent off. I was moving up that day myself, with my adjutant, leaving the QM behind in charge of our labour at Majunga, and came across a river in front of which the petrol lorries had all stopped as the river bed was very soft and muddy although the water was only about 18 inches deep at the ford.

Being the senior officer on the spot, and a Pioneer Corps officer to boot, I naturally took charge. We cut down some lovely eucalyptus trees with straight stems and

laced them with fencing wire into a mattress which we had floating on the water. As soon as a vehicle ran slowly onto it the mattress sank and all the vehicles, including my own car passed safely over. Believe it or not a few days later, Brigadier Lush again

complained bitterly about this and again reported me for "wanton destruction of valuable trees and fencing". This again illustrated why we fighting soldiers looked upon 'Civil Administration Officers' with grave mistrust.

On 26 September I left Majunga en route for the capital Tananarive, taking with me only Private O'Connor. The road was very rough in places, unmetalled and crossed mountains where the track had been blasted into the valleys and the river bridges blown. The River Betseboka Bridge, a long suspension bridge, had been broken by cutting the cables but we managed to use it still as it had merely collapsed with most of it about three feet under water with a 30ft ramp at each end of about 45 degrees.

I had sent up a labour party of 100 natives who had to unload most of the lorries and carry the contents across, tow the vehicles along the submerged bridge and reload them on the further bank. The car I was in had its petrol tank holed on a rock over 100 miles from the nearest repair shop. We enquired round but nobody had any chewing gum so we tried bunging up the hole with soap. This only worked for a short time but some bright lad got hold of some beeswax from a native and this did the trick until we got through a few days later. *(There is another tale from the Betsiboka Bridge Dean did not recall in his memoir which comes from the book Into Madagascar (Penguin Books, 1943) by K.C. Gandar Dower. He wrote of an incident involving Dean: 'A senior officer arrived at the crossing in a car that had no brakes, and he very sensibly produced a rope and a team of Malagache. But Equatorial labour is proverbially unreliable, and his team did not appreciate the fact that, if you intend to lower a car down a steep place, it is necessary to tie the rope on first. The car, therefore, shot down into the water as fast as it could fall and, according to reliable witnesses, vanished completely beneath a wave of water. To everyone's amazement, when the fountain subsided, the senior officer drove calmly across the bridge. A gas-cape over the radiator had saved the engine, and as for the nerves of the senior officer - well, he already held the VC'.)*

Arriving at the capital we found that the British Force had captured and released on parole a number of French officers who in

many cases were reserve officers with either civilian or purely administrative jobs, though there were exceptions. They were all in or near the capital. General Platt ordered that they should be put into a non-existent PoWs camp immediately.

As usual General Sturgis passed this job on to 'Dogsbody Dean'. I requisitioned a large empty seminary and ordered all French officers to report there within 24 hours; at the same time informing them that they should bring their own furniture, bedding, mess gear etc. as there was none in the Prison Camp but that we would provide transport. We had all their addresses of course. They all came along at the appointed time, some of them complaining bitterly that it was quite unnecessary and that we were only making the administration more difficult for ourselves by locking them up.

One of them told me that when we was released on parole he had collected his wife and family from the hotel where he had parked them but which had now been taken over by the British, and had returned home out in the country a few miles away but he could not possibly leave them there in such an isolated spot without a white man to look to their safety. I gave him 24 hours leave to move them to friends and a lorry to do it with, with a British driver of course who was nominally guarding him. He came back without any trouble.

The CO of the French Air Force found that things were rather primitive in the PoWs camp and that I was running it on the 'Old Boy Basis' so he himself suggested that he might return to the Air Field and load up with his mess gear which he did and he even brought back into camp a vehicle of his own.

The trouble was of course what to do about guards but this was soon solved as we did without any for the officers at the start as I put them on a semi-parole. The next day however we had a number of both Senegalese and Malgache other ranks. As a temporary measure, with the co-operation of the French Officers, we put the Senegalese acting as guards to the Malgache, which they did very happily, until we got a Platoon of KARs for the job; then the French officers complained that they should not be guarded by native troops but I had a quick answer to that as one or two of our British officers, when wounded and taken prisoner had been guarded by French natives so what the hell!

I was of course Officer Commanding the PoWs camp with Captain Morley, my Adjutant to help and I requested the quick arrival of Lt (QM) Browne. They flew him up from Majunga promptly. We got on very well on the whole as the French got their own cooks and servants, etc. From the PoWs and I merely drew the rations for them all. Fortunately the Senegalese could eat the same rations as the KARs and the Malgache could eat anything though it was mainly rice.

Naturally I had to order the French officers to hand over their revolvers or pistols, which they did under protest as they said they were their own property and would be essential for their own protection when we left. Accordingly, I got the owners to label their own weapons and I took a French officer with me and we deposited the pistols at the local Gendarmerie which was also under British Military Police. I refused permission for a flagstaff to be erected outside the PoWs building for them to fly their Tricolor from as I thought that was a bit too much but as they explained that for the sake of discipline they wanted a parade ceremony every day on raising or



lowering the flag I gave permission for this to take place and provided both flagstaff and flag. After about a week of this I even arranged for visitors and allowed the French to have their wives or family or official fiancée's in. The KAR guards could not read English so I had some coloured cards provided by a local printing firm and put my censor stamp on each.

Naturally this was only one of the many jobs we had to do as the normal labour work had to go on and this was done partly with civil prisoners, partly with Malgache PoWs and partly with hired civilians, though as I had to keep either myself, adjutant, or QM at the PoWs Camp it meant increased work for all three of us.

One of the effects of the blockade of the Island was an acute shortage of petrol so we found that all the cars were running on a special mixture called 'Carburol' which was one quarter petrol and three quarters a distillation from native sugar. If used on any vehicle not specially adapted for it, it just gummed everything up.

One day I needed a haircut so I went to a local civilian barber's shop. The barber was a naive woman; when I sat down for my turn she carefully ran the metal comb through a spirit flame, which I thought most hygienic but I was not so pleased when she did the same thing after combing my hair, I also noticed that the same bristle hair brush was used, untreated, for each customer in turn!

I was billeted in one of the hotels in Tananarive which was staffed entirely by natives some of whom had no room at all but just slept on the floor of the passages or landings at night. The first night the proprietor came to my room and asked if there was anything I wanted; when I said "no", he put it more plainly that if I wanted a sleeping partner I had only to mention it: 'Black, white or chocolate'!

There was never any lavatory paper provided so I had my own closely guarded roll of bronco. One day when I was in the loo, a lady rattled the door twice so I hurried up and left quickly and she popped quickly in. It was only then that I remembered that I had not brought away my hoarded bronco so I lurked just round the corner and as soon as she came out I popped in only to find that she had pinched my bronco. What should a gentleman do in such a case? Should he go to the lady's bedroom and demand the return of his lost roll or ignore it? I must admit that I had not got the nerve to call her a thief so lost out.

It is worth recording that before we got to the capital there was a British resident who kept a transmitting set in his house there and sent out some most useful information to the British Army. When he was arrested by the French they were unable to find the set but they sentenced him to death. Undeterred his wife kept transmitting and hid the set in her bathroom we were told. The British arrived just before this brave man was executed so all was well.

The French of course were most difficult over native marriages as they would not allow a marriage to be legal without the production of birth certificates by both parties. Very few indeed had such a thing and the only way to get one was for two people who had known the individuals from birth to come to one of the few centres and testify. This meant in actual fact that the two people, who were often

elderly, had to walk anything up to 150 miles each way. Not unnaturally few would or could do this unless they lived really close to the centre.

Finally the day came when General Sturgis was due to return to the U.K. so the night before his departure with some of his staff the remainder of his HQ gave him a farewell dinner. After dinner General Sturgis came and sat by me and said "I do not know exactly what I am doing next but I believe that I am going back for another combined operation landing, would you like to come with me?" I said "Yes, please". So I hastily got on the phone to Major Cannon and told him to meet me next day at Tamatave as I was handing over to him and he was to take my place as Group Commander. I appointed Captain Morley my adjutant as second in charge and CO of the PoWs camp, packed up and left early in the morning by the Michelin rail coach with the general and his staff.

So ended my interlude in Madagascar, which however was full of incident and interest. A few days after I left a signal came for me offering me the job of OC Troops in Mauritius but as I was no longer there this job naturally fell through. This would have meant the rank of full colonel which I had to wait for another two years but I should have been in a backwater and away from the main action in Europe. I really do not know what I would have chosen had I had the choice but the old army saying "never volunteer for anything or refuse anything" is a sound one, in theory.

Shortly before my leaving Tananarive I had to open a second PoWs camp, mainly for natives, both Malgache and Senegalese, which I did at the barracks 'Direction Artillerie'. The HQ of two British Pioneer Corps companies arrived at long last from Majunga or I could not have found the officers to look after this extra commitment, so when I left on 17 October, there were sufficient to carry on all the jobs that my adjutant, QM and I had tackled alone.

Being now rated as on the Staff of 121 Force HQ as ADL (Assistant Director of Labour), we boarded the Ocean Pride, together with most of No.5 Commandos

who were also leaving and sailed from Tamatave on the afternoon of 18 October 1942. During that morning I had further talks with Major Cannon and advised him to get to the capital with all speed and get his appointment confirmed otherwise they were sure to appoint someone else over

his head from East Africa. Lt (QM) Browne was then the only man left at Group HQ who had been with me since the formation of that HQ at Clacton in 1939.

On 24 October, we docked safely at Durban and got ashore and I dined that night at the Club with Admiral Tennant, General Sturgis, and Brigadier Festing, etc. as a farewell between 121 Force HQ and 29th Infantry Brigade HQ. Next day we sailed again, the weather being so rough that even in our bunks we had to hang on tight to prevent damage to ourselves as we rolled and were thrown about so roughly. We were travelling very fast in spite of the weather as enemy submarines were reported.

On 27 October, we docked at Cape Town. Next morning I started shopping for food to take home. In the afternoon I was one of a party taken round the town by kind local inhabitants. We visited the Zoo, Rhodes Memorial, etc. On the 29th had

lunch with General Sturgis at the Civil Service Club and afterwards went with him, by cable car up Table Mountain and after a short walk up on top descended again by the same method. This cable is 4,000 feet long from the top of the mountain to a station part way up. The sensation of the down journey is somewhat like a parachute descent, I am told.

On 31 October, most of our party went to the races I did not but instead went with Lt Col Moulton for a climb up Table Mountain. We went by the Blinkwater Ravine which we were told was one of the easier routes but as we had no guide we lost the track several times and got on to ledges that ended in nothing, however, we finally made it. The time taken in walking and climbing was about 5 hours.

During my spare time in Cape Town, I spent much of it buying food and transporting it back to the ship and getting it in cold store. We left Cape Town on 2 November without naval escort as we were not in convoy. Our maximum speed was stated to be 18 knots so as we were under 20 knots, which was apparently the minimum which allowed us to take a full load of servicemen, some of the commandos were sent ashore to wait for a later ship and their places were taken by civilians, mainly women and children, (so, what was unsafe for Commandos was good enough for women and children!). Amongst the former were a Mother Superior and several second class Sisters of Mercy.

We insisted that even if they slept second class they should use the first class deck.

After circling round the harbour repeatedly testing out the new gear against magnetic mines we finally cleared for the open sea going liked a scalded cat. Next day we should have had air escort, promised to us by Colonel Mostert of the South African Air Force, but this did not appear, probably because of torpedo attacks on our shipping off East London which naturally had prior claim. We heard that one of the Empress ships had been torpedoed near us. An unidentified plane flew low over us that night so we promptly altered course as soon as it had passed.

Some 400 miles away from the nearest land we saw a lone swallow which stayed with us for several days, we did not see it perch but it may possibly have done so on the ship at night. We were not particularly cheered to hear of more ships being sunk when travelling not in convoy and, via Rugby Radio, rumours of 7 German subs somewhere in our path so we yet again altered course.

Talking of birds reminds me that we saw an albatross rising from the sea. Apparently it could not rise by just flapping its wings but had first of all to get up sea speed by furiously paddling. We later saw a parent albatross and a young one. The parent hardly moved its wings at all while in the air but the youngster while trying to glide also had to keep on flapping like hell to keep up.

After 28 days at sea, going full blast all the time, we landed safely, and for my part thankfully, at Liverpool having been halfway to America I should think and coming of course round the North of Ireland. When I landed the customs officer asked me if I had anything to declare so I truthfully started telling him that I had ½ cwt of sugar, a crate of oranges, 14 lbs sultanas, 14 lbs raisins, 14 lbs currant, gin, tea. He stopped me saying "Ha! Ha! Very funny" and passed all my baggage through unexamined. What we did not keep for ourselves, we gave as very welcome Xmas presents in a time of strict food rationing. ■

**'There was never any lavatory paper so I guarded my own'**





# The London Blitz

With  
extracts  
from  
Pioneer  
Corps War  
Diaries

Report: Norman Brown  
Picture: Norman Brown

**A**T 1115 hrs on Sunday 3 September 1939 the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, broadcast to the nation. After months of uncertainty Britain had declared war on Germany. Within minutes, the sirens sounded and people hurried to take cover from the approaching aircraft.

In fact the warning was a false alarm and the only casualties were Sunday lunches up and down the country. However, the incident served to confirm the widely held belief that aerial attacks on the civilian population would play a major part in the conflict. German bombing raids on London in the First World War had destroyed forever the old distinction between combatant and non-combatant, and events like the destruction of Guernica in the Spanish Civil War showed what the Luftwaffe might do to British cities. When the former Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, declared in 1932 that ‘the bomber will always get through’ he was expressing the view of military reports both in this country and abroad.

Throughout the 1930s, parliamentary committees were considering the implications of this for civil defence. In 1937 the Committee for Imperial Defence estimated that as many as 600,000 civilians would die in the first few months of a Second World War, with twice that number

being seriously injured. The printing of extra death certificates, the production of makeshift coffins and the formulation of plans for mass burials in quicklime all underlined the catastrophic view of the future. As for London, it would be in Churchill’s words ‘the greatest target in the world, a kind of tremendous, fat, valuable cow, fed up to attract birds of prey’.

Faced with this appalling prospect, national and local government had drawn up a series of Air Raid Precautions (ARP) long before the outbreak of war. The use of sirens, sandbags and barrage balloons, as well as the appointment of ARP workers (of whom there were 1.4 million by the end of 1938) were all part of a programme designed to minimise the number of casualties. The distribution of 38 million gasmasks at the time of the Munich crises came to symbolise the country’s readiness for war. Similarly the distribution of metal Anderson shelters suitable for use in the garden and the construction of public shelters in the street provided reassuring evidence that the safety of the civilian had not been forgotten.

Some ARP measures were less popular than others. Public opinion was particularly hostile to the blackout which was introduced at the beginning of September 1939 and which was held to be responsible for so many accidents in the early weeks of the war that its restrictions had to be relaxed. Nevertheless, most of those who

listened to Chamberlain’s broadcast and heard the first siren felt that they were well prepared for what was to come.

## THE PHONEY WAR

It was the sense of anticipation which perhaps best explains the disappointment many expressed in the autumn of 1939 and the spring of 1940 with the so-called ‘Phoney War’. Far from finding themselves in the front line, Londoners felt cheated when the widely predicted air raids failed to materialise.

Restrictions which had been accepted as necessary at the beginning of September had become irritants by the end of the year. As enthusiasm waned, members of the rescue services who had previously been praised for their patriotism found themselves attacked as parasites, and by June 1940 half of those who had volunteered for the Auxiliary Fire Service had stepped down.

Nothing underlined this change in attitudes more clearly than the return home of a large proportion of the capital’s 600,000 evacuees. Mainly children and young mothers, they had been evacuated to the countryside in the first week of the war. For many, the experience of being separated from their homes and families had been traumatic and they had found it difficult to settle in. Those from poorer areas like the East End had not always been welcome, and complaints about evacuees

November they turned their attention to Coventry and other provincial cities, the attacks were to continue intermittently until 10 May 1941. By this time 18,800 tons of high explosives had been dropped on London. 20,000 people had been killed and the place of the Blitz in the history of the Second World War was firmly established.

## DEFENDING LONDON

Since the vast majority of raids during this period took place under cover of darkness there was little that could be done to stop the Luftwaffe bombers. Between the wars anti-aircraft defences had been largely neglected so that by 1939 there was an acute shortage of searchlights, anti-aircraft guns and effective night fighters. The equipment that did exist was out-dated, and provided the attacking planes kept their height there was little chance of them being seen, let alone hit.

In September some 30,000 anti-aircraft shells were fired for every success recorded, and it was said the greatest danger was to those on the ground as the shrapnel from the guns rained back down. Nor was the blackout of much assistance, especially since the German planes could be guided to their target by a system of interlocking radio beams. Once over the city, the distinctive loop of the Thames around the Isle of Dogs provided just the landmark the bomb aimers needed, particularly with a clear sky and a full ‘bombers moon’. It is significant that the first break in the Blitz on 3 November was caused not by human action, but by poor weather than made flying too hazardous.

If London’s defences were powerless to prevent the planes dropping their bombs, then they were almost equally unable to cope with the damage those bombs might do on impact. The government had ensured that everybody was equipped with a gas mask – but gas was never used. Instead, the bombs that fell were packed with high explosive weighing up to, and sometimes over, 1,000 kgs, or were incendiaries made from magnesium and designed to burn fiercely on landing. Improvements to the fire service had been an important part of ARP planning but on the outbreak of war much remained to be done.

The capital did not even have a unified fire service but possessed 67 different brigades. They were autonomous, and varied in size from the London Fire Brigade, with well over 100 appliances, to small units operating a single motor pump. With no standard water supply outlets, a shortage of vital equipment such as turntable ladders, and with rigid cast-iron water mains running just below the road surface, the potential for disaster was obvious.

On Sunday 29 December 1940, German planes carrying a high percentage of incendiaries succeeded in starting over 1,500 fires, the vast majority of them in the heart of the old City itself. The buildings were close together and many of them had been locked for the Christmas week. Fanned by a strong wind, the flames spread quickly.

When the principal water main was hit the pumps began to run dry and an exceptionally low tide meant the Thames could not provide an adequate alternative. As the temperature in places rose to over 1,000°C, the blaze was visible in Bishops Cleeve 27 miles away. By the end of the night all roads and bridges into the City were closed. The Guildhall and 17 historic churches had been gutted and vast areas around London Bridge station, the Tower

and Moorgate had been razed to the ground. Almost miraculously St Pauls survived this second Fire of London, caught amidst the flames by the camera of Herbert Mason in what has become the single most enduring image of the Blitz.

## SHELTERING FROM THE RAIDS

Given that little could be done to stop the bombers, the provision of adequate shelters was clearly of great importance to Londoners. Pre-war planning was based on the assumption that most attacks would take the form of short daytime raids and that, where possible, people should be dispersed rather than gathered together in large numbers. Under such circumstances the Anderson shelter seemed the ideal solution.

Made of corrugated iron and half-buried in the garden, it was said to be able to withstand everything except a direct hit, even if in wet weather it was easily flooded. Unfortunately many Londoners did not have gardens.

Although the Morrison shelter was to overcome this problem, providing a family shelter that could be used indoors, it was not available until the spring of 1941 when the worst of the bombing had passed. The official alternatives were larger trench shelters, situated in local parks, or the brick street shelters which had often been built close to blocks of flats. The latter enjoyed a particularly poor reputation and this was probably justified, since government economies meant that there was sometimes little more than lime and sand holding them together.

In November 1940 a government survey revealed that only 40% of Londoners were using official shelters. The remainder had made their own arrangements employing basements, cellars and railway arches. Thousands were living in the vast network of caves at Chislehurst in Kent. On occasions the use of such sites was sanctioned by the authorities but frequently they were simply taken over by local people. The conditions and the degree of safety involved varied considerably, but nowhere were things worse than in the notorious Tilbury shelter in Stepney.

At the height of the Blitz, 15,000 people were regularly spending the night in the squalor of this basement warehouse which formed part of the Liverpool Street Goods Station. The dilemma facing the authorities was a simple one. Improving the conditions would encourage people to use such places, however undesirable that might be; failing to improve the conditions would run the risk of a serious breakdown in public health and possibly in public order.

It was a dilemma faced at the highest level. While pictures of people sheltering in Underground stations are now a well-known part of the Blitz story, this was not something which had been intended. The use of the Tube was regarded as dangerous not simply because of the disruptive effect it would have on the capital’s transport system, but also because the government feared it would encourage a ‘deep shelter’ mentality, with people refusing to come out even during the day.

However since the authorities were not prepared to use force to keep people out, the simple expedient of buying a one and a half pence ticket and refusing to move was enough to ensure a night’s shelter. By the end of September it was estimated that some 177,000 Londoners were sleeping in the Underground, often queuing for much of the day to secure a good position on the platform at night.

Invariably conditions were primitive.



Sanitation was poor, the air soon became stale and people were packed together with little thought to privacy or hygiene. As the weeks passed the incidence of scabies, impetigo and lice began to rise alarmingly. Faced with this situation and with growing public disquiet, the government was forced to act. Shelter marshals were appointed and tickets were issued to do away with the need for queuing. Toilets were installed and where possible bunks were put up. Canteens provided hot food and drinks, while by January 1941 the London County Council was holding over 200 evening classes in the Underground. Nevertheless improvements in sheltering conditions could not prevent tragedies like that at Balham in October 1940, when a direct hit on the station left 64 people dead.

#### HOUSING THE HOMELESS

By mid-November the Luftwaffe attack on Coventry gave London its first real break, the nightly routine of many Londoners was firmly established. For some it meant sheltering with family or friends, trying to get what sleep was possible amidst the noise and discomfort of the raid. For others it meant working outside as wardens, fire-fighters or in the rescue services, struggling with limited resources to manage a situation that was always threatening to get out of control.

Those who survived found that each morning brought its own problems. Disruption to road and rail services could make travelling difficult, if not impossible. A lack of gas or electricity could mean no light, no heat and no way of preparing hot food. More seriously it could mean no way of boiling water which, because of damage to the water mains, was not clean. There was the need to clear away the debris left behind after a raid, to repair damaged houses and in extreme cases to find alternative accommodation. By the middle of October, 250,000 Londoners had been 'bombed out' but only 7,000 had been officially rehoused. The remainder were staying with friends and relations or were crammed into rest centres, sleeping on the floor with no washing facilities and only canteen food.

Obsessed with the idea of mass casualties and confident that evacuation would have removed large numbers of people from the city, the government in its ARP planning had paid relatively little attention to the needs of those who survived the air raids. Individual local authorities frequently lacked the resources to cope. Because the bureaucracy involved was closely linked to the pre-war system of public assistance, many people felt that they were being blamed for having had the misfortune to be bombed. Only gradually did the government begin to recognise the scale of the problem.

By the end of November, the Treasury had agreed to cover all the costs involved in providing for the homeless. Council services were reorganised to offer a centralised system of advice and support, backed up by voluntary agencies like the WVS. As a result money, clothing, rations books and other essentials could all now be obtained in the same place. Billeting officers were appointed to look for vacant accommodation and welfare officers visited those who had been rehoused. Money from the Ministry of Food enabled the London County Council to open over 100 subsidised restaurants in 3 months while mobile laundry vans helped with the sort of basic service that had been overlooked in all the pre-war planning. Such things could never compensate for the shock of seeing

your home destroyed and those around you killed, but they did help to provide a basic routine amidst the chaos of the Blitz.

#### 'BUSINESS AS USUAL'

It was the establishment of this routine which best explains how Londoners survived the months between September 1940 and May 1941. What had been an isolated event directed at hundreds of individual families on 'Black Saturday', had become an accepted part of the collective life of the city by the spring of 1941. Ironically those cities like Coventry and Southampton which suffered only isolated raids found the experience far more traumatic because they had no opportunity to adjust. While 31% of Londoners confessed to having been unable to sleep at night in early September, the figure had dropped to nothing two months later and if people could sleep they could also work. Those who defiantly scrawled 'Business as Usual' on the walls of their premises were not simply doing so to satisfy the propaganda machine. They were attempting to maintain a continuity in their lives which implied they had a future as well as a past. A preoccupation with work left no room for death, and the government-sponsored Mass Observation surveys found that the subjects which most affected public morale were not related to the war at all, but concerned work, the weather, health and friends just as in peacetime.

This sense of routine flourished in the collective atmosphere of the Underground station and the public shelter, with the sight of familiar faces each night, the occupation of identical bunks or stretches of platform, even the singing of popular tunes. The knowledge that thousands of others were sharing a similar experience gave an appearance of normality to an existence in which death could come at any time.

People managed to carry on by emphasising the positive aspects of life and banishing the hardship and fear to the background. As a result, the image of the Blitz that endures today is two-dimensional. Reinforced by government propaganda and by strict censorship which forbade any reference to subjects such as looting, Londoners are seen emerging from the ruins of their city united and defiant, calmly taking the worst that the enemy could throw at them. It is reassuring image that reflects well on the city and its inhabitants.

It provides a model of cooperation and self-sacrifice that appears to contrast all too strongly with the divisions of modern society. However, such a picture misleads as much as it informs.

It fails to convey the individual tragedies of those who died or were bereaved. It underestimates the degree of panic and confusion caused by the onset of the Blitz, which led many to flee the East End in the days after 'Black Saturday'.

It finds no place for the anger and frustration caused by the inertia of the authorities in tackling the problems of the Blitz, anger and frustration which led to the calling of a tube shelterers' conference in November 1940 to try and force the government's hand. Above all, it does not take into account the considerable element of luck that enabled London to survive.

As the Blitz progressed the official response undoubtedly improved. Defences were strengthened and in May 1941 night fighters, which had been so ineffective in

September, were able to bring down 116 enemy planes. Rescue services were co-ordinated and in the wake of the raid of 29 December compulsory fire watching and a national fire service were introduced. The need for better shelters was recognised and in October 1940 plans were drawn up to convert eight existing tube stations into deep shelters capable of accommodating 64,000 people. But for all this, it is important to remember that the heaviest raids of the Blitz came at the end in the spring of 1941. 10 May was the coldest

May night on record with temperatures well below freezing. There was a clear sky, a full moon and a low tide. In spite of London's improved defences, 500 planes managed to drop more than 700 tons of high explosive, hitting targets as far apart as the House of

Commons, the Law Courts and the Tower of London and rendering one-third of the capital's streets impassable. 2,300 incendiary bombs started over 2,000 fires, nine of which were burning out of control by the following morning despite the efforts of fire services from as far away as the Midlands and the West Country. The number of people killed, 1,436, was the highest in any single raid. 12,000 more were homeless and 155,000 families were without gas and electricity.

Had raids like this been followed up with the same regularity as in the autumn, London might not have survived. But they were not. With the invasion of the Soviet Union imminent, Hitler felt the need to transfer his resources to the East. There were to be no further serious attacks until 1944.

Despite the predictions of the experts, the experience of London had shown that it was not possible to eliminate cities and win wars by saturation bombing. It is the ultimate irony that those who were slowest to learn this lesson were the British themselves, as the aircrews of Bomber Command were sacrificed in largely ineffective raids on the cities of the Third Reich.

As for London, the impact of the Blitz is still being felt. By the time the war in Europe ended in May 1945, 30,000 Londoners had died in enemy air raids. Perhaps as many as 130,000 houses had been destroyed, and in Stepney 40% of properties were uninhabitable. People had been driven from their homes, breaking up communities that had existed for generations, and a large number of those who left were never to return. While much of the material damage could gradually be made good, life for many was never to be the same again. Too much had changed in too short a space of time. Like the Great Fire nearly 300 years before, the Blitz was a formative event in the evolution of the city and was to pose questions of social policy that modern planners still have not solved today.

#### EXTRACTS FROM WAR DIARIES

##### 18 Group - 16 Oct 40

Announced that vital water main at BUSH HILL, EDMONTON had received a direct hit and was out of action. Decided to re-open New River, ENFIELD Loop, to reduce danger of flooding and restore water supply. 1,800 men (1,000 from Group) sent with tools and worked under difficult conditions. They arrived 2 hours after the decision was reached at a conference of LCC (London County Council) and worked

**'The number of people killed, 1,436, was the highest in any single raid'**



throughout the day at very high pressure and under exceptionally difficult conditions – often up to their knees in water – in 12 hours the river bed had been re-excavated and the task completed. One of the Coys engaged was an Alien coy and among the many episodes and scenes of the memorable day was the background of one which stands out by reason of its human and international significance. It is a picture of a man superbly built, stripped to the waist, up to his knees in water and working with the furious energy of one possessed with a vision.

Enquiry elicited the information that he was a German, an exile from his native country, with bitter memories of the concentration camp. The sight of this man desperately striving to repair the havoc wrought by his Nazi compatriots will not soon be forgotten. As darkness was falling, and in pouring rain, an engineer of the Metropolitan Water Board ordered the dams to be cut and the Pioneers job was done.

#### **112 Coy – 26 Feb 41**

13 ORs killed, 7 admitted to hospital and 43 injured in air raid

#### **69 Coy – 16 Oct 40**

5 men killed and 22 injured bomb exploded behind charabanc in which they were travelling from work to billets

#### **41 Group – 9 Dec 40**

Heavy air raid on night 8/9 Dec. 207 Coy – stood to in bullets in SOUTHWARK area. Local AFS applied for assistance about midnight and a party of 15 men under 2187463 Sgt E H Mason and 13020082 Cpl M Chandler salvaged a considerable amount of furniture from a warehouse opposite Newington Butts, when the task finished they proceeded to a shop in Walworth Road which was on fire. 0300 hours – 2196085 Sgt R Wilson and 2 men extinguished a number of incendiary bombs in the vicinity of the billets, they

then proceeded to Elephant Road where a fire had a strong hold on a number of shops and warehouses. This party manned a spare AFS hose whilst the remainder salvaged goods. When the fire was under control they returned to Elliott Road where a vast quantity of stores was salvaged, including a heavy lorry.

Then they went to Walworth Road where they contacted a rescue party working on a bombed building, it was thought there were trapped personnel, Sgt Wilson put all his men on rescue work and sent for reinforcements.

Whilst waiting Sgt Wilson saw Southwark Town Hall was ablaze and notified the AFS and they with a Cpl attacked the fire with a stirrup pump until the AFS arrived. On the arrival of the AFS the party turned their attention to extracting a man from a bombed house and were successful. They then assisted the AFS in releasing a trapped woman.

A second party, of 15 men, of the Coy under 2183314 Sgt H H C Fennell and 13020154 Sgt K W Fidler went to Lambeth Hospital which was on fire. They carried a number of patients to safety and helped in salvaging all moveable hospital equipment.

#### **171 Coy – 6 Jan 41**

Commenced work a GREEN LANE where 2 land mines damaged about 500 homes and killed 12 people

#### **191 Coy – 5 Oct 40**

Bomb struck Coy HQ – all records and officers & sgts kit destroyed – no casualties

#### **112 (Smoke) Coy – 26 Feb 41**

Land mine exploded on billet, which was destroyed. 13 killed & 3 men admitted to hospital a further 50/60 suffering from cuts, shock and superficial injuries

#### **81 Coy – 31 Dec 40**

Asked by Camberwell Council to assist in clearing debris in Bellenden Road where bodies are believed to be still lying.

#### **137 (Alien) Coy – 1 Dec 40**

Still on demolition and debris clearance in BERMONDSEY, the men of the Coy who were qualified doctors in civil life rendering much assistance to air raid casualties

#### **167 Coy - 25 Dec 40**

Men's Xmas Dinner attended by the Mayor and Mayoress of BERMONDSEY who thanked the Coy for the good work they had done. Beer supplied by the landlord of the 'Ship and Whale.' A number of local people sent cigarettes. Extract from 'South London Press' dated 3 Dec 40:-

'A dozen men who helped to fight the War during the day spend their evenings helping other people forget there is a War on.

They are men of 167 Coy, Pioneer Corps, who formed a dance band .... Bermondsey meets this concert party in its shelters for 6 nights (excluding Sundays only) of every week .... And wherever they have been the request for a repeat performance is heard time and again.

The Revd Leslie Fisher, Rector of Bermondsey and Chairman of the Executive Committee of Bermondsey's Shelter Council told the South London press, "These concerts have proved one of the most successful efforts in the scheme to entertain the people in the shelters .... The boys work all day on demolition work and then come to the shelters six nights every week ... There they work so hard and sometimes in such heat that they perspire frequently and leave themselves exhausted .... Their work is absolutely invaluable and their popularity in the shelters immeasurable."

#### **121 Coy – 8 Mar 41**

14 HE bombs dropped on Streatham Hill damaging gas and water mains, Coy billets and adjacent houses.

50 men of Coy engaged in rescuing 5 children alive and one dead from under the debris. Letter of thanks from Town Clerk of Wandsworth. ■





# Unveiling of the Athens memorial

By W02  
Lt Smythe,  
518 Coy Royal  
Pioneer Corps





**T**HE Royal Pioneer Corps and the Indian Pioneer Corps were represented at the unveiling of the Athens Memorial, the honour going to myself, together with Sgt Grange and Cpl Marr, also of 518 Coy RPC. Before I describe the ceremony I should like to mention some other aspects of my visit.

A mixed contingent of about 230 servicemen from Cyprus flew from the Island on the 6th and 7th May by charter aircraft en route to Athens. On arrival we were met by representatives of the Greek services and taken in modern coaches to LST 158 (HHMS LIMNOS) in Piraeus harbour, which was to be our home for the following week. This ship was kindly loaned for this purpose by the Greek Navy. Only military personnel were accommodated on the ship, the RAF being accommodated at the RAF Transit Hotel and the Navy on HMS SAINTES. Our food was supplied from our own resources.

On Sunday and Monday we carried out rehearsals for the parade from 0900 hrs to 1430 hrs each day, but the following day a sightseeing trip was arranged. The Acropolis was visited and we were all very much impressed.

A tour of the city then followed. We were surprised to see the very high standard of roads and public transport and the like, which compared favourably with any European capital.

We also took the opportunity to make private tours and visits, which, for many, brought back memories of when they served in Greece in 1944.

The Band and Pipes of the Black Watch beat the retreat on one of the many squares in Athens, and were very well received by the local population; a sign of a return to happier times. Representatives from all nations attended, together with their Military attaches.

Many complimentary remarks were passed regarding the high standard of the drill and turnout of the British soldier.

On Wednesday the 10th May the Ceremony took place. As an Usher I was responsible for the care of relatives, Sgt Grange was a Wreath Bearer, and Cpl Marr was a Flag Unfurler.

In the presence of His Majesty the King of the Hellenes and many relatives of those commemorated, HRH The Duke of Gloucester unveiled the Athens Memorial at the Phaleron War Cemetery. Two thousand eight hundred soldiers, sailors and airmen are commemorated on this memorial, including fifty two members of the RPC and IPC.

The ceremony began with the marching on of the Guards of Honour, the Black Watch representing the United Kingdom

and Commonwealth, and the Greek Royal Guard (Evzones) representing Greece. Both Guards looked magnificent in full dress; it was most striking as both nations wore their national variations of the kilt.

Then came the most moving part of the ceremony. The Wreath Bearers marched on in slow time carrying wreaths which were to be laid by the VIPs. The assembly then awaited the arrival of the Duke of Gloucester, who inspected the Guards of Honour, and then received HM the King of the Hellenes. The whole of the Greek Royal Family were present as well as the Duchess of Gloucester.

The religious part of the ceremony then took place, the Chaplain General to the Forces officiating, assisted by senior chaplains of all other religions, and Greek Orthodox and Muslim leaders. The Duke then unveiled the memorial. He and the King of the Hellenes then laid wreaths, and were followed by the VIPs. After the wreath laying they visited and spoke to many relatives.

During this period Corps and Regimental representatives laid their wreaths. I also laid a wreath at this time on behalf of the RPC, IPC and the Corps Association. The wreath was of red Flanders poppies and laurel leaves, surmounted by the Corps Badge, with a commemoration card and ribbons of red and green, the Corps colours.

The ceremony over, the Royal Party left and relatives then went forward to carry out their own personal visits. The whole ceremony was most moving and impressive and I felt privileged to have been chosen to represent our Corps at this ceremony and, together with Sgt Grange and Cpl Marr, to represent the Corps in an official capacity.

That evening I was again honoured, this time being invited to a reception given by HM the King of the Hellenes at the Royal Palace, where I was presented to the Greek Royal Party.

There were approximately 100 guests present, most Corps and Regimental Associations being represented, as well as many former Commanders, who served in Greece during the period 1941-1945.

The King, Queen, Crown Prince and two Princesses were present, and after the presentation mingled with the guests. The whole ceremony was most informal, putting everyone at ease.

#### ADDRESS GIVEN BY FIELD MARSHAL HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE DUKE OF GLOUCESTER AT THE CEREMONY OF THE UNVEILING OF THE ATHENS MEMORIAL

Your Majesty,

I am sure that all those for whom I speak would wish my first words to express our deep appreciation of Your Majesty's presence here today. There should be no evidence so convincing of the respect in which those whom we commemorate are held by those in whose land they fought and died.

Here, in the Phaleron War Cemetery, there are already the graves of more than 2,000 men of the Land and Air Forces of the British Commonwealth, of the Royal Navy and of the Merchant Navy. Today it is my privilege to unveil this Memorial – always to be known by us as the Athens Memorial – to an even greater number of brave men who fell in the War of 1939 to 1945 and have no known grave.

Inscribed in this Memorial there are the names of nearly three thousand men of the Land Forces of the British Commonwealth – men of the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan and Cyprus – who gave their lives.

It is right that I should recall the campaigns in which they fell – on the mainland of Greece, in Crete, in other islands and in Yugoslavia.

In the course of those long years there were few if any episodes more stirring than the Greek defence of their country in the autumn of 1940 in defiance of the Fascist ultimatum.

At that time Great Britain was herself in grave peril, but it was little more than a week before the first squadrons of the Royal Air Force were with the heroic Greek Army. It was in that hard winter that the first Commonwealth casualties were sustained.

Six months later came the greater ordeal – the invasion by Nazi Germany in overwhelming strength. The reinforcement that was all that Great Britain could send – two infantry divisions and one armoured brigade group – was far too small to provide anything approaching equality. In the long withdrawal to the south, Greek and Commonwealth Forces alike suffered heavy loss.

For us, and for the brave Cretans themselves, there followed the short but most gallant defence of Crete. I have been told that the resistance of our Commonwealth troops is still spoken of in Crete with deepest admiration. Heroic it was, and very costly in human lives.

Many of those commemorated in this Memorial fell in those tragic months of 1941, but throughout the war there were in many parts of this fair land and indeed as far as Yugoslavia and Albania, men from the countries of the British Commonwealth playing a gallant part in our fight to save Europe from the Nazi domination.

We remember with pride those who fought and fell in the islands of the Dodecanese and those who gave their lives while giving aid to the movements of Resistance and in Commando operations.

Lastly I would recall the comradeship of Greek and Commonwealth Forces in the winter of 1944 – a time of great peril for Greece when we were proud to be at your side. Here in Greece twenty-five centuries ago, on such a Memorial to brave men as this, was inscribed a famous epigram, thus translated by an English poet:

"Go tell the Spartans, thou that passest by,

That here obedient to their laws we lie"

Greek patriotism, Greek courage, the Greek passions for independence have been an inspiration to many of us British people. Need I do more than recall the name of Lord Byron, still remembered with admiration and gratitude far and wide in this country, for which he also gave his life.

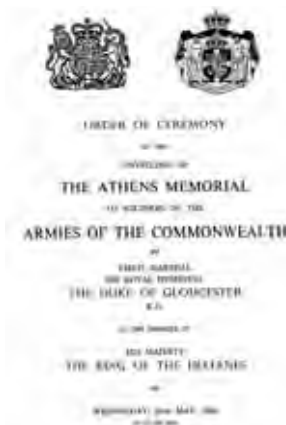
Those men whom we commemorate today are in the same noble tradition: with their Greek comrades, together they added further glory and strength to an alliance which is treasured by us all.

In this century another English poet gave his life in the cause of Freedom and lies buried in one of the Isles of Greece. As a young officer he had written words appropriate to this occasion:

"If I should die, think only this of me,  
That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is for ever England"

Sir, the Royal Hellenic Government has made this dedicated spot for ever a corner of our Commonwealth of Nations – a generous act for which I express our deepest gratitude.

It is now my privilege, as President of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, to unveil this Memorial to the Glory of God and in honour of those brave men whose names it commemorates. ■







■ Prince Phillip meets Micky Hull at Field of Remembrance

Picture: Supplied



■ Association members at the Field of Remembrance

Picture: Supplied



■ Remembrance - Bicester

Picture: Supplied



■ George Brown on his 85th Birthday. He recently joined the association. He served from 17 Feb 44 to 17 Feb 46.

Picture: George Brown



■ London Lunch, November 2010

Picture: Supplied



■ Officers Dinner

Picture: Supplied





■ Boxing Night, 23 Pioneer Regiment

Picture: Supplied



■ Boxing Night, 23 Pioneer Regiment

Picture: Supplied



■ Boxing Night, 23 Pioneer Regiment

Picture: Supplied



■ Boxing Night, 23 Pioneer Regiment

Picture: Supplied



■ Boxing Night, 23 Pioneer Regiment

Picture: Supplied



■ Boxing Night, 23 Pioneer Regiment

Picture: Supplied



■ Boxing Night, 23 Pioneer Regiment

Picture: Supplied



■ Boxing Night, 23 Pioneer Regiment

Picture: Supplied





# 23 Pioneer Christmas Fun Run









“Seated one day at the organ, I was weary and ill-at-ease,  
My fingers wandered idly, Over the noisy keys...”

(words of a popular song of the 1930's)



# Memories

## of September 1939-June 1944, 12 Centre Pioneer Corps

Report: John (Jack) Dixon  
Picture: John (Jack) Dixon

**13050336 Sgt John Dixon enlisted at Newcastle and joined 12 Centre Pioneer Corps for basic training on 11 July 1940 and was discharged on 5 June 1946. He stayed with 12 Centre for his whole service. 12 Centre was formed at Liverpool June 1940. Moved to Pheasey Farm, Birmingham July 1941. Moved to Oldham March 1942. Moved to Prestatyn July 1943. This Centre between 5th June 1940 and 15th May 1945 formed 65 complete Companies and 11 Group and Company HQ. Its total intake was 120,163, and 5,754 officers passed through the unit. These figures give some idea of the standard of organisation required for the successful function of each unit. No 12 Holding and Training Unit was commanded throughout the whole period by Lt Col H Greenwood VC DSO OBE MC**

I CAN RELATE to the first line (*song above*) because that it is what I was doing on Sunday 3rd September 1939 at Ravensworth Road Methodist Chapel, Dunston, Tyne & Wear. I was not weary or ill-at-ease but rather excited or maybe apprehensive? After the first hymn it was accepted that in a few moments we would be at war with Germany.

I could not imagine what the future would be – the excitement maybe because

of the unknown, and apprehensive of how the war would affect me. Shortly after 11a.m. the preacher closed the service with a prayer, and a few minutes later the air raid sirens sounded. What a weird, frightening sound and a sound which still remains with me. I left the chapel and made my way home. No buses, no people, complete eerie silence. Maybe people were afraid to come out, imagining the skies would be black with planes (as we had been told). They would have to be fast ones to be over Dunston so soon!! It proved to be a false alarm – the first of many. The evening service was held at Wood Street Methodist Chapel – again I was on the organ seat complete with cardboard box containing gas mask!

I listened to the 9p.m. news on the radio – the SS ATHENIA had been torpedoed and sunk with a heavy loss of life – men, women and children. Now the meaning of war hit me and the excitement left me. Days went by and the term ‘phoney war’ expressed the situation. British troops were in France but no action had taken place. Sirens were often sounded but mostly false alarms. Christmas came but festivities were very limited. Eventually the real war started.

May 1940 – the German army swept through to the Channel ports. Miraculously, more than 300,000 troops were evacuated from Dunkirk. All equipment, arms etc were left behind, mostly destroyed. Great

Britain now faced invasion – the ‘phoney war’ was over. Factories went onto full-time, and there was now a greater sense of urgency and determination. We had to face the fact that there was every possibility of invasion. I was now in the LDV (later to be famous as ‘Dad’s Army’) and on patrol at nights if the sirens sounded. One night, or rather at 2a.m. in the morning, whilst listening to two old soldiers telling of their experiences of World War 1 and making my hair stand on end, a messenger arrived on a bicycle. “Report to Headquarters immediately – paratroopers have been sighted dropping nearby”. Fear not, I was heavily armed with a cudgel. What a farce! It transpired that a balloon had been broken from its moorings and passed through a searchlight.

On now to Wednesday 3 July 1940. A plane had been droning around for some time and it was evident from the sound of the engines that it was a German – no sirens had been sounded. I left the office at 5p.m. to cycle home and approaching the balloon barrage site the plane dived out of the clouds machine-gunning the balloon. I could clearly see the Swastika markings. Terrified, I jumped off my bike and dived into the hedge. The plane flew towards the bridges over the Tyne and I saw a huge flash and clouds of smoke and dust. My first experience of seeing a bomb dropped. Many more were to follow in the next 12 months. When I got home my father

handed me a buff envelope marked ‘OHMS.’ and I did not need to open it to know that it was my ‘calling up papers’ – “Report to Dingle Vale Schools, Liverpool, Thursday 11th July”. Mixed feelings. What would it be like leaving home? I knew the misery of homesickness from school camps and Boy Scouts Camps. I had a good home life, good pals and a great interest in piano and organ playing. All this would be lost. The next few days were grim, the waiting and uncertainty were worst. Wednesday 10th July, 10p.m. Central Station, Newcastle, dreading the farewells. Only in later years did I realise what it must have been like for my parents to see me disappearing over the bridge to Platform 9 then returning home and worse still, a few days later when the case containing my clothes arrived.

The journey to Liverpool seemed to be never ending as I had never been further than Saltburn! Duly arrived at Lime Street Station at 8a.m. Apart from Joe Thompson (Swalwell) I had palled up with Jack Stenhouse (Benwell). The three of us found a cafe, thick chipped tea mugs and bacon sandwiches! “How do we get to Dingle Vale School?” we asked the Chinese owner. “Tlam Clar (Chinese accent) with notice Aigburth on flont” (Tram car with notice Aigburth on front). For about two miles we rumbled and clattered our way, and there was the school. Documented and issued with clothing etc, then escorted to a

classroom. “Sorry lads”, said the Sgt. “No palliasses yet, you will get used to sleeping on the floor!” Night came but sleep did not. There were 30 of us and it was talk, talk and more talk, and lots of fun until the Orderly Officer came in and ordered “SILENCE!” After three days we were dispersed to various houses in the area (there were 300 soldiers in the Company). Beautiful stone built houses, the owners evidently well off, had moved to safer areas and the army took possession. Joe, Jack and I were in a room in the third floor, (comfort now because we had palliasses). Every morning we were marched to the school which was about a mile away for breakfast followed by the inevitable Square Bashing. I was happy and enjoying a completely new life. Exercise, discipline and comradeship, and a feeling of pride. Walking out in the evening in your best battledress (even if it was not a perfect fit) shoulders back and saluting officers, great!

One morning on parade the Officer in Charge said that personnel were required to form headquarters staff to control the intake of 300 recruits every Thursday. Cooks, admin, quartermaster etc were needed and if anyone was interested to step forward otherwise instead of volunteering you would be ordered. I was pushed forward by Joe, and the Officer assumed I was volunteering. “Report to QM Captain Gosling at 2p.m.” So at 2p.m. I was giving an account of what I had done in Civvy Street, and I ended up in the QM Stores Office. This was the start of the worst period of my six years service. Good fellows to work with, Taffy, Smithy, Ray and Stan but the work was so futile and useless. We had ledgers to control the input of clothing etc and issues of same. If the stock remaining did not tally they were simply written off!

As the weeks went by air raids became almost nightly and heavier. Sitting in the Trocadero Cinema one Saturday evening (15th September) and listening to the Wurlitzer Organist who, later was called up, joined our unit and eventually played the organ for our wedding, when suddenly he stopped and a notice was flashed on the screen ALL SERVICEMEN REPORT TO THEIR UNITS IMMEDIATELY. No trouble getting lifts to the school where chaos reigned. Report to the armoury was the order. Issued with rifle and five rounds and marched in groups of ten to the banks of the Mersey. Word was passed that invasion was imminent and two German battleships were at the mouth of the Mersey. We lay there all night and I’m sure everybody thought the same as me, what will a rifle and five bullets do to a battle ship! At 2p.m. on Sunday we were stood down. Rumours were flying around and many weeks later it was disclosed that invasion barges had been sighted in the Channel but it was not clear whether it was an exercise or the real thing.

I remember once standing on the landing stage waiting for the Ferry to New Brighton when suddenly there was the sound of a bomb dropping. The piercing whistle got louder and louder and I felt it was going to land on my back. Instead all I got was a soaking. The bomb dropped in the water near the landing stage. Glad that the bomb evidently did not have my name on it.

5th May 1942 was the start of a week of continuous bombing every night from 7p.m. till 4a.m. for 6 nights. I was now billeted in 99 Colebrooke Road with Taffy, Smithy, Ray and Stan which was an extra storeroom for Army clothing and blankets etc. This street was only 100 yards from a huge oil storage depot – 30 tanks in all. On

7th May two tanks received direct hits and night was turned into day. There was a direct hit on No 103 but fortunately most of the inhabitants had cleared off to Sefton Park as they felt safer there. The noise of bombs and anti-aircraft fire was deafening. The sky over the city was red. I went into Liverpool on the Saturday – fires were still burning on the dock side and ships sunk by the docks. Lewis’s Store was completely burned out, Bryant & May’s matches factory burning and scores of people outside the Town Hall scanning the notices of names of the dead and unidentified. There was an air of sadness and despair.

The powers that be decided that Liverpool was not a safe place, and it took them 12 months to realise that, so we were moved to Pheasey Farm Estate, Great Barr, about five miles from Birmingham. This was a huge council house estate which had just been completed at the beginning of the war but commandeered by the Army. Leaving Liverpool was a wrench despite the bombing. It is a wonderful city and I have memories which will never fade. Some happy ones, some sad.

I think of the little boy who used to play with us in the evenings. We did not see him for a while but when we did he was on crutches – he had lost a foot. I think of the brave firemen who night after night tackled the huge fires. I think of the times I walked up the hill to the Anglican Cathedral and sat there and prayed not only for myself but for all affected by bombing. Air raids are so terrifying as you can’t see your enemy, you know he is up there but you are helpless.

July 1941 saw us settled into our new camp and this was to alter my career and also my life. I felt that I must get out of the boring job so I requested an interview with the QM who was also in charge of Transport. I took the bull by the horns as it were and asked for a transfer to the Transport staff. I was so happy driving cars and lorries of all sizes. One afternoon I was detailed to go to Great Barr station to pick up an ATS Corporal and thirty other ranks. On arrival at the station there they were, all very smart.

Something about the Corporal attracted me immediately – standing there so smart and lovely, not only physically, but something else which was hard to describe. Whatever it was I had no doubt whatsoever that some day, if she would have me, I wanted her to be my wife. Love at first sight – call it what you will. As we talked on the way back to the camp I found that she was from Birmingham (but no Birmingham accent) and was to work in the QM stores. What a stroke of luck – it meant I would see her almost every day! I was afraid to ask her for a date so asked my pal, Taffy, to do that. “Surely he can ask me himself?” was the answer. So I plucked up courage and the reply was, “Yes, I would like that”. Remember she was a Corporal and I was a driver so officially we were not allowed to hold hands but I think we broke the rules a few times!

Clifton Cinema, Perry Bar, was our first date and the beginning of a wonderful courtship. After a few months she (Jessie) was posted to Lichfield on an NCO’s course. I missed her so much. Eric, one of the drivers (who eventually married one of the ATS and we kept in contact long after the war ended) came to the rescue. There was an old motor cycle without a pillion seat in the garage and Eric said he would take me to Lichfield one evening. I put my greatcoat on the back mudguard and away we went. I often think how did we have the nerve to do it – goodness knows what



would have happened if we had been stopped by the Redcaps! Jessie was delighted and it wasn't long before she returned to camp – this time a Sergeant.

Our next move was to Oldham where we got engaged, and then three months at Heysham, near Morecambe. After that it was on to Prestatyn which was formally Pontins Holiday Camp. We planned to get married but Army regulations stated that a married couple could not be on the same camp. If we had gone ahead we would have been separated, so we agreed that it was better to be together and hope that some day the stupid regulation would be cancelled. Out of the blue it was when a few months later the Commandant of the ATS paid a visit to the camp. Questions were invited from the NCO's so up got Sergeant Hobson and asked was it not better for a married couple to be together in time of war than separated? The Commandant claimed she was not aware of this rule (a likely story!) but would look into it. A few weeks later the regulation was cancelled so we were able to go ahead with our plans.

The date was set – Saturday 17th June 1944, at Trinity Church, Prestatyn. A glorious, sunny day and understandably, a nervous one. The start of another new chapter in my life.

After a week of rain and gales, the day dawned with a clear blue sky, warm sunshine and no wind. Was this to be the pattern for our new life together? No! Life is not like that. It is like a sea voyage. Some days are so pleasant when the sea is calm and the ship sails smoothly along and then suddenly the sky darkens, the wind reaches gale force, huge waves threaten to sink the ship and that is the time you need a good Captain. One who knows when to sail in the storm or ride before it. Jess was my Captain and her strength of character, her positive thinking and implicit faith steered me through those stormy days.

At 2p.m. in the Trinity Church, Prestatyn, the organist started to play "Here come the bride", I hardly recognised Jess all in white because I had only always seen her in khaki. Clothing was severely rationed in those days but thanks to the generosity of the officers who gave her their clothing coupons she was able to purchase a wedding dress.

When we came out of the church there was a guard of honour formed by ATS Officers and NCOs. This was a great occasion not only for us but the camp as well. We were the first couple on HQ Staff to be married there. One hundred and ten guests including our Commanding Officer were at the reception. Everything was provided by the Officers' Mess and the music for dancing played by some of the Regimental Dance Band. At 7p.m. Jess and I set off for Colwyn Bay and stayed there for 2 days before travelling to my home at Swalwell, near Newcastle Upon Tyne. All too soon our honeymoon was over and it back to Army life again. It was strange after an evening out having to pass through the Guardroom gates, say "Goodnight" then separate.

*(Ed note: following was published in The Victoria House Review Issue 2 - Aug 44):*

#### **"D" Day or Hobson's Choice**

Today was the day of the wedding, Jackie and Jessie were united, At Trinity Church he met his doom, And the drivers were bloody delighted.

See the guests roll up in a lorry,  
And they all gave a hearty cheer,  
When a taxi rolled up with the bridegroom,

And Garnham rolled up with the beer.

Into the Church we were bundled,  
The organ it crashed so mightily,  
Hear Johnson play the "Raspberry in Blue",  
As the parson came out in his nightie.

Then silence fell as Jess walked in,  
You heard not a solitary voice,  
The only noise was the knocking knees,  
Of dear little Hobson's choice.

She walks on the arm of her father,  
He came to give her away,  
The whole of the Centre could have done that,  
But it didn't seem right today.

Then the parson asked personal questions,  
That only applied to them,  
They gave their evidence in quaking voices  
Like Wilde at an FGCM.

We all then adjourned to the party,  
To be greeted by Chops-yes-and Jellies,  
Solly's chop went straight to our hearts,  
And very soon straight to our tummies.

The best man was there looking sober,  
He's good at these wedding affairs,  
While the groom looked at the bride so slyly  
Which seemed to say "Gerr up them stairs".

The groom made a speech so terrific,  
As the Captain presented a dowry,  
Jackie thanked everyone in the Centre,  
With the exception of Cpl Lowry.

Chris was in charge of the proceedings,  
Thank God not in charge of the beer,  
The Captain bought us quite a few rounds,  
Till his wife took him home by the ear.

Then the bar had to close till the evening,  
It gave quite a few of us qualms,  
To know that it wasn't till eight o'clock,  
They'd reopen the Schneiders Arms.

But the bridegroom was getting impatient,  
Though the bride was cool and serene,  
Women are like that on honeymoon nights,  
The married men know what I mean.

And soon they'll be off on a puffer,  
After drinking the wine that is fizzy,  
We wish them Good Luck and tomorrow,  
We hope that our Jack isn't dizzy.

They're a grand pair of scouts, and we love them,  
And we wish them a life that is easy,  
A £1000 a year and quads,  
In a dear little home near Pheasey.

So good luck and God's blessing upon you,  
We all wish you great happiness,  
And memories are pleasant around the 'D'  
Day, The 'D' Day of Jackie and Jess.

See Jackie is dressed in his civvies,  
In the train Jess don't let that fellow mess you,  
He's going away as an advert,  
An advert "Let Fred Jennion dress you."  
Sgt J.W.

One evening in October when we met Jess joyfully told me that she had seen the Medical Officer who confirmed that she was pregnant. Great news! Although it meant that she would be discharged in a few weeks time and we would be parted. The months rolled by and on 19th May 1945 our first daughter, Jean was born.

The war in Europe had ended two weeks earlier but it was more than a year before I was demobbed. This was on the 4th June 1946 and I can remember the feeling as I

walked up the garden path to be greeted by Jess and I thought, "At last! The six years are over and I am now Mr Dixon and not Sergeant Dixon". It was very hard adapting to civilian life again and Jess said that she had experienced the same. It was a complete change. Instead of approximately 40 people on the Transport and QM Staff who had been together for so many years and were closer than brothers and sisters there was now just a small group.

Within a few weeks I was back on the organ seat as Organist at Swalwell Methodist Chapel. This time without the gas mask at my side as I had in September 1939. I held this post for 32 years and then came the opportunity to play on a much bigger organ and I played at Crookhill for 4 years before retiring. This did not mean that I was finished with music. Occasionally I was asked to play in the area if an organist was not available. I was also pianist for the Youth Club Concert Party and the Ladies Club. In later years I became a member of the North East Cinema Organ Society and for many years had the thrilling experience of playing the Mighty Wurlitzer Organ. Sadly my eyesight deteriorated but I kept on playing the piano and having to play by memory. Our second daughter was born on the 4th August 1950. After her marriage to Tony, they moved to Scotland with their first child Carol, then Michael was born later.

Our holidays were rather limited before retirement but after that very frequent and varied. We had 2 trips to Majorca with my son-in-law Tony and grandson Christopher. Jess and I had a very wet one with Thelma in Scotland. When Jean and Thelma were very, very young we had a pleasant 2 weeks in North Wales. We had many trips abroad by air and coach – Cyprus, Benidorm, Majorca, Algarve, and an interesting Rhine cruise.

Eventually we had a very different type of holiday and as far as we were concerned the best of all. Year after year we travelled in the motor home which Tony and Thelma bought. Carol and Michael, our grandchildren came too until they started going on holidays with friends. France, Holland, Belgium and Germany – absolutely fantastic and we saw places that we would never have seen. What fun we had every day! Each day and each journey perfectly planned by them and never a dull moment. Can you imagine Jess and I both at the age of 78 paddling our canoes for the first time, down the Dordogne and Jess terrified of water! How about the Chemin de Fer in France – a little truck seating 4 persons, on a railway track? Jess sat there like Queen Boadicea on her chariot urging we three as we pedalled like mad!

When we were camped on the banks of the Rhine at Koblenz we went on a chairlift to visit a fort and at that time I was scared of heights! So many places and events to recall it would take pages and pages. I can almost smell the lovely BBQs we had almost every evening followed by a sing-song. We tried to sing roundelays but I don't think we ever finished one because of laughing! After retirement, Jess and I became very involved with playing carpet bowls and short mat. We were eventually selected for Durham County and played for 10 years travelling all over the country becoming well known as 'Jess and Jack'. Jess was secretary for the Swalwell Carpet Bowls for many years and at its peak was the biggest club in the North East. She then became secretary of the North West Durham Carpet Bowls Association which at one time consisted of 17 clubs. I was treasurer for both and we worked so well



together. She was a brilliant organiser and will always be remembered for the wonderful parties and memorable trips she arranged.

After Jess died in March 2005 we felt that it would be too emotional to go to France that summer (I know what Jess would have said!) so we decided to have a narrow-boat holiday on the canal in North Wales. The weather was very kind to us but 2 incidents occurred which although distressing, to say the least, could have been much worse. After a few minutes we even laughed about them. The first came one evening when it was decided to moor for the night. As the boat slowed down I jumped off the front with the rope to fasten to the mooring ring. I had done this several times but this time I collapsed in agony. I thought I had broken my ankle or leg. Thelma and Tony managed to secure the boat and help me back on board. My ankle was swelling quickly and soon was all colours. All I could do after that was to sit on the front of the boat and admire the scenery and wildlife. That is, until the second incident. One morning after breakfast we decided to move on. Remember, I was of no use and just sitting at the front of the boat. Thelma untied the mooring ropes, fore and aft, and decided to give the boat a little push away from the towpath wall. Oh dear! The boat moved away quicker than she expected and she was stretched out parallel to the water before dropping into the canal feet first and thereby keeping her head above water. I heard the cry "Tony!" and he jumped in to help her out by which time the boat was drifting away. Somehow I hobbled along to the back of the boat, 60 feet long, and brought it in to the towpath.

They were now standing on it, dripping wet and laughing their heads off! I might add – canal water is not very clean but they had no after effects from their immersion! On our way home after that eventful week we called in to the local hospital to have my ankle examined. It was sprained with torn ligaments and a torn muscle too. That was the good news as the doctor said if I had torn another specific muscle I would never have walked again! I was housebound for 8 weeks with weekly visits to the hospital for physiotherapy. Despite all that, we enjoyed this holiday.

At this point, the reader will be thinking that our married life had been plain sailing with sunshine all the way, or a bed of roses. Unfortunately, as I said at the beginning life is not like that. We went through many storms and very sad and distressing times. Our first daughter, Jean, was born profoundly deaf and at the age of five went to a residential school which meant that we only saw her during school holidays. You can imagine the sadness of saying "Goodbye" when they were over and she had to go back to school. In her early 20's she became a diabetic and coped extremely well but worse was to follow. After a long illness she died on her 42nd birthday. This was a shattering blow to us all. Several months before this my father died and a few months after Jean died my mother died. Surely, we thought, nothing else could happen but did. When Jess was about 55 years old she had her first heart attack but thankfully recovered. She was tough and had two more in the following years. At 80 years of age she had a serious fall which triggered off polymyalgia which caused her to be in pain for the rest of her life. In addition to that, she had osteoporosis but not once did

she ever complain – that was Jess.

Then on 15th March 2005 after only 5 days in hospital she died. At last she was free from pain. No more visits to health centres or hospitals for X-rays etc and the never-ending experimenting with tablets. I kissed her and said "Cheerio Jess (not Goodbye), I will see you again some day".

The reader may well think that is the end of our marriage. Not quite "Till death us do part" was our wedding vow and we had now reached that stage – parted. Physically, yes, but when I first saw Jess and fell in love with her it was not only her physical appearance, although she was beautiful, it was something else – something which cannot define and which cannot be destroyed by death. I cannot describe what the next few weeks and indeed months were like. Only those who have experienced bereavement will know. I was alone even though my family and friends were with me – you can still be lonely in a crowd. I was having to do everything by myself – things that I had never done before. Jess and I often talked about death, not morbidly but realistically and we promised that after a period of grief we would try to carry on with life.

Let no-one say that there is no such thing as 'love at first sight'. More than two years of happy courtship and more than 60 years of a wonderful marriage after seeing Jess on that little station near Birmingham and knowing that I would marry her (if she would have me!) surely proves that. Consider too the coincidences that lead up to that.

Why after only one month on route marches, foot drill, rifle drill etc was I transferred to HQ Staff in Liverpool and the Company that I left were to sent to Biggin Hill and several of my colleagues were killed? Why after 12 months in Liverpool was I transferred to Birmingham and a few months later Jess, who was stationed at Burton-on-Trent was told that she was being transferred to Birmingham? Finally, why was I the only driver out of 14 on the camp available to go to that station to bring her to my camp and she was to work in the QM Stores Transport Department so that apart from seeing her in the evenings I saw her several times during the day? I must have been the luckiest man in the British Army!

Now 3 years on, I often go back over those wonderful years and give thanks for them. It has brought moments of laughter and sometimes nearly tears but then I hear Jess saying, "Come on now – no need for that. A happy reunion lies ahead" and this time we will not be parted.

**Jack Dixon – March 2008**

### **I shall call this our "WAR TIME MEMORIES HOLIDAY – JUNE 1996"**

For many months we had talked of doing it and eventually a date was fixed. We started at 7a.m. on Monday 17th June. Down the A1, breakfasting at 8a.m. in Little Chef, on to Leeds to pick up the M62 – 4 lanes full of cars, vans and articulated lorries and all moving about 70 mph. Excitement starting to grow as we pass the Manchester area and we see signs pointing to Shaw, and Oldam where we were engaged.

On we go with LIVERPOOL signs appearing – we must look for ALLERTON about 6 miles from the city. This is to be our base for our short stay. Eventually we find the Green Park Hotel at 11.30a.m. and I realise that is it next to Sefton Park which I know to be about 1 mile from DINGLE

VALE SCHOOL. First memory is of the hundreds of people who, in 1940/41 moved away from the city area and slept there at nights, preferring Anti-Aircraft shrapnel to bombs and incendiaries, although there were many near misses.

Quick wash and brush up and off to the city (by bus) to visit the Cathedrals. The Catholic Cathedral, named by the locals as 'Paddy's Wigwam' an indictment to the architect and builders. Typical modern architecture and we find from the brochure the folly of it all. New methods and new materials have resulted in metal fatigue, glass splintering, cracks in roof and crumbling masonry.

Within one year of opening in 1967 rain poured through the roof and flooded the interior. Dome is covered with scaffolding and £6.5 million is required for repairs. Nothing like a cathedral inside. From the ridiculous we moved about half a mile to the Anglican Cathedral and here was where the memories flowed for me. Miraculously it escaped damage during the blitz. Often I made my way up the hill and entered the huge doors and sat there in silence and prayer wondering if, and when, the bombing would stop.

Back to the hotel for our evening meal, passing the burnt out shell of a church which has been left as a shrine exactly as it happened in 1941, then a short ride alongside Sefton Park and Lo and Behold!! There was DINGLE VALE SCHOOL!! My first billet. An extra building on the Parade Ground, otherwise just the same. The trams that rattled down the slope into the guard room no longer there – dual carriageway instead. Walked down the road to 99 COLEBROOKE ROAD where five of us slept at nights. Stood outside No 103 which received a direct hit on the night of 7th May 1941 – can still hear the whistle of the bomb so clearly. Looked across to the Mersey, instead of AA guns and oil storage tanks which were ablaze that night, now gardens and trees. Also remember when Taffy and I sat and watched a coaster sailing down to Garston docks. Suddenly there was a huge explosion – it had hit a mine. When the smoke cleared there was little left to see. 55 years ago and yet seems like yesterday. Think of Eric, Ray, Taffy, Smithy, Reg – all gone.

Next morning, off to Albert Dock – waterfront is quite impressive with the Royal Liver building towering above all. Saw Fred, the weatherman, and had a short trip around the docks. Last time I saw these they were almost blocked with sunken ships and blazing buildings. Lunch, then a tour of the Town Hall which has to be seen to be believed – badly damaged in 1941 but now an absolute show piece. Next day through Wallasey Tunnel – spent 3 hours with Cliff. Never stopped talking – could it be 52/56 years that we were talking about?? Despite his heart trouble he looked quite well – delighted that we had found each other thanks to my appeal in the Liverpool Echo hoping to trace ex-Army pals.

On again to the land of two languages – NORTH WALES. Eventually found a guest house through the tourist office. Bed and breakfast business dead because of holiday camps. One hotel was fully booked and the other had turned the rooms into flats. Had a look from the outside at the HOLY TRINITY CHURCH where we were married and then drove up the steep winding hill to GWAENYSGOR to find that there had been a fire at the pub where, with my pals, I spent so many happy evenings playing the piano. Talked to the repair men who said it would not be open for another 3 to 4

### **'Lo and Behold!! There was DINGLE VALE SCHOOL!! My first billet'**



weeks. They were too young to help me with names, etc – village very quiet, in fact almost deserted.

Wednesday evening we went to the church hoping that the doors may be open – coffee evening in progress for the Girl Guides. Warm welcome from the lady at the door and when we told her why we were here she immediately called for the Minister. He was so thrilled and moved to think that we had the desire to come back after all those years. He quickly found the keys to the safe and produced the register – can you imagine our feelings as we looked at the entries? He took us into the church and after we had talked for a while he said “Would you like to stand at the front as you did 52 years ago?” We did and he said a most moving and lovely prayer.

The visit to the Holiday Camp which had been our ‘home’ for more than two years was a real shock. As we drove down the lane to the entrance we saw huge iron gates and 2 security men. We just could not believe our eyes – absolutely derelict and destruction everywhere. They told us that it had been closed for 15 years. They could not allow us to tour the whole camp but they did let us through the gates. Guardroom on the right, ration stores and cookhouse behind – the huge dining room which fed 6,000 soldiers – ATS quarters on the left. Nearly all the windows broken and window frames smashed or stolen. The tall tower is used by the security men with binoculars to scan the camp. The previous day they caught three youngsters setting fire to one of the chalets. What were Pontins thinking about – they built a similar camp less than 2 miles away! Then camp holidays suffered a slump – it was cheaper to go abroad. The security men were very interested as we described what it was like in those days. We looked at Roger Jones’ Hall which was our Social Club premises and where we had our wedding reception – now a HQ for Prestatyn Air Training Cadets.

Visited the Express Cafe where Jess and I had many meals in the evenings and became very friendly with Angela, her brother and father – none there now. Everything seems to close at 5p.m. except for 2 fish and chip shops.

On our last day, Sunday, we went to PENMAENMAWR where we spent a lovely holiday when Jean and Thelma (our daughters) were very young. A new, long promenade instead of two loading stages where boats moored to collect gravel which came from quarries at the top of the mountain on long chutes. Talked to one of the local residents as we walked along the beach and he gave us the details of the closure – it became to be cheaper to move by road. Couldn’t see any changes in the village. Went to the church in the evening at Prestatyn and the Minister opened the service by welcoming and blessing Jack and Jessie who were married here in 1944 – a splendid way to end our HOLIDAY OF MEMORIES.

This may seem to be a lot of sentimental rubbish, but for those of us who lived in those times it has brought back that unique experience of the good and bad times of war:

The bad? – Fear, Death and Destruction

The good? – Excitement, Comradeship and Determination

But, the highlight for me, was the moment on 17th June 1944, when Jess and I pledged our lives together, and we have lived that moment again in 1996. ■

## THE VICTORY HOUSE REVIEW

The open forum of the Victoria House

Social Club Produced by the Entertainments Section of the Quartermaster’s Staff No 12 Pioneer Corps Holding and Transit Unit

## Edition No 1 – July 1944

From the Editor...

ANOTHER milestone in the short history of the Victoria House Social Club has been reached with the inauguration of a Club Magazine.

We have come a long way since the formation of the Club in Oldham, both in social activities and in the welfare of the members. Little did we realise when starting this club, the far reaching effect it would have on our lives in the Army, and, we hope, it will have in the future.

There is no doubt that the atmosphere of a social club creates a feeling of Goodwill and Comradeship amongst ones fellow men and women, and this has amply proved itself in the amount of pleasure derived from the activities of our Club by the members.

Not only have members had the opportunity of fraternising with people in all walks of life, and thereby gaining a more tolerant outlook, but we have learned the fact that no two people are alike, either in interests or intellect.

The Club has had many requests for different kinds of entertainment, and we feel sure that we have always done our best to cater for the various tastes.

This is the first number of the Review, something that you have asked for, and you will be the contributors to its pages in the months ahead.

Naturally we all hope the war will soon be over, but until then, let us make as big a success of this job, as we have made of the Club itself.

So please lets have those articles, whether they are in connection with the Club or not, express your views, and if you have any suggestions, say so in the form of a letter. You will find many flippant comments in our pages about our members, possibility yourself, and we ask you to treat these comments in the light hearted way in which they are given.

Yours

THE EDITOR

## From the Chairman ....

With this first edition of our own News Sheet, may I say that I hope it will be the means of keeping us interested and amused, and, what I consider most important, in touch with one another wherever the trend of events may lead us, whether in the Army or in civilian life.

We are very lucky to have in our midst some printers, whose previous experience is going to be a valuable asset to us. They can, of course, only carry on as long as contributions from the members are forthcoming. We, all of us, I think, strike some episode during our wanderings or hikes, which, when put in writing would be of interest to all. The fact that duck eggs are sixpence each has been known to cause interest, so come along all of you, and let us have as much material as you can.

Our thanks are due to those who are taking on the task of editing this News Sheet, not an easy job I can assure you, and one that will take up a lot of spare time.

A lot is said and written these days of post-war planning; it seems to me that perhaps now would be the time to get down to serious thought regarding an

annual reunion. Reunions as I know them are ideal functions for recalling old times, and also of course, an excuse for married men getting away for a couple of days.

A certain hotel in London has been suggested as an ideal venue; judging by the landlord’s efforts with barrels at ‘Roger Jones’ Yard, I think we could safely accept him as “Mine Host”.

Anyway the whole subject is one that perhaps can start you talking, a subject which I suggest is an interesting as hiking? L.G.

## Victoria House Social Club

When Capt L Gosling suggested that some form of entertainment for the Staff should be organised during our stay in Oldham it was received with mixed feelings, and many of the Staff were rather sceptical about it.

However, on 22 Oct 1942, a meeting of members of the staff was held, and after lengthy and I might say witty discussion the Victoria House Social Club was born, and our first committee elected.

Capt Gosling occupied the chair, Sgt Acroft became President, CQMS Wilde undertook the duties of Treasurer and Secretary and Ptes Christie, Jackson and Noble comprised our first committee members.

Sgt Ashcroft made our first arrangements for refreshments, meaning Beer etc, and on 29th October we had our first Dance in the Dining Hall at Victoria House, music being supplied by the Transport Band, the line-up consisting of CQMS Wilde, LCpls Jenuicn and Hogg and Pte Livens. This dance proved to be a very successful forerunner to many more pleasant evenings at Victoria House.

Our weekly subscriptions began to accumulate, and with the aid of a subscription from Mr Cohen, the Tailor of Oldham, and the proceeds of a raffle for a bottle of whiskey presented by Capt Cook, the Welfare Officer, we were able to enjoy our first free visit to the Theatre at Oldham on 5 December 1942.

After this we endeavoured to vary our entertainment with Whist Drives and Beetle Drives. Members will no doubt remember Capt Warwick as MC for Beetle Drives,

when vigorous shaking of Salt Pots and Dice caused some good fun, and I would like to remind members of our good friends Mrs Marwood and Mr and Mrs Wilson who generously provided us with some very good prizes.

By now the Club had become firmly established, the Dances exceptionally popular and we had already interested several of our friends in Oldham, not forgetting Albert’s bevy of beauties from the UCLA Laundry, who by now had become staunch supporters of the Club.

Members will recall the very happy Xmas of 1942 and the New Year of 1943 we celebrated, and this had been proceeded the previous week by the wedding of members Hogg and Hamburger, when Driver Christie excelled himself with the excellent catering arrangements.

Sgt A Freid and his Orchestra provided us with the music, and this was the beginning of the many occasion on which various members of the Band have given us great pleasure with their musical talent. Sgt J Wilson also came to the rescue and since I think the only members of the staff who have escaped his witty dialogues are the Stores cat and the newly arrived quads. By now Flanagan and Allen were experiencing

**‘We have come a long way since the formation of the Club in Oldham.’**



serious rivalry from Capt Gosling and Capt Haskins, (Underneath the Arches) and many impromptu Cabarets were becoming very popular at our Dances.

On 11 February we held a Dance at King Street Stores, marking once more the ambitions of our Club.

16 February was the date when Pte 'Sonny' Weinshallbaum took over the duties of Treasurer and he has very ably held this position up to the present day. A very large part of our success has been due to the activities of Sonny, and his ability to get "blood from a stone" has definitely been responsible for the present sound financial position of the Club.

As we showed a balance of £47 on 7 March 1943, a proposal by the Treasurer that a sum of 10/- be given to all members going on Privilege Leave was unanimously accepted, and this very useful contribution has been extended to all members regularly since that date. Of course since the Leave Ban of last April, those days of leave now seem rather distant.

Friday 26 May 1943 marked a very memorable and happy occasion when Capt Gosling celebrated his 25th Anniversary in the Service. A Dance was held in his honour, and our Commanding Officer, Lt Col H Greenwood VC DSO CBE MC, presented Capt Gosling with an inscribed clock from the members and staff.

The last week in June we held a Farewell Dance in Oldham, and leaving behind happy memories, and some without some mingled regrets, the Centre moved to Prestatyn. (To be continued next issue)

### The Crisis

PT has come, don't swing the lead,  
It's up in the morning instead of in bed,  
To greet the morn' without a quiver  
And improve the condition of your liver.  
A few we know will rise and sing  
And other groan and to bed will cling,  
For Taff I know, t'will be quite a feat  
Who'll rise with words I can't repeat.  
But the strangest sight you shouldn't miss  
Is the early rising of dear old Chris.  
So when Harvey comes with a gentle call,  
Stand by your beds please, one and all.  
And greet him in a way just so,  
Because YOU can't tell him where to go.

V.A.

### Edition No 2 – August 1944

From the Editors....

In producing this, the second number of our Club Magazine we would like to thank all members for their appreciation of our efforts with this new venture.

Since our first issue the activities of the Club have been very varied, including a very enjoyable August Bank Holiday, with a good measure of sunshine.

At the invitation of our friends of the Gronant Tennis Club, our Tennis enthusiasts were able to take part in, and enjoy the Tournament on Bank Holiday Saturday, and on Bank Holiday Monday, the visit to the Queen's Theatre, Rhyl, followed by a Dance at the Club was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

Cricket has been tackled enthusiastically and more about this can be read in this month's issue.

The Allied Nations have had enormous successes on all War Fronts, and the events in France have certainly been very staggering.

With all these successes it has certainly caused a more optimistic air to prevail, and one cannot help but think, in all sobriety, that the final defeat of the Nazis is really in sight. The only really dark cloud at the

moment seems to be the increasing activities of V1, or the "Doodle-Bug", and in this connection we would like to offer our sympathies to members Adamsbaum, Gadd and Stokes who have had the misfortune of having their homes damaged by the fly-bombs, fortunately, without any injuries to their relatives.

Unfortunately our members still seem bashful about letting us have their contributions for the Review, and we feel sure that more can be done about this.

So please do your stuff and let No 3 be better than ever.

Yours The Editors

### From the Quartermaster's Desk

I think everyone is agreed that the first edition of this Magazine was a success, and great credit is due to the Editors. The only grouse is lack of material. The difficulty is well known because it has taken me a month to write this, and then only after several promptings from the Editors.

By the way, have you heard this one? "A sailor had just arrived home on furlough, and naturally after he had had a meal his footsteps took him to the local. Imagine his surprise when, on entering he saw the Landlord on the floor playing Draughts with his dog.

The Landlord moved, the dog did likewise. The sailor exclaimed "What a clever dog!" The landlord with a look of disgust said "Clever be -----, I can still beat him two games out of three anytime". It makes you think.

When talking of our Club do we always realise that our activities are only possible through the generosity of our Commanding Officer? I think we all appreciate how fortunate we are to have at the head of a unit the size of ours, a man whose first consideration always is the welfare of those under his command.

With the coming of winter should we be able to get a reasonable amount of support, a Brains Trust has been suggested. Major Plateau has promised to come to our aid as Question Master. Could we wish for more in the way of entertainment. Anyway should any of you be interested please inform the Committee and hard them your questions. If it's stories you're after we have the solution in the Question Master.

Of course, Major White can also be persuaded to produce a story as you will remember on a recent bachelor night. Two "young soldiers", Major McKay and Capt Hawkins may also be persuaded to produce some interesting memories. Capt Warwick having once upon a time kept a Zoo as an advert, may also have something to tell us about a certain north country seaside village.

Anyway, I'm sure you'll all agree that we are proud to have such a distinguished party of Officers as our supporters.

Capt L.G

### Victoria House Social Club

(Continued from our last issue)  
The Centre having moved from Oldham to Prestatyn in July 1943 we wondered how the fortunes of our Club would fare in our new surroundings. Fortunately, Capt Gosling had been able to obtain the use of a building known as "Roger Jones" for a Clubroom, and on 23 August we held our first meeting there,

Since then we have held Dances regularly, and Housey-Housey has proved a popular feature for the Sunday evenings. Notable occasions have been the Victory Dances held on 9 September to celebrate the Capitulation of Italy, our first

Anniversary Dance on 21 October and the wedding of Pte Wilson during October.

On 26 October the Welfare Fund was formed and already this fund has been instrumental in assisting some of our members, and now stands in a very healthy financial position. In December a Group Photograph was taken at the Club of the members of the Staff, and Xmas and New

Year was again catered for with the usual good entertainment.

Easter Sunday evening again marked another successful venture by the introduction of a Light Orchestral Concert. Sgt Fried and his string orchestra

provided the music, and Mrs Dickens, Sgt Grime and Pte Dunn entertained us with some excellent songs. The show was compared by Sgt Jimmie Wilson, and since then we have had two more entirely successful evenings on the same lines. Thanks are due to the above artistes, and also to Sgt & Mrs Davies for their wonderful singing, Sgt McKinnon and Pte L Brooks who have assisted at the later concerts.

In June 1944 the wedding took place of Pte Dixon and Sgt Hobson ATS, and congratulations are due to all members and other helpers who made the reception so enjoyable. The poetic accomplishments of Sgt Wilson on this occasion are included elsewhere in this issue. (Ed note: I have included this in Jack Dixon's memoirs).

In June, Sgt WE Ascroft was discharged from the Service owing to his very unfortunate accident. Sgt Ashcroft was one of the original members and founders of the Club, and he put in a lot of hard work behind the scenes. We were all very sorry that he had to go, and also pleased when Capt Gosling invited him to become an honorary member of the Club. We all hope that he will be able to spare the time to pay us periodical visits.

The hikers also resumed their activities with the fine weather. Despite the advice of the married members of the staff, weddings still seem to have a fascinating hold on our members and Pte T Royds said "I will" in July. This summer has seen a great deal of activity on the Camp Tennis Courts by the interested members, and Cricket has recently provided further enjoyable hours.

The families of several of our members have been able to spend their holidays at Prestatyn, and during this holiday period the club has proved most useful, and the Dances etc, have been more popular than ever.

August Bank Holiday was marked by a visit to the Queens Theatre, Rhyl, which was followed by a Dance, and the excellent weather made this holiday something to be remembered, if only for the glorious sunshine.

Before concluding this account of the history of our Club, thanks are given to the many people who have helped to make it so successful. It would not be possible to mention everyone, but I would like to place on record, our appreciation of the good work of SSgt Davidson and his helpers, also the help given by SSgt Grossman.

May our Club continue along its successful way until the Victory Bells peal out.

### Regimental History

Compiled by Major R Hargreaves MC

Among other peculiarities, war has a trick of producing certain hastily improvised military formations to meet a particular need. In 1346 on the Pay Roll of



a British Garrison at Calais the Miners and Pioneers were shown as receiving a daily rate of 4d to 6d. This can be regarded as a handsome "Specialist" rate of remuneration, when it is borne in mind that the Mounted Archer received no more than 6d a day, out of which he had to provide not only subsistence for himself, but also for his horse. The purchasing power of money being greater in those days, the Pioneers daily corresponding rate today would be 3/- to 3/9.

The Pioneer in effect, was an individual of unquestionable consideration; a specialist at the type of demolition work that could only be carried out with a high degree of courage, whose life was accompanied by a great deal of risk and peril.

Under cover of darkness Pioneers would creep forward to the foot of a corner of a Tower or some such feature of the defensive stronghold, and there begin to dig out a hollow chamber under the foundations. As they burrowed deeper, heavy wooden beams were introduced to prevent a premature collapse.

Then the chamber completed, the whole of the supporting structure was set on fire. The theory being that the sudden collapse of the timbering would cause the Tower or Wall to collapse. This work demanded a high degree of skill, for naturally the Garrison would attempt to stop the work by pouring down every kind of missile, from Bolts and Arrows to White Hot Pitch and Boiling Oil on the heads of the Pioneer 'task' force.

As a skilled technician no less than as a man of exceptional pluck and determination, the Pioneer held a position in the general esteem of which he could be, and was, legitimately proud. This highly justifiable pride in himself was reflected in his Kit. Thus we find in Queen Elizabeth's reign, a body of Pioneers were ordered to wear a "Cassock of Pale Blue, a White Doublet, White Hose, Shoes, Garters, a Skull and Cap, A sword and Dagger."

At the end of, and after, Queen Elizabeth's reign, the high esteem of the Pioneers began to fall off. They were still employed by the Engineers Offices on building, fortifications, repairing bridges or roads and water works. But their participating in fighting as part of an offensive force declined.

The increasing power of Artillery in Warfare had rendered the Pioneers unnecessary in siege operations. With the relegation to the less spectacular and more humdrum task as assistants to the Engineers the Pioneers lost stature, and with it, the specialist rate of pay, hitherto enjoyed.

In Oliver Cromwell's time the Pioneers occupied such a miserable position in the Army, that to be degraded to a Pioneer was held to be a punishment. Thus in the Ordinances of War, 1640, the following appeared: "A Regiment or Company that chargeth the enemy and retreats before they come to handy strokes, shall answer to a Council of War; and if the fault be found in the Officers they shall be banished the Camp; if in the soldiers, then every tenth be punished at discretion, and the rest serve for Pioneers and Scavengers." These methods to keep up the strength of the Pioneers was attributed, it is thought, to the Englishman's dislike for the Spade, but the work of a Pick and Shovel is inseparable from Warfare and since it is only under pressure that the Englishman can be induced to dig at all, to degrade a

man to the status of the Pioneers at least ensured that, when the need arose, somebody was at hand to do the Spade work, if only as a punishment.

To be continued

### Edition No 3 – September 1944

From the Editors .....

The publication of our third issue comes at a time when the news from all War Fronts is exceptionally cheering.

The Government's Demobilisation Scheme has been received with general satisfaction, and the fair consideration to age and length of service recommends the scheme as having been carefully planned.

The additional good news of the proposed increases in pay for all members of the Forces, and the further benefits of the Japanese Campaign Pay, for our comrades who are fighting so well in the Far East, is another definite sign that all is going well.

Our Footballers played their first match in the Centre League on 25 September, and although we lost by four goals to one, this score did not reflect the true state of the play, as our boys put up a very good show in spite of the appalling weather.

We would like our readers to show some interest in our Competition Page. So far we have never had a single entry, and we can assure you that providing you give the necessary support, the winner will receive a useful prize for his efforts.

We would also like to remind you once more that this is YOUR Magazine, and you have every opportunity of expressing your views in its pages. So please get your pens and pencils busy.

Yours THE EDITORS

### From the Quartermaster's Desk ....

I think we all agree that Pte Gadd's effort on 30 October was really an excellent one. Apart from tripe lovers, the entertainment was as good as we've ever had.

WO2 Davidson ('Soly' to followers of Dog Tracks), as usual came to our assistance, and produced what I am told, by non-tripe lovers, a glorious meal.

Looking through "Who's-Who" I've not yet been able to distinguish any references made by Sgt Wilson, perhaps he holds a revised edition peculiar to Prestatyn only; anyhow his efforts were, as usual, greatly appreciated.

All the artistes were greatly appreciated and we thank them. Unfortunately we don't stock eyeshields for rugger players.

Still the same old complain, lack of material from members of the staff. Please try and put something on paper and help the chaps who compile this review.

It was with regret that we bid Pte Peterson 'Au Revoir' this week. In service, one of the older members of the staff, we shall miss her, but

I'm sure we all hope she'll keep in touch with us. Our very best wishes to her for the future.

We've had no suggestions yet for a Brains Trust. Anyone interested?

Those of you who can, should I suggest, put in a bit of snooker practice. During the winter it is hoped that we shall again visit some of the Local Clubs who kindly opened their doors to us last winter..

### Regimental History

(Continued from last month)

However, in the reign of Charles II, artillery had increased in power and importance in warfare, and it is with this branch of the service that the Pioneer came into his own again in no uncertain fashion.

In 1685 the siege train of artillery contained a contingent of Pioneers under their own Officers and NCOs. Later under William III, the Pioneers were described as being arrayed in special uniforms of "red cloth coats and breeches, leather caps, woollen stockings, shoes with buckles and neck cloths". The Officers were armed with a long straight sword and a brace of pistols. The Sgts and Cpls with Halberds, while the ranks in addition to broad bladed axes, had a heavy slightly curved sword not unlike the Naval cutlass. From the red, the Pioneer's uniform was changed to "Blue coats, lined with orange, orange coloured waistcoats, blue breeches, stockings, and caps embroidered with a Shovel in the front."

When Pioneers served with Engineer Officers they were frequently referred to as Artificers. The 7th Foot (Royal Fusiliers) also boasted a Company of Miners which were Pioneers in another name. With this Unit the Pioneer was fitted out with a Carbine, short sword, and the hamm-hatchet, a weapon peculiar to his branch of the service.

The Pioneer was in effect regarded as the Army's handyman: and small contingents were attached respectively to the Artillery, Infantry and Engineers, to specialise in the particular sort of work carried out by the Unit to which they were attached. With the Artillery they dug the Gun Pits, brought up the Shot and Gunpowder and took charge of any demolitions required in the field of fire.

With the Infantry it was the Pioneers hazardous privilege to lead the assault column, hacking away the palisades, clearing paths through woods and thickets, while the end of the day's march found them busy erecting or improving rough and ready shelters for the nightly bivouac. They earned the privilege when the rest of the Army had to be content with a moustache to grow a beard, for in theory a beard was regarded as a protection against stinging tree branches and briar thorns. In the same way a leather apron was issued to protect their limbs and clothing.

With the Engineers, the miner – the Pioneer in another form, carried out road repairs, erection and demolition of fortifications, the work of the mine and counter mine, all carried out by the resolute Pioneer.

The 'Daily Courant' of August 1709 gives a vivid glimpse into the perilous activities in which the "Miner" engaged during the siege of Tournay. "Our Miners and the enemy often meet each other, when they have sharp combats, till one side gives way. We have got into three or four of the enemies great Galleries, which are thirty or forty feet underground and lead to several chambers, and in this we fight in armour by lantern or candle, they disputing every inch of the gallery with us to hinder our finding their great mines.

Yesternight, we found one which was placed just under our Bomb Batteries in which was 18 cwt of powder and many bombs, and if we had not been so lucky as to find it, in a very few hours our Batteries and some hundreds of men had taken flight into the air." An experience which was re-enacted 200 years later, during the mining and counter mining of the Great War of 1914-18.

(Ed note: this edition shows to be continued – unfortunately we are not in possession of Issue 4)

### Short Story – The "Y" List

After having spent a month in 'dock' with arthritis and bad feet so as soon as I could hardly walk, the Commandant sent for me



and says, "Pte Tomkins, you are now discharged from the hospital, and you must now report to the 12 PC H&TU, The Holiday Camp, Prestatyn."

After he had presented me with my warrant, I hobbles to the station and catches the train for Prestatyn. The civvies had left me room to stand in the corridor, which, I think was very nice of them, and when I wasn't thinking of my poor old "plates of meat", I wondered what the Holiday Camp would be like. I thought I could do with a holiday anyhow, and really began to think the Pioneers were being treated 'posh', like the Yanks at last. When I arrived at Prestatyn Station, a Sgt, about as big as 6d of coppers, says, "New arrival? Wait here."

When he had collected about 12 of us we started to walk to the Holiday Camp. Some of the chaps had full packs, a couple had walking sticks, and I couldn't tell whether one says it ain't far to the Camp, but by the time I sees the camp I was about dead on my feet. It sure looked 'posh' on entering, what with the Goldfish Pond and Fountain.

They took us to a place called the Clipper, and after a few hours wait some guy took us to get Blankets. Blimey, the blankets could have stood up on their own, but after being put in 6 different huts, I eventually gets to 'Kip' with about 40 more blokes in the same hut. I had hardly got to sleep it seemed before 'Nat Gonella' started his trumpet solo at 6.30a.m. and we all got up and made a bee-line for a wash and brush-up.

On breakfast parade they put me with the non-marchers on account of my poor feet. There seemed to be more non-marchers than marchers, and when we lands in the Dining Hall there seemed to be thousands there already. After a breakfast of Spam we were free to do as we liked until 8 o'clock, when we had a bath and a haircut all round.

Then MO's inspection and back to the billets. A Sgt comes round telling us to take our Kits to a Hut 14 for Kit Inspection. The CQMS examines our kits, looked at my Special Light Shoes, says "Go sick and get a new pair in the morning." Examines my glasses and makes me take our my "Hampstead Heaths". So I says to him, "What about my Rupture?" and he says, "Do you wear an Army Issue Truss?" and when I says, "Yes" he puts it all down on my 1157.

Well my poor old feet were all in by now, and after dinner and a cup of 'rosy lee' in the NAAFI, I managed to get a bit of rest, hoping that they would forget that Pte Tompkins had arrived until next day. But no, at 2 o'clock they send a crowd of us to be kitted up at the QM Stores. So I thought it would be a good chance to get a few things changed whilst I was there. I sees the Sgt there and asks him to change my Cap, but he tells me to scrub it, "What about my socks", I says, and he gives me a Housewife with an extra ball of wool. After they had made me pay for a comb, a pair of "Beetle Crushers" and a few more odds and ends which I had left at my other mob, I goes to get a Battle Dress. The ATS dame, what looked like a foreigner, gives me a suit two sizes too big, and matching like 'chalk and cheese.' After which I staggers back to my billet, feeling browned-off and hoping they would soon get me away from this joint and back to a quiet life in a Coy.

That night I manages to stagger to Prestatyn but all the 'Pubs' were closed as it was Sunday, and after walking round for a while I gets back to Camp fed up, and got to bed hoping the ruddy war would soon

be over, next day they Post me from Reception to H & T, and after I asks the OC to get me posted he says that I cannot go till I gets a new pair of shoes. So I get a chit from the MO and had my poor old feet measured and a drawing made of 'em, and am told to wait until I am sent for. A week of misery followed, spud bashing, sweeping up, collecting NAAFI cups and all the odd jobs you could think of.

Then they sent for me to parade at the QM Stores to get my shoes. About a dozen of us went to Rhyl and they really let me ride on a bus. The bloke in charge said I should get posted when I had my shoes, and I begins to buck up at the thought of that. But when I gets to the shop, because I took size 11 and had a couple of Bunions', the Shop chap said he couldn't fit me, but would get me a pair in a month's time.

I don't think I can stand another month in this "holiday camp" after the first week. Holiday camp, my God, give me "Stalag III" anytime.

I bet you I won't get 'Y' Listed again once I get out of this here Cemetery with the bus route running through it. Oh, my poor old feet!!!!

F HIVES

#### Military Discipline

For years British troops have engaged in manoeuvres in preparations for the Invasion of Northern Europe. Some are on such a scale that only the high-ups are sure they are not the real thing.

A story has it that on a recent exercise an obscure British Brigadier and his staff were kept in suspense until the last minute. They nervously paced up and down on a small hill near their Command Post. Finally a troop-carrying plane went by, and from it came a pigeon.

Powerful glasses followed every flap of the pigeon's wings till it fluttered into a nearby coup, and a full Colonel raced over to get the message, bounded back breathlessly, and handed it over to the Brigadier. He opened it with trembling hands, read it, cursed, and threw it on the grass and then walked off with his face a bright purple. A young staff Lieutenant waited until the boss was out of sight, then bent down and picked up the message. It said, "I have been sent down for being naughty in my cage."

#### Issue 5 – December 1945

From the Editor....

I have taken the liberty of producing the following pages as a final "literary" effort before being demobilised.

I do hope that all members will accept any reference to themselves or their friends in the right spirit, and appreciate that any flippant remarks are only intended to amuse, and do not convey any personal feelings.

Our previous issue was produced last Christmas, with the aid of Sgt Sontz, and I would like to thank him for the excellent work he put in for our previous numbers.

Of course events have moved with great rapidity during the past twelve months, and it would not be possible to refer in these few pages to all the momentous happenings that have occurred.

Victory has been achieved at last, the Atom Bomb has been discovered and Demobilisation is under way.

But probably Capt Gosling's return to the Devons has been the most concerning

event to our daily lives. Whilst we are all very sorry he has left us, we wish him every success with his new duties.

It would be most difficult to replace an Officer so highly esteemed as Capt Gosling, but we shall always have pleasant memories of the "Boss", and will long remember his kindness and cheerful company. It is to be hoped that when we have all returned to "civvy street" the proposed re-union of the QM Staff will become a reality, and we shall all have the pleasure of recalling our Army life when it will have a more mellowed memory, and we shall no doubt be able to smile at the difficulties we thought existed.

So please bear our reunion in mind and let us all hope that Capt Gosling will be there to preside.

I would like to add a personal appreciation to all members who have helped to make a success of this small Magazine, and I shall often recall the pleasure and enjoyment derived from its production.

I am including in this issue the private addresses of all the Staff, to enable us to keep in

touch with each other.

#### A message from Capt LW Gosling....

Although I am no longer the "Boss" I still feel that the QM's Department of 12 Centre is my "baby, having seen it grow from one Lt QM plus one RQMS (Snowy by name) on the 6th June 1940, to a total of over sixty in 1945.

Anyway coming down on short leave is like coming home and what a pleasure it is. Several of the older faces have disappeared already, and I gather from conversations that many more are to go in the near future. I hope that the new members of the staff will be as loyal to the new "boss" as you have all been to me. I am firmly convinced that the Club has been the means of keeping us in touch with one another, and I do hope that those of you who are leaving the service will give a sympathetic reading to Pte Hives' suggestion of a reunion. For the first couple of months you will I am sure be very anxious to forget the Army, but gradually little things will happen such as:

Wot, no weekends? To bring old memories back.

Unfortunately I shall probably be unable to attend the first reunion, but whenever and wherever it is held I shall be with you in thought, and looking forward to the time when we can meet in person.

Meanwhile the best of luck to all of you and very many thanks for your loyal support and work.

L Gosling

#### Chads

The funny little man peeping over a Wall and making peculiar remarks, known as Mr Chad, reminds me of a rather amusing story.

A series of "Chads" had been appearing all over a certain military camp, and as some of the remarks were rather pointed, the Commanding Officer decided to put a stop to the practice. Accordingly a muster parade was called and the CO after a strong lecture, finished with this warning: "The next man caught making these ridiculous drawings will be given seven days CB. Parade dismiss."

The CO returned to his office immediately, sat at his desk and found a Chad drawing on his blotting pad: Wot! Only 7 days CB! ■



# Palastinian POWs

Thousands of parched and starving soldiers were taken captive by a handful of German Paras. 120 were Palestinian's, about 110, belonged to Pioneer Coy 606, which had been evacuated from Greece.



Report: Yoav Gelber  
Picture: Supplied

The following article is produced by the SHOAH Resource Centre, The Int. School for Holocaust Studies (Jerusalem).

**O**VER 1,500 Jewish Volunteers from Palestine who served with the British armed forces were taken as Prisoners of War, the overwhelming majority in the campaigns in Greece and Crete during the spring of 1941 – and spent the remaining year of the war in POW camps and labour detachments in Germany.

A small number were taken prisoner in the Western Desert and their period of captivity in the POW camps in Libya or Italy was shorter. Many attempted escape. The Yishuv – the Jewish community in Palestine – was deeply distressed by this affair which also became a test of its ability to ensure the well-being and security of the volunteers. These POWs came close to the actual scene of the Holocaust and thus at the onset of their captivity they feared that they would share the fate of their European Brethren. For the Palastinian POWs and for their comrades-in-arms alike, the period spent in captivity was a test of the

relationship between themselves and other nationals.

## Temporary Camps in Greece

Surrender and capture were both degrading and depressing for the thousands of troops who were left during the night between April 28-29, 1941, on the Calamata shore in the southern Peloponnus. Despite the fact that the balance of forces there indicated British superiority and many hours were to pass before any substantial German reinforcements arrived at the area, it was hurriedly decided to surrender. The majority of troops on the shore were non combatant; many of them had neither weapons nor ammunition and most were almost untrained. There were no supplies and many of the soldiers were already quite hungry. Disintegration had begun on the previous day when officers and soldiers alike had sought their own ways of escape – in small craft or on foot along the shore. It was felt that another day in that area, exposed as it was to bombing, would only abet the demoralisation process, without increasing the prospects of evacuation. Weariness, feelings of frustration and weak leadership were additional factors which

facilitated the inclination to capitulate. There were officers who appealed against the decision to surrender, maintaining that it was possible – even given that morning's difficult conditions – to fight another day, either in the hope of evacuating the following night, or of providing cover for those attempting to escape. Brigadier Parrington, in command of the shore, stood by his decision, and ordered those refusing to surrender to leave Calamata immediately so as not to endanger the remaining troops. Hundreds of officers and other ranks left the Calamata area and tried to escape by land and sea before the Germans should gain total control of the Peloponnesus. Included among those were scores of Palastinian soldiers who tried their luck alone or in groups. One group moved southward along the shore in the hope of taking over small fishing boats to sail to Crete; others hid out in the hills and later made their way over land or by boat among the Aegean islands until they reached the Turkish border. Many of those who escaped from Calamata were later caught by German soldiers and were added to the thousands of POWs taken in Calamata proper. Others were shot and killed by German troops. Among the



thousands of soldiers stranded on shore, relatively few succeeded in escaping. Some of the Palestinian commanders on the spot (Ben-Aharon, Shimon Hacohen and Gershoni) sought to discourage ideas of escape; among the considerations was the fear of the German attitude towards Jewish POWs. The officers thought that the Jewish soldiers would be safer being captured together with the British, and feared that individuals caught while attempting to escape would fare worse. Only one officer tried to escape. Three others decided, apparently independently, that they were duty-bound to remain with their men and to share their fate. Already on April 28, Gershoni told his men that if they could not all be evacuated that evening, he would stay on. On the brink of surrender the next morning, Ben-Aharon answered when urged to flee: "If the Jewish units are doomed to be taken captive, I will not leave them". The British officers felt otherwise; most of them advised and encouraged the Palestinians to escape, and several even suggested that they make the attempt with them.

The British officer who had decided to remain and be taken captive still, however, kept their distance. Ben-Aharon explains this as resulting from the fear that if they should fall into German hands together with the Jewish soldiers they would be allotted the same treatment; the German attitude to Jews was well known even before the war. Although such thoughts must have occurred, it was the relationships in the Palestinian companies during the months preceding the campaign for Greece that had brought about this separation – relationships marked by distance and estrangement between British and Jews and between professional soldiers and volunteers alike. At this difficult time, British non commissioned officers preferred to be among their own countrymen.

During the few hours which passed between the sailing of the evacuation ships and the arrival of the first German soldiers, total anarchy reigned in Calamata and the surrounding area. There were those who hurried to release their tensions from those last terrible days, others attempted to commit suicide. A large group of Palestinian soldiers clustered around Ben-Aharon: "I was the only officer and around me a stormy, noisy sea-people whose mood verged on insanity, and I did not know what to do or what would happen to us. I looked at the nearby British units to see what they were doing, for I had no experience of being taken captive... I ordered the men to prepare for the coming surrender... We shaved, cleaned up, and destroyed our arms. While we were thus occupied, the representatives of 400 Arab soldiers approached us to request permission to join us since they too had remained without any commander... I called the sergeants and ordered them to divide the men into ranks of thirty and march... to surrender... At first, the Jews proceeded in despair and fear, and I who led the column assumed all these fears and my heart turned to water. I saluted the German commander... reported precisely on our numbers and informed him that henceforward the responsibility for these people was in his hands."

Other Palestinian soldiers grouped around Gershoni related: "Many of our boys wanted to commit suicide. Gershoni, our officer, deserves a medal. He encouraged the men, spoke to each one in turn and saved many from death. His words brought solace even to those who had already despaired totally..."

The initial destination of the thousands of POWs was a temporary detention camp in the port area of Calamata. Meanwhile, German units began a sweep of the ridges above the city and the shore and discovered several groups of escapees. The fear of Jewish prisoner meeting German captor turned out in the meantime to be unfounded. The troops of the fighting echelon did not bother themselves unduly with interrogations and thus did not uncover the fact that hundreds of Jews were among their prisoners, including former classmates.

The Fifth German Panzer Division, which was assigned responsibility for the POW detention camp in the late morning hours on April 29 was in charge for one day only. From the testimonies of Palestinian soldiers it appears that no interrogations took place there. Nevertheless, the intelligence officer did run a general check, possibly through conversations with senior officers among the captives, and reported: Interrogation of personnel in Calamata had yielded these initial results: Precise determination of the unit groupings has not been possible since almost all personnel have refused to reveal the number of their regiments or divisions.

The total number of prisoners is estimated at over 8,000 and is made up roughly as follows: 2,000 English from the Isles, with a limited number of fighting troops, the great majority from the signal corps, along with engineers, technicians, animal handlers, etc. (with 113 officers). 1,300 Australians and New Zealanders (fighting troops, with 55 officers). 1,200 Pioneers from Cyprus, among them 3 officers.

1,350 Palestinians, equally divided among Jews and Arabs, with 2 officers. On the same day, responsibility for the POWs in Calamata was transferred from Division to Corps. A new detention camp was set up in a Greek Army camp on the outskirts of the town where all prisoners, including "new" prisoners caught in the hills and on the shore, were penned in the square in front of the harbour. This was, in actual fact, a fenced-off plaza with several huts. Approximately 10,000 POWs were crowded there, without facilities for sleeping, sanitation, food or water adequate for even a much smaller number.

The most pressing problem was hunger, since many POWs had been without food for several days. The shock caused by the surrender and captivity repressed for a while the distress of hunger, but it emerged when the men got used to their situation. When the German guards permitted Greek peddlers of food and drink to crowd at the fences, the starving and thirsty captives rushed to obtain supplies; the guards panicked and some opened fire, killing several captives. During the first three days of captivity the Germans operated random distribution of tea or a soup-like liquid, in one distribution point which served all the ten thousand prisoners. This distribution point was the site of quarrels between the British and the Jews about queuing and priorities. These incidents, the attempts of several German-speaking POWs to fraternise with or to flatter their guards, and rumours (apparently unbiased) of German agents among the captives – led some Jewish POWs already at this early stage of captivity to think about the means to secure their standing in this ordeal:

"We did not know exactly how to steel ourselves or what to do, but deep within

we knew what not to do; we would not flatter these haters of our people, nor make contact with them or beg for privileges; we would not converse with them or speak German." These were the basic negatives, passed on to each individual and group.

The Palestinian officers were held separately from the other ranks and it was impossible to promulgate this code of behaviour by means of the military hierarchy. The only way to ensure respectable behaviour among the prisoners was through general agreement and social pressure brought to bear on those who diverged from it. The internal tensions typical of the Palestinian companies since

the beginning of their service – an outcome of their social composition – put many obstacles in the process of crystallising a united front of the prisoners. As of the first of May groups of captives from Calamata were transferred at the rate of 1,000 men each day to a new camp in the city of Corinth. This was a

temporary detention camp set up on April 25, to accommodate several hundred British POWs taken on that day. The Corinth camp regulations were harsh: To the Prisoner of War camp shall be sent only English [viz, 'all nationals of the Empire' as opposed to Greeks and Yugoslavs]. English prisoners, notably officers, must be treated as their personal weapons. Escape of prisoners must be prevented by any means possible.

The English prisoners must be put immediately in work detachments. They must rebuild all that they have destroyed [roads, bridges, etc]. This order was not carried out literally. The transfer of prisoners commenced earlier than planned and, in addition, 1,600 Yugoslav prisoners were sent to Corinth. The organisation of work detachments was held up as were food supplies for the prisoners. On May 2, 198 officers and 5,923 other ranks of the British prisoners were already at Corinth. Prisoners from Calamata and other areas of the Peloponnesus continued to stream towards Corinth. The harsh "reception" was dictated by the German non-commissioned officers on duty. Living conditions were very poor and rations were: "One Italian biscuit per day... around ten olives, a piece of laquerda, at times polenta, rice for preparing soup, one portion per hundred men". Starvation prevailed in the camp and with it loss of self-control. Given such pressures, relationships between Jews and others and the British became strained on national grounds, relations which had not been of the best even before captivity. Eventually the Germans authorised the opening of a market and captives with Greek currency were permitted to purchase grains and occasionally fruit from Greek peddlers. British officers apportioned money among the soldiers and supervised the trade.

Sanitary facilities in the camp were bad and epidemics of dysentery and malaria rapidly took hold. The prisoners lived in huts built from aluminium slabs and scrap metal found discarded in the neighbourhood, or in hollows which they dug in the sand. The attitude of the German guards to the POWs was, in general, not bad, and there was no discriminatory treatment of Jews, but there were sentries who rushed to pull the trigger when it seemed to them that the rules regarding escape were violated.

In all, 11,110 POWs were concentrated at the camp of Corinth. The division into

**'The German attitude to Jews was well known even before the war.'**



secondary groups ("hundreds") was based on national origin. According to the German census there were 1,907 Palestinian soldiers and 2 officers in the camp. This figure included the Arab POWs as well; the Germans had no separate statistics for Jews and Arabs, probably because they had difficulties in differentiating between the Arabs and oriental Jews. A temporary respite from the difficult conditions in the camp was found by several prisoners in volunteering for work. This was not the usual slave labour as known in Germany, but rather service in various German army installations in Greece such as hospital kitchens, salvage depots, loading and unloading at supply depots, and so forth. Prisoners were also employed in the removal of the bombs and dud shells scattered in the area. Military hierarchy was strictly preserved: officers did not go out to work, sergeants were in charge of the work detachments, and it was the regular soldier who actually worked. The Palestinians welcomed this task: "Work occasionally brought food and clothing, and gave a hope of escaping".

After several days of harassing, the Germans began a thorough interrogation of the POWs. Interrogation of the Palestinian POWs was perfunctory, although at times the Germans abused the captives, especially those originally from Germany. Interrogation of the officers was a more lengthy process, accompanied by insults and jokes. In most cases the soldier was asked his place of birth and how long he had lived in Palestine.

Those speaking German were asked additional questions. Several prisoners originally from Germany served as interpreters and their behaviour led other prisoners to charge them with attempting to pander to the Germans. The onset of interrogations was, the Palestinian prisoners believed, related to "Himmler's visit to the camp." "Himmler" seems in reality to have been Oberstleutenant Hanstein from the Headquarters of the German Twelfth Army who visited the camp in Corinth on May 18. German and neutral journalists accompanied him, interviewed the POWs and published their impressions in the German press. The variety of visitors and the tumult around them caused the POWs to think that they were being visited by a very high-ranking personality.

Hanstein found that "the administration of the camp was satisfactory". He also reported that "the state of health of the prisoners is definitely satisfactory (augesprochen gut)," and forbade the commandant to "show any softness, consideration or compromise towards the prisoners" who, he said, were ungrateful.

The next day, the interrogations began. The German interrogators sought to learn about life in Palestine – Jewish colonisation, economic conditions, relationships between the English, Jews and Arabs. They tried to discover why men volunteered for the British Pioneer Corps, and asked about service conditions in it, about the personnel, the relationships with Arabs and with the British command in the mixed companies, and the attitude of the British POWs to these units. A few of those who later escaped from captivity emphasised in their testimonies that the answers given were prompt and proud. Another escapee claimed, on the contrary, that, "We convinced the Germans that we

were forced to join the army. We explained that in Palestine there was a deep economic crisis, and we were all unemployed." It seems that the Germans were convinced by those who took the latter approach rather than those who said patriotic motives let them to volunteer, as a summarising report shows: Difficult economic conditions are the reason which caused the Jews to join the British work companies. They received excellent rations and salary (700 drachmas per week). In addition, married personnel received a family allowance of 6 pounds per month.

Supernumerary policemen were also forced to enlist, since the disturbances in Palestine had terminated. The military information the German interrogations managed to extract from the Palestinian POWs was of minor significance. The soldiers who "talked" were few, and the information in their possession usually pertained solely to their own units. The interrogators

gathered that feelings harboured towards the British were not positive ones.

The captors were understandably interested in Jews of German extraction. At first these POWs feared that the Germans might not recognise their status as Prisoners of War, and regard them as traitors to their country. The Attorney of the German Twelfth Army investigated this point with a view to finding a juridical basis for branding them as traitors.

During interrogation these POWs claimed that they had been granted Palestinian citizenship and were therefore no longer German citizens. Since British army documents (most of which were destroyed) specified only the parents' nationality, and since the German authorities did not keep lists of German nationals forfeiting citizenship through obtaining foreign citizenship, the German lawyer realised the impossibility of proving treason. He therefore sought an alternative legal means of harassing Palestinian POWs of German origin. One possible solution that presented itself was to prove that individuals had fled Germany in the midst of legal proceedings against them; it might thus be possible to treat them as "fugitives from justice" rather than as Prisoners of War; he did not, however, consider this as sufficient indictment for court-martial.

The German authorities thus attempted to dredge up from these individuals' past any legal proceedings in which they had been involved before leaving Germany. Several prisoners who had given particulars about their past in Germany were segregated from the other prisoners until investigation results came through and a decision was made about how to treat them. These prisoners were eventually sent with the others to the permanent camp in Germany, and were never again questioned regarding their past.

After hearing of this incident, the British ordered the deletion of nationality and place of birth from the documents of Palestinian volunteers which henceforth read "Palestinian" only, in order to prevent the enemy from discriminating against British soldiers of German or Austrian origin taken prisoner of war. Both German and neutral journalists showed great interest in the POWs in Greece. Swedish newspapermen visiting Corinth with a Red Cross delegation spoke of "at least 1,000 Palestinian POWs, some of whom had once been in Germany". They published

personal stories of POWs born in Berlin, Leipzig and other German cities; on the other hand, they quoted Arab POWs who stated that they did not want war, that this was the war of the English and the Jews and that they, the Arabs, had been brought to Greece against their will. A German journalist reported a discussion with a group of Jewish POWs who unsuccessfully tried to convince him that the Palestinian Jews was different from his European brother, and did their best to enlighten him on Zionism and the White Paper, of which he had never heard.

During the last ten days in May, the days of the campaign for Crete, the attitude of the Germans to the POWs in Corinth deteriorated, ostensibly in the wake of rumour about the harsh treatment meted out by the British in Crete to German paratroopers who had fallen into their hands. The POWs' movements within the camp were restricted, the "market" was closed and bathing in the sea was forbidden as was smoking during night hours. Punishment for infringement of these new rules was harsh and several British POWs were shot on various pretexts.

During the early days of June, additional POWs who had been taken captive by the Germans along the north shore of Crete began to reach the camp. Most the POWs fell into German hands in and around Sphakia, the main evacuation port on the southern shore of the island. As in Calamata, thousands of parched and starving soldiers were taken captive by a handful of German paratroopers.

Among these POWs were 120 Palestinian soldiers. Most of them, about 110, belonged to Pioneer Corps Company 606 which had been evacuated from Greece with the first troops taken off. These Palestinians were stranded on the island of Milos after their ship capsized, and were taken off to Crete on May 1st by British destroyers. The remaining ten belonged to other Pioneer Companies and had succeeded in escaping from Calamata on the eve of surrender. Some POWs concealed their Palestinian identity, claiming some other nationality. On June 3rd the POWs from Sphakia were brought to the detention camp near the village of Galatas, on the seashore not far from Canea. The detention camp had been hurriedly erected in an open field, and conditions were severe. To the 6,000 POWs taken at Sphakia were added several thousand POWs captured at other places on the island, most of them from the garrison of Heraklion. The prisoners were segregated according to nationality, and a special section allotted to the 300 officers among them. In an adjoining camp Greek POWs were interned – soldiers who had escaped from Greece and had fought hand in hand with the British in Crete. Until the beginning of 1942, no Red Cross delegates visited the temporary camp at Galatas, mail and parcels were not received, and the POWs were totally isolated from the world, permitting the Germans to treat the prisoners with greater harshness than was considered acceptable in Greece or in permanent camps in Germany. The few testimonies about the camp at Galatas make no mention of interrogation of the Palestinian POWs; German reports mention only British fighting units, and it seems that the interrogators contented themselves with identifying their prisoners and the battles in which they took part prior to reaching Crete.

Through agents in the camp posing as prisoners, the Germans learned of camp morale, of the relationship between the



British and the other prisoners, and of the prisoners' opinion of the Germans.

After the first groups of prisoners had been moved to Corinth at the beginning of June 1941, 6,500 POWs from the surviving forces, including all the Palestinians, still remained in Crete. At the beginning of July, 2,300 of them were transferred by ship to Salonica on their first lap to Germany and 1,900 were sent one week later; a polio epidemic which developed in the Canea camp halted these transports for the next few months. The Palestinians, with the exception of a few, were among the first to be transferred to Germany. 1,700 POWs remained at the camp of Galatas; the harsh treatment to which the remaining prisoners were subjected there, the difficult conditions, and the rapid organisation of a local underground movement, led to numerous escape attempts, many successful. At the beginning of October the transfer of POWs to Germany was renewed. 800 British and 4,500 Greek prisoners now remained on Crete; in the face of the wave of escapes the German command hurriedly transferred the English to the mainland. The transports followed each other in close order during the fall of 1941, and by the end of that year only 100 prisoners remained on the island. The last Palestinian prisoner escaped from the camp on the eve of his transfer to Germany at the end of December, and in the spring of 1942 reached Palestine.

In June 1941 dismantling of the camp at Corinth and transfer of the POWs from Greece to Germany began. Problems of sea transport necessitated transfer of prisoners overland to Salonica, so the Germans had to wait until the Twelfth Army had left Greece and transportation routes and railways again became available. It seems, although there is no definite proof, that the transfer of Greece from German to Italian occupation hastened the decision to dismantle the camp and evacuate the prisoners to German-controlled territory. Internment in Germany would distinctly curtail possibilities of a successful escape. The prisoners perceived this and the number of those who prior to the transfer attempted to escape and fade into the local population grew. Others planned to escape in the course of the journey to Germany.

The Italians were the first to be moved from the camp at Corinth and returned to their army, then the Yugoslavs. Afterwards the British officers were sent to Germany by way of Salonica. Several days' later transfer of the remaining POWs began according to national groups. They were marched to the railway station, and crowded into cattle wagons which were then sealed. The trains ran to Athens, and from there to Salonica, where the prisoners were held in a temporary camp for close to three weeks; this camp also held the prisoners who had been transferred from Crete. For the first time a systematic search was made of their possessions which were often confiscated. Afterwards, the prisoners were housed in crowded huts in a Greek army camp. Discipline at this transit camp, stricter than that which had prevailed in Corinth, was the result of a wave of escapes on the way from Athens whose magnitude only became apparent to the Germans upon reaching Salonica. In Salonica, the Germans did not permit the Palestinians to work outside the camp. They apparently feared that the prisoners, many of who had

been born in that city (members of the Port Operating Company) would succeed in escaping, and merge with the local population. Thus the Germans strictly prohibited any contact with the locals. The citizens of Salonica, who had already felt the strong arm of the occupation regime, were more reserved than the population of Corinth and Athens, who treated the prisoners with demonstrative sympathy.

Several days after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, at the end of June 1941, the prisoners left Salonica on their way to Germany, 50 men to each sealed cattle car. The harsh treatment, overcrowding, hunger, thirst, and lack of sanitary facilities made the journey, which lasted five and a half days, a living hell. The journey ended on the Yugoslav-Austrian border on July 3, 1941. Here the Palestinian group was divided between two temporary camps: Wolfsberg and Marburg. In these camps the Palestinians as a group encountered, for the first time, the problem of their Jewishness and a different treatment specifically meted out to them as Jews. Their fear was great, mainly because their official Red Cross listing as prisoners of War had not yet been carried out.

In the Wolfsberg camp the Jews were segregated from the other prisoners and were again divided up among themselves. The Jews of German or Austrian origin were forbidden to go out to work; they were separated from the other Jewish POWs who were sent on work-detachments to various places in the neighbourhood. In Marburg, too, the 600 Jews were segregated from the other prisoners and it was rumoured that they would be obliged to wear a special badge; it seems that these rumours were not without grounds. It was on the eve of the enactment of the law (September 1941) requiring Jews in Germany to wear the yellow star and the camp commanders wondered, in the absence of any clear-cut directive, how to treat the Jewish prisoners in this respect. The uncertainty was finally resolved only at the beginning of 1942 when the department in charge of POW affairs in German High Command (OKW) instructed commandants of Prisoner of War camps that in regard to Jewish prisoners from all armies: "The marking of Jews in the Reich with a star is a German

Government step to facilitate the identification of Jews in the streets, shops, etc. Jewish Prisoners of War are exempted from wearing any Jewish star; they are, however, to be segregated as far as possible from the other prisoners." The relatively courteous reception accorded the prisoners at Marburg did not hint at what awaited them there. "Lice were here a more pernicious plague than in any

other camp", wrote one of them in his memoirs. Most of the time was spent in queuing for food, and "we were treated not as POWs but as criminal prisoners". Searches and interrogations took place, personal possessions were confiscated, and lists of prisoners drawn up according to their country of origin. At the end of July, the period of temporary and transit camps came to an end and the prisoners proceeded on their final journey by rail to the permanent camp at Lamsdorf in Silesia.

With this ended the first, and probably the most painful chapter of the Odyssey of captivity. The period between capture and reaching a permanent Prisoner of War camp subject to Red Cross supervision and international treaties, was marked by

apprehension, uncertainty, lack of rights, and isolation. In addition there were hunger, bad sanitation, lack of medical treatment, harsh discipline and punishment. This was the lot shared by all the prisoners: English, Australian, New Zealander, Cypriot, Indian and Yugoslav. The Jewish prisoners had in addition specific fears of their own, stemming from uncertainty over the treatment they would receive at the hands of the Germans. This feeling of isolation created a growing sense of comradeship and common fate during the first few weeks in Greece and in the camps in Austria and was to consolidate later during the years of captivity in Lamsdorf and in the labour detachments.

### Prisoner of War Camps In Germany

The first to reach the permanent camps were the officers transferred from Greece at the end of June. The three Palestinian officers were segregated from the remaining prisoners and sent along with the British officer to Oflag Va. Prisoner of War camp for officers in Bieberach in southern Germany. In the autumn of 1941, two attempts at digging escape tunnels were uncovered in the Bieberach camp and the majority of the prisoners, numbering some 3,500, were transferred to the Warburg camp in Westphalia. Following a successful escape operation, approximately half of the POW officers were sent to a new camp, Eichstadt, in Bavaria where the three Palestinian officers remained for a year and a quarter. Early in 1944 they were transferred to another camp, in Rotenburg.

The Arab prisoners from Palestine were segregated upon their arrival in Germany and sent to Stalag III D where they were subjected to intensive propaganda from Arab collaborators whose guiding spirit was the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. In the winter of 1941-42, Hajj' Amin al-Husseini's emissaries visited the camp in the attempt to enlist volunteers for the Arab Legion mustered with a view to participating in the liberation of the Middle East. About a hundred Arab POWs volunteered forthwith. Those who refused to do so were transferred to Lamsdorf where they joined the remaining prisoners: "In our camp they usually were well behaved, happily and actively participated in all our activities, and successfully learned Hebrew".

At the beginning of August 1941, 1,160 Palestinian POWs in two groups arrived at Lamsdorf camp in Silesia (Stalag VIII B) where they joined 12,000 British prisoners and 7,000 prisoners of other nationalities – Frenchmen, Belgians, Poles and Yugoslavs.

Already in 1940, during the French campaign, the Germans had ruled out setting up separate camps for Jewish POWs. They preferred to have the French prisoners demand such segregation and removal of the Jewish POWs to work outside of the camp.

At that time they were still weighing the possibility of marking the Jewish POWs with a distinctive badge. The Germans thought that the British would separate themselves from the Palestinians in a similar manner, but soon discovered their error. From the beginning, representatives of the British POWs in Lamsdorf made it clear that this would not happen there, and via diplomatic channels it was hinted that the British Government, too, would insist that the Jewish POWs receive equal treatment. A German officer informed the newcomers to Lamsdorf that they would be treated as British POWs. The veteran prisoners, taken in Dunkirk, told them, on the other hand, that the German staff was perplexed and had no idea how to deal

**"The lack of sanitary facilities made the journey, which lasted five and a half days, a living hell."**



with them. Thus, for example, the Germans decided that the Palestinians would not share in the distribution of Red Cross parcels sent from Britain. The British Man of Confidence in the Stalag, R.S.M. Sherrif, declared that in such a case the British too would refuse to get their parcels. The Germans were alarmed, and the parcels were distributed among all the prisoners.

The Palestinian Man of Confidence, C.S.M. Schusterman, discussed this problem with an inspection team from the Swiss Embassy. Sherrif's assistant, who also represented the Red Cross in the camp, informed the new prisoners of the Geneva Treaty rules and emphasised the rule permitting non-commissioned officer the right to refuse to work. The Germans were sensitive to this problem of NCO work, since the prisoners regarded work as a contribution to the German war effort, and did their best to avoid it. Four-way talks between the embassy delegate, R.S.M. Sherrif, Schusterman and the camp commandant ensued. It was agreed that the treatment of the Palestinians would be precisely that accorded to the British: they would receive their share of parcels; the NCOs would be permitted to decide for themselves if they wished to work or not, bearing in mind that only prisoners who worked received payment.

After a week or two of adaptation, the prisoners began to be sent to work outside the camp. Most of the prisoners (15,800) were divided into 300 labour detachments which worked in various enterprises. Around 4,000 prisoners remained at the Lamsdorf camp, among them 148 Jewish POWs who lived in separate quarters. A Red Cross delegation which visited one of the small Jewish labour detachments in December 1941, reported that the treatment of the Jews was identical to the treatment given to all prisoners and the Jewish prisoners testified that similar conditions prevailed in the other labour detachments as well.

From now onwards, members of the labour detachments underwent a long process of battle against the ravages of winter, of standing up for their rights against German guards and overseers, of struggles over working conditions and food supplies, and of internal crystallisation, all the while dealing with those who ingratiated themselves, informed or stole. A continuous effort was made to halt the commerce existing both between the prisoners and their guards and among the prisoners themselves. In several of the better organised groups of the labour camps parcels were shared, as was the general food preparation. Cultural activities slowly developed: teaching Hebrew to new immigrants, putting out a leaflet and organisation of courses on various subjects. Through these efforts, the prisoners periodically came into direct conflict with those in charge of the camps. These clashes took place partly on matters of principle; others were the result of nervousness and personal confrontations. Clashes such as these on matters of discipline were not typical of the Jewish prisoners. They often took place between British prisoners and their German guards and more than once ended tragically when German guards killed British soldiers and justified this by claiming that the latter had attempted to escape. Clashes even occurred between Arab prisoners and German guards despite the efforts of the

Nazis to draw the Arab prisoners to their side in order for them to be inducted into the Arab Legion created by the Mufti.

The prisoners in Germany were, geographically and mentally closer than any group of members of the Yishuv to the Jews of Nazi-occupied Europe. Scattered among various labour detachments, they came into contact with forced labour groups made up of Polish Jews. The first meetings between the Palestinian POWs and members of such groups took place near the canal in Gleiwitz during the winter of 1942. The Hebrew spoken by several of the prisoners was overheard by a number of Jews from Poland and thus the first contact was made. In the course of time, several tricks were devised to make more meetings possible. The Palestinians learned from the forced labourers of events in the ghettos in Poland. After bribing the guards, they smuggled food, cigarettes and medicines to the Polish Jews. This encounter lasted several weeks until the Jewish groups from Poland was transferred elsewhere, leaving no traces.

During the winter of 1942\43, certain prisoners were employed at various jobs in the nearby city of Gleiwitz. Here they met local Jews and even relatives. Here, too, they found ways of sharing with these Jews the commodities distributed by the "winter relief campaign" in which they were employed.

An additional meeting with Jews took place that winter in the Bläichhammer factory producing synthetic rubber, where a group of Jewish POWs worked side by side with Jewish and Russian forced labourers, including a group of Jewish youths from cities in western Galicia. In the autumn of 1942 a change for the worse occurred in the German attitude towards the British prisoners, as a result of the abortive commando attack on Dieppe, where many Canadians fell into German hands along with captured documents, including a "no prisoners" directive.

The general crisis between Germany and the British Commonwealth as regards POWs had a specific Palestinian aspect since the Palestinian prisoners were among those particularly harmed by the steps instituted by the Germans. During the summer of 1942, for the first time, German prisoners arrived at the POW camp in Latrun, on the road to Jerusalem. Soldiers of the "Bufs" company which guarded the prisoners in this camp somewhat

maltreated the German prisoners who complained to the Spanish Consul, representing German interests in Palestine. The Consul reported to Berlin and the Germans reacted by taking steps against the Palestinian prisoners, 82 of them, all non-commissioned officers, were transferred in August 1942 to Stalag 319, a special

penal camp in Cholm near Lublin, along with 68 British prisoners. Treatment of the two groups, while identical, was exceptionally harsh. The prisoners alluded to this in their letters and sought to urge the leadership in Palestine into action.

The letters reached Palestine in January 1943 and instigated several families to put pressure on the Jewish Agency whose contacts with the Red Cross and the British authorities about the prisoners were unknown to the public. Jewish Agency officials attempted to reassure prisoners' families in Palestine and promised them that "we are doing all that in our power to ease the bitter fate of our POWs". In

February 1943, the Germans permitted representatives of the Red Cross visit the penal camp in Cholm. The delegation summed up: Camp 319 is a camp which was built as a retaliation; it cannot be compared to any regular camp. It is more shoddily constructed than the others. In addition to this, relations between the prisoners and their guards are not of the best.

At the beginning of March the Red Cross in Cairo reported to the Jewish Agency that "the Germans are prepared to evacuate the prisoners from Cholm and to dismantle the camp if the camp at Latrun should be closed down." We reported to Geneva that the German prisoners had been sent from Palestine to Egypt several months ago and that there are no German prisoners at Latrun. We hope that the camp at Cholm will be dismantled shortly.

At the end of May the NCOs who were taken out of Cholm were transferred to a separate camp near Nürnberg where better conditions prevailed. In the fall of 1942 one of the labour detachments returned to the rubber factory in Bläichhammer.

This factory served, once again, as a meeting-place for Prisoners of War and Jewish forced labourers, including groups of Jewish women from Galicia. The Jewish prisoners now learned of Aktionen in various places but did not realize the connections between them and their being components of a systematic plan of destruction.

Here, too, they encountered Jewish forced labourers deported from Western Europe, and saw how those too weak to work were sent away from the camp, without knowing that they were being sent to extermination camps. In covert talks the Jewish POWs managed to have with these unfortunate Jews, they heard of Judenräte, resistance organisations and Zionist underground cells. Along with the Cholm camp incident, clashes between Jewish prisoners and their German guards increased in numbers during the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943. Information reached Palestine through hints in the prisoners' letters home.

In response to the Jewish Agency's appeal, representatives of the Swiss Embassy visited three of the Jewish labour detachments in March 1943. The Swiss delegates reporting to the General Inspector of Prisoners of War at the OKW demanded an undertaking that the Palestinians should be treatment similar to the British prisoners.

The most serious incidents occurred in a large labour detachment composed of 365 prisoners who worked in the coal mines at Jawozno. Two of the prisoners were shot in the mine by their guards. A German investigation committee, followed by committees from the Red Cross and the Swiss Embassy arrived at this camp.

The British Embassy in Switzerland, to whom the committee reports were rapidly submitted, reported to the Foreign Office about the maltreatment of the Jews in the labour detachments, and about the murder of the two prisoners.

The Swiss, however, reported to the British that the beatings were handed out to the Jewish prisoners only in exceptional cases, and based on checks run in many camps in Germany, had arrived at the clear conclusion that the treatment of the Jewish prisoners was usually identical to that of non-Jews. Indeed, during the same period, seven Australian and seven British prisoners were shot and killed in mines in the same area and several British were shot in the wake of bids for escape. In Jawozno, the Palestinian prisoners would pass Auschwitz

**'The treatment of the Jewish prisoners was identical to the treatment given to all prisoners'**



on their way to work; they learned about what was going on there from one of the German foremen. Towards the end of the period of work at the mine, the Palestinians met with a group of Jewish prisoners who had been brought from Auschwitz; despite the strict supervision exercised over the Auschwitz inmates, they often succeeded in smuggling them some food and even talking with them. Among them they found some of their comrades, originally from Salonica, who had escaped from captivity in Greece, returned to their home town, and had been deported to Auschwitz together with Salonica's Jews. Despite representations to the Red Cross, they were held as civilians and not as POWs until 1945.

During the early months of 1944 most of the Jewish forced labour camps in Silesia were dismantled and the POWs contact with them ended. Only members of the labour group near Gleiwitz continued to maintain contact with Jewish forced labourers from Western Europe, who were nearby.

Their guards were bribed to allow twenty of the Jews to be sent daily to the POW camp, where they received food and clothing. In Lamsdorf, aid consignments, including cigarettes, soap, clothing, canned food from Red Cross parcels and cash were sent to this labour detachment earmarked for the Jews. Non-Jewish prisoners also contributed their rations. The final consignment did not reach its goal – in mid-1944, the last of the Jewish workers were sent to their death. The POWs taken in Greece and Crete constituted the major portion of the prisoners. However, from the beginning of 1942 onwards, information regarding additional Palestinian soldiers in various POW camps, taken captive in other places and circumstances, began to reach Palestine. 24 prisoners who fell into enemy hands in the Western Desert were transferred to a POW camp in Italy; they reported that camp conditions were satisfactory and that relations with POWs of other nationalities were good. Several Palestinian soldiers who had served in British units and had fallen into German hands were not sent to Lamsdorf but to other POW camps in Germany where they were swallowed up among the multitudes of prisoners.

The whereabouts of one of them, for example, was discovered by chance from an announcement stating that together with two of his British comrades he was to be tried for establishing contacts with German women labourers in a factory in the city of Nordhausen. These three prisoners were held in Stalag IX C.

Two years of captivity and isolation from family caused more than a few domestic difficulties. The prisoners were anxious about the fate of their wives left with no provider to care for the children, without knowing whether there was anyone who would come to their help. Others were concerned about unreliable postal connections.

Some were doubtful of their wives' fidelity. By the end of 1943, 1,258 POWs were to be found in Lamsdorf; 218 of them in the central camp, and 1,040 in the labour detachments. During the following weeks, several labour detachments were dispersed and an additional 200 prisoners were returned to the camp. Conditions had deteriorated since the camp populations had almost doubled with the arrival of prisoners from Italy transferred there on the eve of her surrender; the living quarters and installations, however, had not been extended. The work load, especially in the

mines, had increased and Red Cross official considered it too great. In November 1943, with the continuing German retreat on the eastern front and in Italy, POW camps were transferred to the interior, and their general set-up reorganised. This included the Lamsdorf camp, which was divided up; its Teschen annex was now called Stalag VIII B and the main camp was to be known as Stalag 344. While the population was mainly British, many other nationalities were to be found who, with the exception of the Americans, had all been taken captive while serving in the British army and were regarded as British prisoners by the Germans. The camp was now run by a POW cam unit which had been brought back from the Russian front and the organisational change rapidly brought about a deterioration in the attitude towards the prisoners.

With news of the Red Army advance, the Germans became nervous and suspicious, tightened security and were quick to pull the trigger at any hint of an escape attempt. Two prisoners had indeed attempted to escape; they were discovered, hiding close to the camp where they worked, isolated from the other prisoners, and shot. On the day the two were shot, several warning letters were sent to Palestine and to the Jewish Agency delegations in Constantinople, and the Red Cross was requested to investigate the incident.

Prisoners who had been exchanged described the incident in greater detail on reaching Palestine; the Jewish Agency in London was requested to take action with a view to having the German supervisor responsible for that labour detachment included in the list of war criminals.

During the summer of 1944, hundreds of Palestinian prisoners were removed from the Lamsdorf camp and the attached labour detachments as part of a preliminary exchange of prisoners or in preparation for such an exchange. Additional prisoners were sent to other camps following recapture after escapes or a stay in hospital or prison, whence they were scattered at random over all of Germany.

A total of 540 Jewish POWs remained in Stalag 344, 220 in the camp itself and 320 in the labour detachments. The general overcrowding in the camp became worse, as was happening in other POW camps in the Reich. The German withdrawal led to the evacuation of numerous POW camps whose prisoners were transferred to camps in the interior of the Reich. The continuous Allied bombing of Germany necessitated relocating the camps.

The expanding movement of prisoners from camp to camp and the tremendous overcrowding, together with a general feeling that the end of the war was near and with it the defeat of Germany, made escape attempts more frequent. The Germans took steps to counteract this, including special marking of the prisoners' clothes for identification of escapees. At the beginning of 1945, with the advance of the Red Army towards the Oder Line in the east and the disintegration of authority and the home front in Germany, the Germans began to evacuate the POW camps and the labour detachments westward. During the general disorder the prisoners were scattered all over the Reich. The lucky ones were rapidly liberated by the Red Army; the majority of them began to wander – on foot, by car and by train – through Germany. They were transferred from one

camp to another, occasionally assigned to urgent work in clearing landslides and ruins and were harassed by their German guards until their liberation by the advancing Allied forces in small groups and in places far removed from each other. Most of them were held by the Germans until the surrender; some could not endure the final days of captivity and fell on the brink of liberation.

### Escape from Captivity

An integral part of the story of captivity was the continuous attempts of POWs to escape to friendly or neutral territory in order to rejoin the Allied forces. Over 100

prisoners succeeded in escaping; many others attempted and failed. There were escapees who succeeded in reaching Turkey and from there, Palestine, others crossed the Mediterranean and reached Egypt. Several of them made their contribution to the war effort by joining the partisans in Yugoslavia and in Greece.

These reached Palestine in later years after contact had been established with resistance movements, and planes and submarines could reach the shores and the improvised airfields of the Balkans and evacuate them.

Those who escaped from captivity and returned to Palestine were the first source of information regarding capture and living conditions in captivity. Those who came later brought important information both in terms of military intelligence and the conditions of Jews in the Balkan countries.

A great many of those who escaped from captivity in Greece had escaped while being transported to Germany during June 1941. This journey afforded various opportunities for jumping from the train during its slow progress through the hills, and especially while being marched through the area of Lamia in central Greece, where the bridges were destroyed and prisoners were taken off the train to proceed on foot. On the road bends and during the encampments in the villages, scores of prisoners managed to escape. One of these was Corporal Ben-Gershon who reached Palestine via Turkey.

Some travelled to Salonica, then south to Lamia or to the city of Volos, where the Jews of that city rushed to their assistance. The Greeks passed many escapees over to an underground network dealing with the transfer of escaped POWs to the Turkish shore and to Palestine. Not in all cases did the Turks treat the escaped prisoners who reached their land with sympathy. One of the prisoners was arrested for several months on the charge of spying as he had been carrying maps and diagrams sent by the Greeks to British Intelligence. After two months he was released through the intervention of the British Embassy and sent to Palestine.

In another case, an escaped prisoner was sent back by the Turks across the border to Greece. Another prisoner, Fritz Yordan, escaped during the journey to Germany and reached Salonica. He, too, like other escapees, attempted to seek aid from local Jews and met with reluctance – actually refusal – due to the fears of the Jews of Salonica with regard to their own fate. However he was greatly helped by Greeks – villagers and city dwellers – who hid him in their houses, gave him food, information and false documents and helped him and others to cross the Aegean by boat and reach the Turkish shore. During the summer

## 'With news of the Red Army advance, the Germans became nervous and suspicious'



of 1941, the Germans discovered the activities of the Greek underground which dealt with smuggling out Greek soldiers and officers who wished to join the Free Greek forces which had assembled in Egypt, and in this framework also smuggled out British prisoners. Several escaped prisoners were helped by this network and upon their arrival in Palestine reported this to the institutions, requesting them to thank the Greeks who had helped them escape and repay them the cost of the journey and the boat. Not all who escaped from captivity in Greece continued on their way to Palestine.

Many of them hid out in villages and a portion of them joined the partisan units who were massing in the hills. They found means of reporting that they were alive and of contacting their families in Palestine; letters were sent home through Greek soldiers who had escaped from Greece in order to join the Free Greek forces which had started to muster in the Kfar Yonah camp east of Netanya. There were escaped prisoners who remained in Greece for months and years. The Greek-speaking Salonians from the Port Operations Company settled and found jobs in Salonica and Athens. There were those who were taken by the Germans (as Greek citizens) and were sent to forced labour. Several of them were identified as escaped POWs by the Gestapo. A number of those arrested were sent to POW camps in Germany and others who could not prove their identity as soldiers were deported to Auschwitz with the Jews of Salonica in the summer of 1943. The prisoners who did reach Palestine were interrogated by the Interrogation Office of "Shay" (Haganah Intelligence) in Haifa which collaborated with British Intelligence in questioning those coming from occupied Europe. They told of the situation in Greece, of the hunger there, of the deportations of Jews to Poland, of the retaliation tactics used by the Germans against the Greek Resistance Movement and of the escape routes from Greece and Turkey.

During 1943-1944, the escape routes were perfected with the deployment of A Force, a service which engaged in smuggling out prisoners, mainly pilots. Several escaped POWs who were still in Greece at this time were smuggled out, along with British and American pilots. In one case an escaped prisoner, Yitzhak Menachem, returned to Greece from Egypt in a submarine in order to evacuate additional escaped POWs. Testimonies of prisoners who escaped from Greece reveal that the local Jews were reluctant to aid them; however Greeks gave them considerable assistance by providing shelter, food, clothing, money, guides, false documents; and they smuggled them out by boat to the Turkish shore. Without this assistance, which overcame barriers of language and communication, it would not have been possible for the prisoners to travel along the shores or to set sail from them. Several of the prisoners who remained in Greece joined the partisan movements which were organised after the occupation. They fought with them until the liberation of Greece by the British army during the autumn of 1944. They wandered over Epirus and reached Albania. Some of the escaped POWs joined up with the British liaison mission sent by the SOE to the partisans.

There were prisoners who, when passing through Yugoslavia, jumped from the trains proceeding to Germany. As in Greece, they initially received assistance from the local population. Their fate was subsequently

placed in the hands of Yugoslav army officers from General Michailovitch's partisan army and these brought them to safety. They established contact between the partisans and a group of Jews who were thus transferred to the Italian occupied zone. The prisoners were caught up in the internal conflict between the Chetniks and the partisans. By good luck they managed to contact a British liaison mission and joined them. They trained local partisans and together they sabotaged railway tracks. When the British mission left the Chetniks, they took the Palestinians with them. After two and a half months with Tito's partisans, at the end of March 1944, they were flown to Italy, and from there to Palestine.

Escape from the temporary camps in Greece or from the trains travelling to Germany was extemporaneous and unplanned. The last of these escapees jumped from the train in Austria, probably on the way from Wolfsberg to Lamsdorf. Anti-Nazi Austrians hid him and had him brought to Yugoslavia. With the aid of Yugoslav partisans, he wandered to the Greek border and from there he continued on his way to Palestine. Escape from the permanent camps and work groups in Silesia was more difficult.

The distance to the Middle East was greater and the local population was usually hostile to POWs in general and to Jews in particular. An escaped prisoner required civilian clothes, false papers, German currency, maps and navigational aids or guides.

Under these conditions there was no possibility of impromptu escape; only with careful planning in the camp and the help of the underground network run by the British in occupied Europe was escape possible. An escape committee in Lamsdorf supplying money, documents, tickets and means of forgery, decided on escape routes, had its network of helpers, and guided the escapees. It was this committee which also planned the digging of tunnels or other methods of escape.

The Palestinians in Lamsdorf were much in demand as escape partners mainly due to their command of European languages and, at times, because of their knowledge of the terrain along the escape route. One of them was usually attached to a small group of two or three British or Australians. Many of those who escaped were caught in Germany, in the territorial waters of Sweden, or in Hungary. Few were those who managed to reach Britain, the Middle East or a neutral country.

Already in the fall of 1942, several prisoners' letters to Palestine conveyed hints that there were prisoners who attempted or were planning to escape. The assumption was that these prisoners would not be able to reach the Middle East from Germany and would attempt to reach Britain, Switzerland or Vichy France. Shertok, then on his way to London, was therefore requested to ascertain if such prisoners had indeed reached safety. Four Palestinian prisoners did succeed in escaping from Italy and reached Switzerland.

Another prisoner, A. Yerushalmi who had been among those who had escaped in Greece, reached Palestine via Yugoslavia and Turkey. The exact number of escapees is unknown; estimates range from 150 (the number of attempts coming before the reparations committee at the end of the 1950's) to 300 (the maximum estimate

made by prisoners who were liberated in the early exchanges at the end of 1944). Each and every escape attempt is an adventure story in itself, and the proportion of attempts on the part of Palestinians stands out. Even if we accept the minimum number – 150 – they still constitute some ten per cent of all Palestinian Jewish POWs. Almost all the POWs who managed to join up with the British forces continued to serve, and several of them even volunteered upon their return for special tracks in which they could make use of their recent experiences.

### Liberation

Liberated POWs engaged the attention of the institutions in Palestine long before the end of the war. Close to 100 prisoners had been wounded during the battles in Greece or the bombing during the retreat and evacuation. Some additional POWs were wounded while interned and as they were unfit for labour it was hoped for their early exchange. Several of them died of illnesses or wounds in the hospitals of the POW camps. The Jewish Agency's political department cited a precedent from the First World War and requested transfer of the seriously injured to neutral territory, Switzerland for example.

The Germans refused, and the exchange of wounded was delayed until the autumn of 1943. However, wounded POWs who had fallen into Italian hands were returned to Palestine at the beginning of that same year, and even the slightly wounded were liberated relatively soon. Part of them, captured in June 1942 at Tobruk, were released at the end of that very year with the advance of the Eighth Army, and the remainder after the invasion of the Apennine Peninsula in September 1943.

A few POWs were sent northwards by the Germans and escaped later on when the Allied forces broke through the Gothic Line during the summer of 1944. A few prisoners who remained in Greece were held at the Avaroff military prison in Athens, and were liberated by the British Army in November 1944.

At the end of October 1943, a preliminary exchange agreement of sick and wounded soldiers was drawn up in which Palestinian prisoners were included.

The actual exchange took place in Barcelona, Spain and from there 52 of the Jewish POWs were sent to London, and nine to Egypt. In the wake of this negotiation, further exchanges could be carried out, and from time to time Swiss committees visited Lamsdorf in order to vet and confirm the candidates for exchange.

In May 1944, an additional exchange of sick and wounded prisoners took place. 698 Germans were returned for 100 Americans and 890 from various Commonwealth countries, among them 22 Palestinians. As agreed, bombing of railway lines was halted to secure the prisoners' transfer from the camps to the Franco-Spanish border. This cessation of bombing was one of the main motives prompting the German agreement to these exchanges.

In view of the rapid pace of the early exchanges and in anticipation of the mass liberation envisaged at the war's end, the British decided that Palestinian prisoners would be transferred to Britain for medical treatment and interrogation, after which they would be repatriated to the Middle East. A special transit camp was erected for

**'There were  
escaped  
prisoners who  
remained in  
Greece for  
months and  
years.'**



them, staffed with Palestinians.

As the war began to reach its end, the tempo of early release was speeded up. In September 1944, an additional 50 Palestinian POWs were released and reached the new transit camp in Newcastle in northern England. A month later an additional group, bigger than the previous one, reached Britain, and included 200 liberated prisoners, most of them Palestinians and a few Cypriots. In January 1945, the last exchange agreement between British and Germans was carried out, with 41 Palestinian Jewish prisoners and two non-Jewish ones reaching Switzerland. From there they proceeded via Marseilles to Britain.

The anticipation for an early liberation was mixed with more than a little fear of what would face the prisoners during the anarchy which would accompany – or so they thought – the downfall and retreat of the Germans. On January 5, Red Cross representatives visited the Lamsdorf camp for the last time. According to the demand of Y. Karlenboim, he and the prisoners' man of confidence met in the camp with two of the representatives alone.

Karlenboim voiced his fears of a situation in which the prisoners would be placed at the end of the war, when SS men might attempt to take revenge on the Jewish POWs at the last moment and the Red Cross men were urged to warn the German command that POWs were British soldiers with equal rights. The Red Cross representatives demurred; in their opinion, any statement of this sort would only wake sleeping dogs.

They further claimed that it was not within their jurisdiction to intervene. Nevertheless, Karlenboim planned an emergency resistance plan dealing with two possibilities: with the help of the British prisoners and without it, and appropriate commands were relayed from Lamsdorf to the labour detachments.

During the coming weeks, the Red Army rapidly advanced towards the Oder River. Prisoners from the detachments began to be sent to Lamsdorf and the overcrowding grew. Cases of typhus were discovered and fear of an epidemic grew.

On January 22nd, during the final visit of the Swiss delegation, order came through to evacuate the internees to Stalag VIII A near Görlitz in Lower Silesia, 240 kilometres away from Lamsdorf. On that same afternoon, the first group of 1,000 POWs commenced their journey which was to last 12 days.

The Palestinian prisoners in the camp (who had been joined by hundreds who had returned from the labour detachments) were to leave with the third group. While it was important to maintain a Palestinian bloc, it was not considered advisable that all should leave in one group, should the Germans decide to attack them en route. Four hundred Jewish prisoners left on the journey on that day, 50 of them returning to the camp on various pretexts, some to leave the next day in a group of British, Australian and others prisoners.

One the same day, when the Russian arrival seemed imminent, the German personnel evacuated the camp. A committee of prisoners sought means of making contact with the Red Army, and for that purpose co-opted several Russian speaking Palestinians.

About 100 men left the camp the next few nights, in an attempt to find the Russian spearhead. At the beginning of February 1945, the Russian advance was halted and in several places near Lamsdorf, the Red Army was even forced to retreat.

Escaping POWs who did not succeed in reaching the Russians began now to return to the camp.

On February 10, the Germans regained control of the camp, unguarded for almost two weeks. British, Polish and Russian prisoners were now recaptured on the roads and brought back to Lamsdorf. On the 15th of the month, the evacuation of the camp commenced for the second time. Among the 1,000 prisoners who began their journey westward were a group of 70 Palestinians.

In the confusion which accompanied the Russian offensive in the winter of 1945, the Palestinian prisoners dispersed throughout Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. It is difficult to trace their fate as they mingled

with different groups of British prisoners – and each group had its own experience. Fifty four Palestinian prisoners succeeded in reaching the Red Army lines; at the beginning of February their names were announced over the Polish radio broadcasting from Lublin. They were transported by the Russians to Rumania where they waited to set sail for the Middle East. Another group of 49

prisoners marched eastward to Krakow where they were collected by the Red Army, sent to Odessa, and embarked for Egypt; at the beginning of April 1945 they reached Palestine. They were among the first to report in Palestine about survivors in Poland.

The remainder of the prisoners spent an additional two months in captivity, shuttled throughout Germany, suffering as before from hunger and torture. In the course of their journey, they were joined by Jews who had escaped from the death marches from the concentration camps.

They provided them with uniforms and with identification papers of Prisoners of War. One of these groups – evacuated from the labour detachment at Beuten – marched a distance of 1,200 kilometres from Silesia through Bohemia to Nürnberg in Bavaria until they were liberated by the American army near Regensburg. Several of the Palestinians were killed or wounded during the wanderings of the last days of the war by aerial bombing. Others lost their lives after liberation when the plane carrying them to Britain crashed over French soil.

The three Palestinian officers were released on April 12, flown to Brussels and from there to Britain. The main group of Palestinian prisoners at Lamsdorf were liberated at the beginning of April and reached Britain a few days later. Other less fortunate prisoners remained in POW camps in Austria or in hospitals until the end of the war – the early days of May 1945. After their release by the Americans they assisted them as interpreters and took part in manhunts for war criminals and SS men, during which they discovered groups of Jewish survivors in various corners of Austria and Bavaria.

Close to 900 liberated POWs reached the transfer camp at Newcastle at the end of the war. At the end of May, the first group of 437 men sailed for the Middle East.

It is difficult to establish the precise number of the Palestinians Jewish POWs, for many captives actually served in British units and held no Palestinian identification. Further, not all of them fell into the main group of prisoners – members of the

## **‘On release prisoners assisted as interpreters and took part in manhunts for war criminals and SS men’**

Pioneer Corps and the stevedores – whose war history forms the bulk of this discussion. Even the official reports of the War Office to Parliament are lacking in full information. The prisoners themselves numbered their fallen comrades in captivity as 30, but to this number added “and ten others missing whose names are unknown”. Any statistical summary pertaining to captivity must of necessity be inexact. The most comprehensive summing-up which was made by the British military authorities listed 1,514 Jewish POWs from Palestine. An additional 169 were regarded as missing, and it was known then that another 12 were killed while in captivity. These data were slightly modified at the end of the war with the liberation of the

POWs, and subsequent discovery of some of those reported missing who safely returned from captivity; others were discovered in Greece and in Yugoslavia and revealed the circumstances surrounding the death of several whose fate until then was unknown.

M19 (the British Intelligence Branch Department dealing with POW matters) did not back the Palestinian prisoners;

these had to set their own ethical standard, framework of mutual relations vis-à-vis the British, and conduct with the Germans. All this was done under difficult physical conditions in the face of immense emotional pressures and great danger.

The Germans, who were not prepared for the phenomenon of Jewish captives as soldiers in the British Army, were initially puzzled, but after several months accepted the principle of equal treatment. Outbursts against Jews, while not uncommon in German POW camps, were usually the result of personal or camp initiative and not of orders from above.

British prisoners generally forestalled German attempts to institute procedures employed in cases of Jewish prisoners from other armies, in that they did not hold themselves apart from the Palestinian and demanded that British and Palestinian alike be given equal treatment. Anti-Semitic manifestations on the part of British POWs were rare; more common were the friendly contacts that prevailed, and along with joint cultural and social activities, escapes also constituted joint ventures.

The Palestinian POWs constituted a heterogeneous group, a cross-section of the volunteers for the British Army. Most of them were illegal immigrants and those who, before the war, had not yet become an integral part of the organised Yishuv. Only in a few of the units did leadership to crystallite from within and, during the period of captivity, this slowly evolved into leadership of the entire group of prisoners.

The shared experiences served, after a while, to unite them socially and to crystallite them nationally. Even in adversity they tried, each in his own way, to contribute to the war effort, and to help fellow Jews.

This ranged from assistance to forced labourers in the camps in Silesia, the liberation of Jewish women from the concentration camp in Meklenburg and aiding survivors of the death marches, to the adoption of surviving children whom they brought to Eretz Israel.

Source: Yoav Gelber, *“Palestinian POWs In German Captivity”, Yad Vashem Studies, Vol. XIV, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1981 pp. 89-137.* ■



# Fire Fighting

## with the Pioneers of 206 Company



■ Left to right, Pte McDonnall, Pte Williams, Pte Tripp, Sgt Sutton, Pte Fairhurst, Pte Jones

**Report: Lieutenant Bruce Melia**  
**Picture: Lieutenant Bruce Melia**

WHO would have thought that the Firemans strike was going to last so long. Not the firemen, nor the government and certainly not the army. After the nine weeks the total number of alarm calls handled by the Worcester Fire Control stood at four hundred, two hundred and eighty of which were handled by the army fire fighters, from 206 Company and the RE's from Long Marston.

On Friday 11 November 1977 HQ Engineer Resources at Long Marston were tasked with supplying Military Fire Crews to major towns in the County of Worcester and Hereford. On Sunday 13 November, Remembrance Sunday, the teams, after hasty training, were deployed.

In the early days of the strike, conditions were very primitive. The control cell for Worcester and Hereford was situated in a single bare room at Norton Barracks, Worcester with accommodation for the Goddess crews and controllers in an adjoining unheated barrack block with the majority of the crews sleeping on camp beds. The controlling staff consisted of

three fire service personnel and one army officer working a shift of twelve to fourteen hours depending on the availability of personnel and a second shift of the same makeup. The OC troops for the county was Major Peter Gallard RE who had the unenviable job of taking the responsibility for the six army locations. The army locations were at Hereford, Ross on Wye, Kidderminster, Droitwich and Worcester with the teams used mainly to answer calls within the town boundaries. The rest of the county was protected by twenty retained stations, who, despite serious threats from militant piquets, continued to answer all calls within their own areas.

206 Company sent two crews to Worcester, Kidderminster, Redditch and a joint RE/RPC crew to Ross on Wye. Hereford and Droitwich were mainly crewed by the RE.

It was not long before the Company spirit, last seen at Summer Camp, was once more in the public eye and within a few days everyone had settled into their new homes and made friends with the locals. There followed material signs of public support with gifts of books and games and offers of TV and invitations to parties, and

letters of support to the local press.

The Kidderminster detachment was perhaps the luckiest being based at the TA Centre, Birmingham Road, as they had a club upstairs run by the TA to which the off-duty crew was invited to spend their leisure hours. They were also blessed with the easier and closer route to the town centre which cut their response to call time over the other detachments

At Redditch a lot of work had to be done by the crews to turn an empty industrial complex at Moons Moat South into a suitable place to live and work which was accomplished within a very short time thanks to the help from the local Council and the untiring efforts of the boys under the direction of SSgt Terry Warren. The sections there were faced with the task of combating industrial fires as well as domestic and they had to go "Hydrant spotting" at every opportunity in order to familiarise themselves with a very complex area.

The largest area of responsibility was covered by the Worcester crews who were sent as far away as Evesham and Malvern. Luckily the spare Goddess was based here which was manned by the off-duty crew in

an emergency.

At the end of the third week of the strike a two man crew with an Austin Gypsy was located at the RA Centre at Ross on Wye with the off-duty crew based at 22 SAS Hereford with the RE Detachment.

The daily routine of the sections was rapidly established by starting the day with a vehicle and equipment check followed by a training session. The preliminaries over the crews would then "Book Mobile" and go hydrant spotting, a phrase used by the crews when familiarising themselves with the area.

Meanwhile the routine of Fire Control was also established with the off-going watch completing their reports of the last twelve hours and the oncoming watch familiarising themselves with the duties in the logs and any changes in situations at the stations. Once handover was complete the four member team would settle down to a good book or chat about things in general whilst waiting for the inevitable emergency call.

In front of each of the watch was a fire line telephone Junction Box fitted with three emergency lines with red lights and two normal lines with white lights. Each

member could listen and speak on any of the fire lines, by putting the switch under each light down. For incoming calls a buzzer would sound, a light on the junction box would light and the colour would determine whether it was admin or emergency. For emergency calls, all four members of the watch would listen to the details and record all the information as soon as the area and addresses were known, one of the watch would find the location on the map, one would call out the appropriate station, and one would call the area duty fire officer out to attend. Then the police would be informed and any emergency service required such as electricity, water or gas boards or ambulance. The location of the emergency would then be marked on the county map and the next nearest station given standby instructions including the route. The controllers then had to wait for the crew to arrive at the scene and report back before any further action could be taken. Usually the crew of a Goddess could contain most fires very quickly because of their slickness and the power of the pump and additional appliances were seldom required. The controllers soon became efficient and at one stage handled three separate calls in two minutes.

After the first three weeks of the strike the sections had settled in so well that it looked as if they had always been there. The Worcester sections and Fire Control moved into the Officers Mess with heated accommodation, spacious recreation, rest, admin and kitchen areas and a control room with windows, a luxury so far denied. A Training Team was set up allowing all areas to pass through Worcester and train on the spare Goddess under the CSM or usually under 2LT David Rainey or 2Lt Loigi Gregorie (on loan from their Companies at Bicester) who had spent countless hours studying various ways of fighting the different types of fires. They also took their turns as watchkeepers in the control room when the regular watchkeepers were unavailable.

Calls were graded from one to six; 1 Fire with Damage, 2 Small Fire no Damage, 3 Chimney Fire no Damage, 4 Emergency Service, 5 False Alarm Malicious, 6 False Alarm Good Intent.

All calls had to be answered and apart from chimney fires and traffic accidents the Teams would not know what to expect until they arrive. Times of turnout varied from one to two minutes.

It would be impossible to mention all of the two hundred and eighty calls attended by the Goddesses as mainly they were false alarms, chimney fires or traffic accidents. But the big fires attended deserve a special mention and also a quote from a fire officer who said, "What a nice change it is to have six willing men who do exactly what they are asked to do immediately."

In the early hours of 30 November the Redditch crew was sent in response to a police call to a house fire in Romsley near Bromsgrove. The neighbours had rescued a sixty six year old woman from her house but had only called the police and ambulance. Consequently the house was well alight by the time the call was received with no hope left of saving the property. The crew arrived on the scene quickly and within minutes had the blaze under control. Help was also sent by the West Midlands in the shape of a Royal Marine manned Goddess and together they put the blaze out.

Later in the same day a passer-by saw a men at the Copcutt Elm Filling Station on the A36 between Worcester and Droitwich

taking petrol from the pumps, throwing it over the garage buildings and throwing lighted matches after it. The alarm was given and the Worcester crew and the Droitwich crew were sent to the scene. A nearby cottage was ablaze and shortly after the forecourt buildings flared up. The crews are to be congratulated for their efficiency in dealing with these two fires especially the forecourt buildings as they were close to the pumps and storage tanks. The danger was enough for the A38 to be closed for half an hour. By the time the fires were out both the cottage and garage buildings were severely damaged.

The biggest blow tackled by the Company fire-fighters was a joint effort. A call from West Midlands for assistance at a fire in the Needle Industries Works at Studley came in and the Redditch crew were mobilised. In attendance were two pumps from Studley and Alcester and the Goddess from Stratford. The blaze took two hours to control. The fire broke out in the second floor packing department and quickly spread. The firm's own fire-fighters found the blaze too much for them and by the time the Redditch crew arrived the factory was well alight. The fire was so intense that the houses nearby had to be evacuated and routes into Studley sealed. The factory suffered intense damage and the crew were in attendance until the next morning.

The speed with which the company fire teams were able to mobilise saved the Oxfam shop in Worcester town centre when on 22nd November a fire was reported in the shop, the crew were at the scene in five minutes. They quickly gained access to the heart of the fire and extinguished it saving the shop and most of the contents. But for their speedy response the shop would have been destroyed.

The route to the beautiful town of Malvern nestling against the picturesque Malvern Hills was a familiar one to the Worcester crews as they had attended quite a few chimney fires in the town. It was a good job too as they had to rush to a fire in the resin store of the Malvern Aircraft Company on the 27th November. The workers had spotted the fire as they were lighting the melting pots and had tried unsuccessfully to put it out.

The store shed was well alight by the time they arrived but the crews managed to contain the fire to the store shed and save the rest of the factory. The store was completely gutted including the roof but within a week the factory was back in production.

The crews were rewarded for their efforts from time to time. The Robirch Bacon Curing and Pie Factory at Evesham was the scene of a fire and the crew came back with boxes of pies and sausage rolls, a gift from the management. A fire had started in the curing section of the factory and the local volunteers with their own fire appliance were summoned to assist. They managed to prevent the fire from spreading but couldn't get into the factory because of the smoke and heat. There was so much smoke that it hung over the town like a huge mushroom. The Goddess arrived twenty minutes after the alarm had been given, not bad as the trip should have taken twenty five, and without thought to the danger the crew, the scarves around their faces, rushed in and put the fire out. They were given so many sausage rolls that even after they had shared them out with everyone at the station, we were still eating them next day.

Christmas came and went just like any other working day for the duty crews. All





■ Needle Industries Works at Studley

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Copcutt Elm Filling Station

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Attending a road traffic accident

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Rest Room Call Sign A21B - LtoR LCpl Merritt, LCpl Williams, Sgt Anderson, LCpl Robinson, Pte Kewall

Picture: RPCA Archive

stations had decorations and looked very festive indeed. The locals popped in from time to time wishing us all well and giving us gifts such as boxes of chocolate, cigarettes and the odd bottle of spirits. They didn't stay long at all just long enough to say Merry Christmas and then leave. We were all very grateful for their support and even more grateful to the people who invited crews to their homes for Christmas dinner. Even the piqueting firemen were not forgotten. Beer and mince pies were taken down to the Worcester station and the boys and firemen wished each other well and told jokes for two hours. Cementing public relations continued with all the Goddesses visiting the children's homes in cities and presenting them with toys and sweets and cash which had been donated by the public, a nice surprise for the kids. On Boxing Day, Col NT Ridings, visited all the locations and wished everyone the seasons cheer.

A False Alarm Malicious is an emergency call given by someone as a prank and although we turned out for quite a few, perhaps the worst one was just after Christmas, a call was received from a driver who was on his way to Budley telling me of a fire in a hostel in the South Weir fringe of the town. The Budley retained station was mobilised and as a back up so to was the Goddess from Kidderminster. On arrival the retained men asked for another pump and were advised that the army from Kidderminster were reporting their location as Budley and would be in attendance in five minutes. This meant that we would have a total of three pumps at the fire.

People were still in bed in the hostel and the area fire officer in his breathing apparatus was in the process of evacuating these from the building. At this time we received a second emergency call. A woman caller reported a house fire in eastern Budley with persons trapped. The Goddess was immediately turned round and sent to the new fire. A second fire officer was sent and both he and the Goddess arrived at the same time. There was no sign of fire at all, a bad prank had caused a much needed crew to be diverted. Luckily the retained men had the hostel fire under control and the Goddess was returned to Kidderminster. It could easily have turned into a disaster.

We had our first and only fatality on 2nd January. Mr & Mrs Clist returned home from the golf club to their house in Kidderminster just after 2200 hours. Mr Clint went to bed and Mrs Clist started to change the gas bottle on the downstairs heater. She lit the heater and it started to flair up. Immediately she dragged it into the hall with the intent of taking it out of the house but as she got to a position near the stairs it exploded sending a jet of flame into the upper storey.

The house was large and old with a new extension built on the side. It was constructed internally of heavy timber. Neighbours who heard the explosion reported flames coming out of the roof and rushed to rescue Mrs Clist. The house was instantly well alight and they could not gain access to the upper storey where Mr Clist lay asleep in bed.

The Kidderminster crew were quickly on

the scene but by this time two sections of the old house were well alight. The crew stayed on the job until relieved by the day time crew who had the unenviable task of clearing through the rubble to find the body. The remains were found in the basement where they had ended up as the house collapsed. This was the job of the longest duration attended by crews of the Company.

The last fire worthy of note happened on 13th January at Redditch. A factory fire was reported on the Enfield Industrial Estate in the North East corner of Redditch. It had started through a short circuit in the press shop of the Enfield Engineering Works and the Redditch crew were mobilised to the scene. They took only seven minutes to book in attendance and confirm it as a fire. The Droitwich crew RE were mobilised to assist but after they had been mobile ten minutes the Redditch crew reported that they had the fire under control and that further help was not required. It took three hours to extinguish the fire but the crew had prevented the fire from spreading and had saved the factory. Even so 60% of the press shop was damaged.

Tuesday 17th January 1978 saw all the striking firemen in Hereford and Worcester back at work. Most station crews invited their army counterparts down to their stations for drinks which lasted until late in the night. "Thanks for doing our jobs boys" – "Have a look at some real fire engines" were the friendly remarks passed. But not one of the real firemen could deny that the Goddess Pump was more powerful than anything they had. ■



# Blast from the Past

Do you recognise anyone from these old photographs from the past?



■ 23 Regt Shooting Team (1997?)

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Reunion Weekend 2005

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Reunion Weekend 1986

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Visit by HRH The Duke of Gloucester – date unknown

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ 9 Signal Regt, date unknown – Sgt is Geof Wilcocks

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Anzio Section, 11th January 1974

Picture: RPCA Archive





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- ▲ **Tie Pin**  
lovely  
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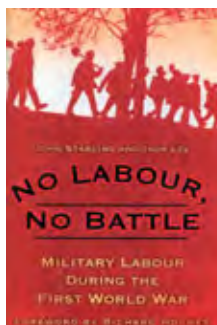
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by Major E H Rhodes Wood  
This book, long out of print, is now available on CD-Rom at a cost of  
**£11**



- ◀ **"Royal Pioneers 1945-1993"**  
by Major Bill Elliott  
The Post-War History of the Corps was written by Major Bill Elliott, who generously donated his work and rights entirely for the Association's benefit. It was published by Images, Malvern in May 1993 and is on sale in the book shops at £24.  
**£10**



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# It was a good weekend

ANOTHER AMAZING and wonderful Pioneer magazine with interesting photographs especially on page 4. As we were waiting for the Officers to turn up for the group photograph we were exchanging stories of our experiences.

It was a good weekend reunion although the afternoon activities although very interesting seem to go on for ever! Bill Sears and I left in the early evening to recuperate in our rooms. At this time I am not really sure if Bill and I will be able to attend next year's reunion.

Many thanks are due to you and your son for the many hours of work you put in to keep the Association going. Many thanks, also to 23 Pioneer Regiment in hosting the event and to WO2 Colin Bell for his past work. Bye for now  
**GD Pringle**

# I am so glad that he was able to see the medals

I AM writing to thank you again for your help with the information regarding my Dad's service record and the information regarding his service medals. I took your advice and some letters later I was eventually issued with Dad's medals.

We have a family Christmas party each year and Dad is usually guest of honour so it was our intention to present them to him in front of his entire family as a surprise. Unfortunately he took ill on his way to the party so we did not get the chance to make a fuss of him on the day. I took his medals to his care home and showed them to him and he was immensely proud. This has become even more poignant as Dad passed away suddenly last Sunday. I am so glad that he was able to see the medals and they will now become a treasured keepsake in our family. One of my nephews has served in the Army and always makes a point of attending the local remembrance service and wears his own medals with pride.

At future services he will wear his Granddad's medals with the same pride. Coincidentally, he also served in an Engineering regiment.

Dad will be buried on the 3rd February and his medals will be proudly on display on that day.

Once again, please accept the thanks of myself and Dad's family for the help and assistance that you provided, without which we would still not know anything of his service life and would not have obtained the medals.

**Will Cunningham**

# Kidnap and disappearance of Mrs Muriel McKay in 1969

**T**HIS IS a slightly unusual request. Do bear with me while I explain! I'm a writer, currently researching a book on the kidnap and disappearance of Mrs Muriel McKay in 1969.

The case became notorious for a number of reasons. Mrs McKay's body was never found. It was also the first instance of kidnapping in the UK, and the missing woman had been mistakenly assumed to be Rupert Murdoch's wife, presumably in expectation of a large ransom. A man called Arthur Hosein was convicted of the murder, and died in prison 4/5 years ago, never having been released. I met him some years before his death when he was a patient at Ashworth High Security Mental Hospital.

My book is concerned with establishing why Arthur Hosein did what he did, and who he really was. On his wedding certificate of May 18th, 1960, he is shown to be a serving soldier with the Royal Pioneer Corps (No. 23623918), stationed at Berechurch Hall Camp, Colchester. At

his trial in 1970, it was said he had been court martialled for desertion that same year; one suspects he wanted to join his new wife, rather than serve in the Army. My questions is; how can I find out any information about his time in the Royal Pioneer Corps.

When did he join up? Was he doing National Service? How might I locate any fellow-soldiers from that time? In what circumstances did he leave the Corps?

Is there any way you can help, or point me in the right direction? Needles in haystacks were never this difficult!!

**Bill Jones**

HWJ Creative  
hwjcreative@fsmail.net  
07767 654218 / 0170682 7092

*Ed Note:* Our records have the following information:

Date of Birth - Aug 36  
Date of Enlistment - July 59  
Home Town/Area - Hertfordshire  
Discharged (Medical) Sept 60.

# From D Day to Berlin

**I**'M HOPING you might be able to help me. Last year we made a series for Channel 4 called "Blitz Street" that told the story of the Blitz using a mix of strong interviews from men and women who had experienced the bombing, archive film and the recreation of a London street which was then subjected to a spectacular range of large-scale explosions that match the original ordnance dropped on Britain by the Luftwaffe at the time.

The series was a great success and we've just started production on a big and ambitious follow-up which will re-tell the story of D-Day to Berlin. This will consist of six one hour films for Channel 4 here in the UK and the History Channel Canada.

The series will use a combination of archive and re-created battlefield action sequences but the most important element that we are looking to drive each

programme and bring it to life is firsthand testimony from the people that were there at the time. It's a long time ago now but I'm hoping that there will be some of those very brave men who were involved from D-Day onwards still willing to tell us their stories for this new series. I was wondering whether you might be able to help me find these people and pass on my details to any veterans who would be interested in speaking with me further.

Should you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact me (all my details are below).

At this stage I'm simply hoping to talk to and meet as many veterans as possible with a view to filming interviews with them as soon as possible in the New Year. Many thanks.

**Hettie**

henrietta.mitchell@impossiblepictures.co.uk



# Pioneer flies spitfires



■ Dennis Gimes in a spitfire

Pictures: Dennis Gimes

**S**O WHERE do I start; I'll ask you a question. Do you know of any ex, or serving Pioneers, who became a Flight Lieutenant in the RAF and flew spitfires?

Well some of what I've just said is true, no, not the rank thing but the flying of spitfires. I am a member of the Bomber Command Association and I did take a flight in a spitfire and I took the controls. Just as when I'm driving my car I was told to slow down! The knack of flying is learning how to throw yourself at the ground and miss.

I will start to explain, my flight only lasted 35 minutes, that's why my rank (which I gave myself) was only Flight Lieutenant if I had stayed up for an hour I would have become an Air Vice Marshal. An RSM once told me in 1965, that if I stayed in the Army for 30 years I would reach the rank of Lance Corporal.

About 5 years ago I joined The Heritage Foundation and we are currently raising money for a Bomber Command Memorial which is going to be built in Green Park, London.

It is to be unveiled by Her Majesty The Queen in 2012. In September 2009 Robin Gibb, (The Bee Gee's) who is the president of the Heritage Foundation, gave a garden party at his home in Thame. The day of the party was on my birthday and Robin sang Happy Birthday to me, which in its self was a great present. I was then introduced to a friend of Robin's, by the name of Jim Dooley. (Does anyone remember The Dooley brothers of the 1960's?).

Jim is the official photographer to the Bomber Command Association and in November 2009 he and Robin arranged

for me to go up in the Spitfire, which was the second part of my birthday present. Birthdays are good for you, the more you have, the longer you live! But to be serious you don't have to have a high rank or to be famous to make a difference. I'm a humble person, really. (I'm actually much greater than I think I am).

All I had was a wish to do something my way to say "Thank You" to the 55,000 aircrew of Bomber Command, who didn't make it back during WW2. I belong to a few Associations, both ex-service and theatrical. I soon realised that just being a member was not enough, although it's a good start. I just had to get involved; then really good things started to happen.

I like work, it fascinates me. I sit and look at it for hours. Not only did I start meeting really nice people, I had the feeling I was making a difference. For most of my life I've been very selfish, now I'm trying to think of others by getting involved. As a member of the Variety Club I help children to obtain wheelchairs. I am also a member of The Royal British Legion who help ex-servicemen. Who knows we just might need their help one day. The celebrity associations I belong to help me obtain free tickets to shows. I've often thought that being a celebrity is someone who has worked hard all their life to become known then wears dark glasses to avoid being recognised.

Please join some worthwhile charity and offer to help, you will have so much fun. And one more thing before I finish - If you think nobody cares if you're alive, try missing a couple of payments! Hope to see you soon.

**Dennis Gimes**

## Called up for National Service

I FOUND your website on the computer, I am hoping you could help me with some information.

I was called up for National Service in 1952 and did my training at Horsley Hall, Gresford, North Wales. My service number was 22706737.

When I finished my training I stayed there as a storeman for several months and during this time I signed on for 3 years with a further 4 years on the reserve. I then moved to CAD Kineton with 251 Coy until I was demobbed in 1955.

I was called up again in 1956 as a reservist for Suez and went to Cyprus, as I was a full Cpl when I was discharged I retained my rank.

Any information you have on people in any places mentioned, looking for contacts. I remember a Sgt Cook at the training centre also a Cpl West, LCpl Churchill and LCpl Izard.

At 251 Coy a Cpl Stan Davies. I would love to contact anyone who remembers me.

**DW Priddle**

## Not the news expected

The following email was received after a service record was obtained:

"Hi Norman. Thought I would let you know what has happened since I applied for my husband's war record. I got it a little while ago, but I am in a state of shock! My husband was court-martialed in January 1946, in collusion with others, for stealing some drums of war department petrol!

It doesn't make sense. Why would he jeopardise everything - take such a risk. He was a CSM, he enjoyed the odd cigar, liked a glass of brandy now and again, wasn't a women chaser, (he was 45 when we married).

He didn't need the money! I know people would say, 'well you would say that wouldn't you'. but, I am a realist, and I really 'knew' the man. He was a straight arrow! He was reduced in the ranks and sentenced to six months detention, which was reduced to three months.

I don't know where he was, other than he was serving in the BAOR. As I said earlier, it just doesn't make sense. He was a good, hardworking, loving family man, who never gave me a minutes worry during the forty years we were married. I just don't know what to think!

So, I may have to forget leaving full details for the grandchildren - who may wonder why grandpa was a private when he left the army I was thinking of getting the court martial records - but I guess there's no point.

Thanks for all your help"

**Name Supplied**

*Ed note:* Not the information the family were expecting!



# Let's make 2011 the biggest yet



■ Pioneers marching at the Cenotaph

Picture: Paul Brown

I HAVE just got back from today's parade which started in Horseguards Parade London. The experience was absolutely brilliant.

I would strongly encourage any old or not so old Chunkies to contact Norman in order that tickets can be reserved. It would be fantastic for Pioneers to have a huge presence. If you live near London, you should have no excuse to support your Corps. Lets make 2011 the biggest yet. The Association needs your support or risk losing their slot on this very important annual parade.

**Gucci**

*Ed Note:* Although the Royal Pioneer Corps are only issued with thirty tickets for the Cenotaph we have learned that if we apply earlier enough our allocated will be increased. It would be appreciated therefore if you can attend this event to let the Association know as early as possible. Applications can be made at any time. Let us make 2011 the largest turnout yet. It has been noticed that the BBC tend to give coverage to the largest contingents, a large turnout will probably give us good exposure.

**T**HANKYOU FOR giving myself the opportunity to attend the London Remembrance Cenotaph Parade on Sunday the 14th of November 2010.

A truly memorable event. I would be obliged if you would reserve me a ticket for 2011.

I would like to urge ex-Pioneers that live in London or close surrounding areas to try their hardest to attend and show their support, so that The Pioneer Corps Association can have the type of numbers present that other Regimental Associations do.

**Steve Barron**

## Pioneer Flashes

I CAN only apologise that the tragic death of Charlie Wood has finally prompted me to finally check the internet for emails. Charlie was truly a gentleman who I will personally miss.

Only a week or two before he had taken time from his busy programme to come and see his old RSM for a brew and banter about what a dodgy job he had.

His soldiers were in awe of him and he has left a gap that is almost impossible to fill. Lt Slater has had the most difficult of positions to fill and from listening to the lads he is doing a great job. This is

obviously down to the attitude of Charles team. I suspect, like me, they will all have Charles' cheery voice in their heads saying come on lads lets just get on with it.

His repatriation was attended by all Pioneers in theatre and all were at the front wearing their illegal Pioneer Flash, as was I, with Tony Topping to my right and the remainder of the Pioneer contingent to my left.

Please pass on my regards to all who remember me.

Kind regards  
**Will Ross**

## the Pioneer

■ **THE Mouse**  
I believe Billy Dilkes has rung you with the answer but it does state: first one to email me. Page 10 - on the ammo box.

**Maj Dave Mason**  
- 2IC 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC.

■ **I BELIEVE I** have located the mouse, in the Madagascar photo (bomb or mine clearing). It is located on the photo bottom left above the words Clearing Mined Road. I hope I am right.

**RW Stone**

■ **THE cuneo** mouse is on page 60 the vichy french prisoners on madagascar on the soldiers right leg with bandage/sock on the man looking down with Lifted leg.

**TONY Lunn**  
(Sorry - both wrong see first letter above. Ed)

■ **I SEE** that you have done it again, the magazine is great. Congratulations  
**Jimmy Atkins**

■ **I NOW** live in an old folks retirement village, will you please give my regards to anyone who remembers an Old Fogey of 83 years, especially any from 521 Coy.  
**Cloggy Compton**

■ **THANKYOU** for a very enjoyable and interesting day out last Thursday (17 March) we both had a wonderful time with you and everyone in 23 Pioneer Regt. Also we were really pleased with the dedication to our father. I am sure he would have appreciated a Club named after him as he did like a beer or two.  
**Thank You Val and Eileen**  
(two of the daughters of Sgt JP Scully's GC)

■ **MANY** thanks for the Pioneer Magazine, it's a pleasure to read the articles and see photos of old members of the Corps that bring back so many memories. A big thank you to you and your son Paul.

**Andy Taylor**

■ **First**, I would like to thank you for a great time at my first reunion last year. I met one old friend and made many new ones. A big thank you also to the CO and all the men of 23 Pioneer for making me feel so welcome especially WO2 Colin Bell who made the stay so enjoyable. I hope to see you all at this year's reunion.  
**David A Armstrong**



come on, send us a mail...

## The Royal Pioneer Corps Association

c/o 23 Pnr Regiment RLC  
St David's Barracks  
Graven Hill  
Bicester OX26 6HF

or email us at:  
royalpioneer corps@gmail.com





# The right to reply

**I** READ the extracts from Lt Col Davey's 'memoirs', as published in the October 2010 issue of 'The Pioneer', with considerable interest.

I cannot comment on the distinguished Colonels military career other than the fact that his memoirs left me with the impression he did not attain the senior rank and appointment of grandeur to which he thought/considered he should have aspired to. (Some reach their ceiling and many have been known to have had their 'head and shoulders through it'!! I was a prime example for I always believed anything beyond and above 2Lt was a bonus!!)

I was commissioned into the Corps of Royal Engineers and served with 38 Corps Engineer Regiment in Aden, initially with 48 Field Squadron 1963/64 (Little Aden) and secondly with 73 Field Squadron 1965/6 (the whole tour was spent up country on the construction of the Aden/Dhala road).

During both tours of duty, in Aden, 518 Company RPC provided outstanding and valued Pioneer Support. (On transfer to the RPC in 1972 I was 2IC 518 Company RPC. Chris Etherington was appointed the OC and we continued our very good working relationship we had cultured from our days, working along side each other, in Aden. Chris was a good operator).

Despite Davey's comments the CO of 38 Engineer Regiment was a first class and extremely able Commanding Officer who did not suffer 'fools' gladly, if at all. One always remembers 'wise' words of advice from Senior Officers and on joining the Regiment the CO told me: "Always remember that the most important individual in the Army is the Private Soldier for without him you do not have a job. You look after him and he will look after you." and, secondly, "Always be in the right place, at the right time, with the right frame of mind to do the right job and if you do not understand ask and, if need be, ask again." How right he was! The CO had my most utmost respect and that, certainly, was not the case with one or two senior officers I served with during my military career.

The CO 38 Engr Regt was supported by a first class Adjutant and outstanding RSM. There was none of this 'back biting' to which Lt Col Davey refers to in his memoirs. The RE Officers got on with each other and we all (I certainly) had a very good rapport/banter with both John Napier and Chris Etherington and especially the RPC soldiers - always affectionately known as 'The Chunks'. The mutual respect, trust, understanding and co-operation continued between the RE/RPC, on the ground, during my second tour of Aden (73 Field Squadron RE), up country, on the Aden/Dhala Road.

I cannot comment upon the personal and command differences of opinion Davey may have had with the CO 38 Engr Regt. However, I would state that from having served under the CO's command I just do not accept that he, or any of his officers, got involved in petty trivia. The CO commanded the Regiment and he had an established, highly efficient and effective command structure to implement his orders/requirements. The CO was not one for wasting time.

One was left with impression from the memoirs that Davey was more interested in

re-badging to flying duties with the Army Air Corps! Certainly one way of achieving his ambition and getting closer to God! I would have believed that if the OC 518 Coy RPC was so concerned with the RE/RPC working relationship, at Officer or any other level, he would have spent more time visiting his soldiers at the work site. He was, from my point of view as a RE Troop Commander, on the ground, conspicuous by his absence. However, with officers of the calibre and capability of John Napier and Chris Etherington and a sound loyal CSM in John Merrick and some very reliable SNCO/JNCO's I can understand the OC had time and confidence to pursue his egoistic ambitions.

On returning to the UK and on leaving 38 Engr Regt the CO was promoted to Brigadier and was appointed Commander Land Forces Persian Gulf, in Bahrain.

Davey refers to the fact that 12 Field Squadron RE (a Sqn of 38 Engr Regt) took over from 24 Field Squadron RE, in Aden. This is incorrect. 12 Fd Sqn took over from 32 Field Squadron RE who returned to the 38 Engr Regt barracks in Ripon, Yorkshire. (32 Fd Sqn were deployed to Borneo in 1965).

12 Fd Sqn on completion of their tour of duty in Aden returned to 38 Engr Regt in Ripon. On return from leave they left the Regt and deployed to

1 (BR) Corps, Germany. 73 (Christmas Island) Squadron RE returned to the UK, joined 38 Engr Regt in Ripon, formed into a Field Squadron RE and, after formation Troop/Squadron Training in Scotland and Malta deployed to Aden in 1965.

The construction of the Aden/Dhala road was interesting, challenging, arduous and not without the odd interruption (Day and/or Night) from the Arab 'dissidents'. As stated previously 518 Company RPC provided outstanding and valued Pioneer Support. I will not go into the technicalities of the road construction other than to confirm, up country, there was a strong bond between All Ranks of RE/RPC. I remember John Napier and Geoff Hill visiting their Section(s) in our Sqn location in Al Mihla as well as the (always and ever) cheerful/smiling Sgt 'Paddy' Lyle (PCLU Sgt). He paid the local labour - a Pay Parade that had to be witnessed to be believed. There was none of this "Pay and Pay Book correct, Sir". ? We found a way of speeding up the 'process'!!!

Davey made reference in his memoirs to the Pioneer who woke one morning only to find that a 'Dissident' bullet had 'taken out' his portable radio, which he had purchased from the Camp NAAFI. It was many years ago however, and if I remember correctly, I believe his name was Private Fairclough (George) - surely the Company Commander should have remembered his name, that is if he was still in theatre at the time!! I was a Sapper Troop Commander and I remember the occasion - as well as the 'well meaning banter' Fairclough got from 'one and all'. Like all good Pioneers he took everything in good spirit and in his stride - good man.

Fairclough was (a) very lucky, as the Radio was inches from his head and (b) a total and true 'Pioneer' in every sense - one wound him up in the morning and he grafted all day. One had to stop him at

'close of play', other wise he would have just carried on - everyone knew him .. He was, without doubt, a character.

The next time the 'Dissidents' paid us a nightly exchange of fire, by courtesy of a (well briefed) RE NCO, Fairclough had a new Radio and the NAAFI were displaying a Radio with a bullet hole through it .. 'For Sale', price tag attached. - Soldiers: 1 & NAAFI: 0. Fairclough: 'morale restored.'

Remember: "The most important individual in the Army is the Private Soldier for without him you do not have a job. You look after him and he will look after you".

I take considerable umbrage at an individual who unjustifiably criticises my [then] CO and Regiment especially when the individual in question was what I considered to be a very ordinary and 'run of the mill' officer. Perhaps, like many others, the CO in question had reached the same conclusion! In my view if you publish your memoirs/views you are there to be 'shot at'. I will remain loyal to my CO and those who know/remember me will, I trust, accept and understand that I do not do that lightly. Loyalty from the 'Top to the Bottom' is a right; from the 'Bottom to the Top' it is respect and that has to be earned, is not a 'God damn Right'. The CO 38 Engr Regt had my total respect.

If I have upset anyone I apologise, accordingly and will now go back to retirement.

**J B Sievier (Lt Col (Retd))**

## 405 Company

DID ANY other soldiers in the RPC have to do what we had to do in 405 Coy when granted a 48 hour pass (which was about once per month).

We had to hand in our bedding into the stores and pick them up on the Monday morning. On the Sunday evening I would catch a train from Aberdare at 2055 hrs then catch the 2230 hrs train from Cardiff arriving at Bath Spa Station at about 0200 hrs. We would then wait to see if we could find another 3 or 4 men from camp and then hire a taxi. On arrival at the camp at approx 0230 hrs no stores were open so we had to sleep on the bare springs of the bed!

**Phil Marks**

## Long Marston

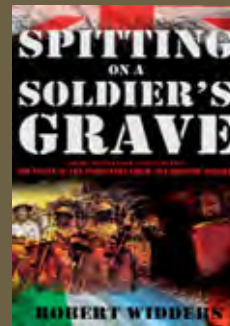
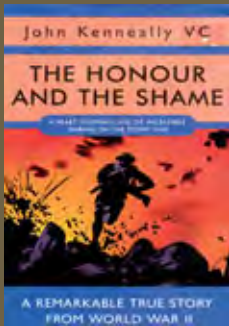
THAT SAME morning I received you E Mail about the death of George Lineham I had been reading the magazine and had read the E Mail from George where he mentioned his concerns about his health.

I'll never forget those few months I spent at Long Marston in 1974 along with you, Norris Taylor and a few others I have forgotten along with George who as CSM was in charge of our clandestine labour operations. It was great fun and we earned a few bob to supplement our meagre military pay.

All the best and hope you are both well, keep up the good work.

**Walt Bennetts**





# The Honour and the Shame

Review: Norman Brown  
Picture: Supplied

**T**HE REMAINING Germans had scattered and were firing everywhere, even at each other. Bullets were shattering off the boulder in front of me. The lads came over the top screaming like banshees and were picking them off left, right and centre”.

At a crucial point of the Second World War, John Kenneally proved himself to be a soldier of extraordinary courage. During a desperate battle in which his regiment defended a hilltop position while surrounded by the enemy, Kenneally performed a daring solo attack armed only with a Bren gun - an action for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross. His subsequent military career, which took him from Anzio to Palestine, was marked by equal bravery.

But years later, he made a

remarkable confession. The hero of the Irish Guards was not, in fact, John Kenneally at all, but Leslie Jackson, the illegitimate son of Neville Blond and Gertrude Robinson, who had deserted his former regiment, the Honourable Artillery Company. In book, Kenneally tells his story with verve and frankness.

It is a tale of riotous escapades, intense loyalties and courage in the face of death. It brings vividly to life the adventures of a freewheeling youth, and the horror and strange exhilaration of the battlefield.

*(The following is an extract from the book)*

The Medical Officers had checked the local brothels and they were given the all-clear to reopen. There was a popular one called the 'Belvedere' and we would sit in the bar opposite and watch the goings-on. A queue would form before

they opened, full of guys of all nations: black, white, yellow and even the odd Arab, just as if they were queuing for the cinema.

One soldier at the head of the queue amused us greatly. He was a private in the Pioneer Corps; he was small with close-cropped ginger hair and wore thick-lensed glasses - only his mother could have loved him. He was first in and after a few minutes he was out again looking quite animated. He rejoined the queue and went in again - three times. After his last excursion he came over to the bar for a drink, his passion cooled.

We joshed him about the number of times he'd been in. 'It was great,' he said in a thick Brummie accent, 'I'm going again tomorrow.'

**THE HONOUR AND THE SHAME**  
By John Kenneally VC  
ISBN 978-0-7553-1611-3

# The Bloodiest Year - 1972

Review: Norman Brown  
Picture: Supplied

**K**EN WHARTON, a former soldier and veteran has produced the goods again with his fourth book on the Northern Ireland troubles; as always, written from the perspective of the British soldier.

His latest venture chronicles the worst year of the troubles - 1972 - a year in which 172 soldiers tragically died in or as a direct consequence of the insanity which gripped Ulster for almost 30 years. His empathy and support lie firstly with the men who tramped the streets and countryside of Northern Ireland, but also with the good folk of the six counties who never wanted their beautiful land to be the

terrorists' battleground. As always, he is utterly condemnatory of the Provisional IRA and INLA but he also pulls no punches in his equally vitriolic assessment of the Loyalist paramilitaries and terror gangs who sickeningly sought to outdo the barbarism of their republican counterparts. It is a very well researched chronicle of that terrible year and he tries to cover every death in as much detail as time and space permits with longer chapters which cover 'Bloody Sunday', 'Bloody Friday' and the appalling tragedy of Claudy. It is written with passion and a detailed knowledge in particular of Belfast and explores again the life - and death - of the ordinary squaddie on the streets.

It has become Britain's forgotten war and so long as he has breath in his body, Ken will do his best to keep the memory of Op Banner well and truly alive.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ken Wharton has now 'passed 59' and is currently a resident of Queensland, Australia. He is a former soldier who served two tours of Northern Ireland; father of seven children and grandfather to four. He lives with his partner and soul-mate Helen right on the sun-kissed shores of the South Pacific.

**THE BLOODIEST YEAR 1972**  
By Ken Wharton  
History Press  
ISBN 978 1 86227 483 0  
(Published 1 May 11)

# Spitting on a soldier's grave

Review: Norman Brown  
Picture: Supplied

**T**HE STORY of the Irishmen who deserted from the Irish Army to join the Allies in the struggle against fascism and Nazism during the Second World War, has been kept secret for over half a century.

These men fought, and sometimes died, in some of the bloodiest battles of the war. And after the war they were all Court Martialed even the dead.

This meticulously researched book tells the story of the men who fought for freedom but were vilified after death. It tells the story of men like Joseph Mullally who died on D-Day, 6 June 1944, fighting with the British Army on the beaches of Normandy - a year before his court-martial. And Stephen McManus who'd already suffered torture and starvation whilst being worked to death in a Japanese prisoner of war camp. Gerry O'Neill risked his life with the newly formed Irish Navy, rescuing wounded British soldiers from the beaches of Dunkirk and Nicholas McNamara volunteered to serve with RAF Bomber Command knowing it meant almost certain death. The freedoms and democratic rights we enjoy today were earned by men like these, who fought, and sometimes died, on the home front and the battlefields of World War II. The deserters from the Irish Army, who joined the Allied struggle, faced the horrors of the bloodiest war in mankind's bloodstained history. Their stories are now told, in meticulous detail, in Spitting on a Soldier's Grave.

**SPITTING ON A SOLDIER'S GRAVE**  
Court martialled after death, the story of the forgotten Irish and British soldiers.  
By Robert Widders  
ISBN 978-1-84876-4996  
Tel: 01235 465521



# The Royal visit's off!

## Gun drama almost cancelled the 800th Anniversary of Northampton's charter

Report: David, Saint Chronicle & Echo  
Date: 11 October 2010

The following article appeared in the Northampton Chronicle & Echo on 11 October 2010.

**T**HE ROYAL visit's off! Those words must have sounded like a death knell. After all, it was 5pm on the evening of Wednesday, June 7, 1989 and tomorrow morning the Prince and Princess of Wales would be in Northampton for the biggest day the town had seen for many a long year.

It was the celebration of the 800th Anniversary of Northampton's Charter.

Everything was in place. Months of preparation. Months of expectation. Thousands of excited children. Thousands of placards proclaiming, "We love Diana."

At the Guildhall, where she was to be made an honorary Freeman of Northampton, the Council Chamber was polished and perfect. Sniffer dogs had sniffed their finest and the police were on guard.

At the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Northampton, John Keightley and his wife Pat, were putting the final touches to the epic exhibition of monarchs of the realm.

Single-handed, Pat had made over a dozen beaded and bejewelled costumes,

every stitch, every gem. And John had masterminded the celebratory service in which Prince Charles was to read a lesson.

All was scuppered by those devastating words from Major Bill Elliott of the Royal Pioneer Corps on the phone: "The Royal visit's off!"

A number of small arms were missing from Northampton's Simpson Barracks. Ever conscious of royal security, the visit had to be cancelled.

Four hours followed when Northampton hung in limbo until 9pm when you could have been deafened by the sighs of relief. The guns had been found. The royal visit was on!

Thank goodness. Obviously I knew nothing of it until John told me, but I would have been terribly upset, after all I had prepared my commentary notes for Radio Northampton down to the minutest detail of Diana's outfit by the French couturier Catherine Walker.

But St Sep's could continue with its celebrations and John Keightley could sleep in peace!

Over the years he has proved to be a champion of Northampton's most celebrated church.

Passionate about raising colossal sums for the Restoration Appeal, John has overseen 25 royal visits and organised 151 concerts. The appeal was launched in February 1982

with out beloved Princess Alice as its Royal Patron.

The small, but faithful congregation aimed to raise £12,000 as their contribution and 28 years later they have just passed £410,000.

During the four days following that Royal visit in 1989, an amazing 15,000 people came to look at the exhibition of costumes and on the following Monday, the Mayor, plus all the former mayors still living, welcomed 1,000 schoolchildren to learn of Northampton's colourful past. The Appeal Fund was swelled by £86,000 too!

Now the £1.2m Restoration Appeal has reached its target. The final hurdle was crossed when two spinster members of the congregation each left £32,000. A perfect way of celebrating the church's 910th birthday this year.

It was founded by Simon de Senlis, Earl of Northampton in 1100. He had taken part in the First Crusade and the heart of St Sep's, The Crusader Round, was built on the pattern of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

It's thought that at least 10 other similar churches were built around England. Now including Northampton's, only four Crusader Rounds are left; the Temple Church in London, St Andrew the Great in Cambridge and St John The Baptist, Little Maplestead in Essex. ■

## Long Lost Trails

The following are trying to re-establish contact...

### DERRICK WILLIAM GEORGE WRIGHT

Seeking relatives of Corporal Derrick William George Wright of Dunmow, Essex, Private John Albert Looker of Stepney, and Private H.A. Meyer, all of 129 Company, Royal Pioneer Corps. All three killed on 8 June 1944 (D-Day+2) in a German air raid on their position in Normandy and buried in British Cemetery, Hermanville-sur-Mer.

Wright and Looker were friends of my grandfather, who served alongside them.

I recently visited the cemetery at Hermanville-sur-Mer, and have photographs of the graves of the three men mentioned. Please feel free to get in touch if you are related to them. Contact: Pete Hurren paxtonyid@gmail.com

### RON BLACKBURN

I am trying to find Ron Blackburn. I served with Ron back in the 80's he was Cpl RPC and I was REME.

We served together at The Training Battalion And Depot REME in Arborfield and also again in Detmold. I believe he

settled somewhere in the North West having originally come from the Manchester area. Contact Carl Coombes carl@extramilebiketours.com

### NORMAN WISDOM PHOTO

At the opening of the film "The Square Peg" starring Norman Wisdom a group of RPC Soldiers in Blues attended as a Guard of Honour from the Training Centre, Hermitage Camp, Wrexham.

I together with the following personnel attended Lt Ray, Lt Gettings, WO2 Bennett, WO2 Scotland, Sgt Banks, Sgt Parker, WO1 (RSM) Atkins, Pte Ponds and Pte Varnise. I had the pleasure of having Norman Wisdom standing in front of me, has anyone a photograph of that?

Please contact Mr CJ Starr, c/o RPC Association.

### LESLIE IAN JENKINSON (24473280)

The mother of Leslie is trying to make contact and has left a message in the forums section of our website under 521 Company.

### PADDY NUGENT

Does anyone remember Paddy Nugent from Ireland who was at the old Conington/Glatton airbase taking care of Italian POW'S between 1945-1947. If so could they please make contact as some of the local people who are still alive often speak about his beautiful singing and wonder what became of him. Contact Shiela Holtzen (from Alaska) c/o RPC Association.

### 405 COMPANY

405 Company, Monkton Farleigh Camp. Mr Phil Marks is trying to contact members of 405 Coy serving from 1955 -57 at Monkton Farleigh Camp. Contact Mr P Marks, c/o RPC Association.

### THOMAS CARROLL

(Died Trieste 17 January 1954)

If any reader has any memories of my grandfather Thomas Carroll, and his involvement during the BETFOR years, or knows of anyone else who may, I would gratefully hear of them. I was

only eleven when he died, but now, at 68, find myself drawn to finding out more about him. My wife and I recently visited his grave in Trieste for the first time.

Most of the 33 graves there were of young (18, 19, 20 years old) soldiers. If my grandfather's name jolts a memory, you are likely to have been of a similarly young age. My grandfather, though, could have been your father: he was 52 when he died.

Contact Thomas Carroll Marshall m.loenmarshall@tiscali.co.uk

### AAJLR TONFANAU

Did you serve at the AAJLR Tonfanau (between Barmouth and Aberdovey), if so please check the following link:

<http://www.aaajlr.org/tinckey=G7043TpO&formname=allboys>

### B SHIFT, REGIMENTAL POLICE CAD KINETON

Did you work on this shift, Mr David Armstrong is trying to locate ex colleagues. Contact David A Armstrong c/o RPC Association.



# Last Post

It is with sadness to report the following deaths

## LINEHAM GEORGE

**Maj (498659) 29 Oct 10 Wrexham (Aged 72)**

Served 2 Jun 59 - 30 Sept 86. The following appeared in the Royal Pioneer Issue 92 (Sept 67). Royal Pioneer Corps Sgt Commended

"Sergeant George Frederick Lineham, a 28 year old soldier serving with the Royal Pioneer Corps, has been commended by Lieutenant-General Sir Geoffrey Baker, COC-in-C Southern Command, for the part he played when the aircraft in which he was travelling made an emergency landing at Manston, Kent on 20 April last. At the time of the incident, Sgt Lineham was in charge of a party of soldiers flying by charter aircraft to Australia. Shortly after take-off it became apparent that the landing gear had failed to retract properly and after repeated efforts to remedy the defect the passengers were warned by the captain of the aircraft that it would be necessary to make an emergency landing. After circling for a number of hours a difficult landing was successfully carried out. During the tense and disturbing time before the landing Sgt Lineham reassured his men, instructed them as to the emergency drill, and by his leadership and example produced an atmosphere of steadiness and control which was a very valuable factor in the maintenance of calm amongst the other passengers.

### Leadership and Example

The behaviour of the sergeant and his group of soldiers both during the flight and after the emergency landing when they provided assistance, made a significant contribution to the morale of their fellow passengers and indeed drew their admiration. The citation states: "Sergeant Lineham displayed leadership and example in keeping with the best tradition of the Service". Sgt Lineham, who joined the RPC in 1959 and is a section sergeant with 521 Company RPC at Bicester, Oxfordshire, is at present on detached duty with the Maralinga Range Support Unit, Australia."

The following appeared in the Royal Pioneer Issue 114 (Mar 73)

206 Coy – Our new CSM who also has the distinction of being the youngest CSM serving with the Corps. He joined the Army in June 1959 as a National Serviceman and decided to make the Army his career. He has served in Aden, Australia, Germany as in all the Companies of the Corps and the Training Centre. He is married and has 3 children.

George was commissioned in 1974 and joined 522 Company.



Major George Lineham

## DUFFIN LEONARD ARTHUR PTE

**(13095297) 1 Dec 10 (Aged 89)**

**Portchester, Hants**

Served 17 July 41 - 21 May 46

## CLARKE LESLIE CPL (23939997)

**3 Dec 10 (Aged 65) Stratford Upon Avon.**

Joined RPC in Mar 64 and was in Rhine Section under Sgt Mel Evans. He was posted to 206 Coy at Long Marston where he became the projectionist in the cinema.

On leaving the Army he lived and worked in the Stratford Upon Avon area at the Red Horse Hotel, The Royal Shakespeare Company and finally was the ferryman.

## PIPER GORDON ENSELL

**Lt Col 21 Oct 10, West Chinnock**

Aged 74

## GRIFFITHS FREDERICK DAVID

**(3970245) 27 Oct 10 (Aged 89)**

Brecon. Served 7 Jun 40 - 23 Aug 46

## STOUT JAMES (14039823)

**15 Mar 10 (Aged 82)**

**Willenhall**

Served Jun 45 - Mar 48

## GARADI MAX (13035179)

**10 Oct 10 (Aged 96) London**

Served 4 May 40 - 24 Jan 46

## CUNNINGHAM JOHN EDWARD (14393639)

**16 Jan 11 (Aged 86)**

Served 17 Oct 42 - 10 May 47 in 179, 294, 193 and 224 Coys

## PERRY WILLIAM LESLIE (14943523)

**14 Sept 10 (Aged 83) Sale, Cheshire**

Served 14 Apr 45 - 19 May 48

## TUFF JOHN BARRY (23670087)

**30 Oct 10 (Aged 64)**

**Countesthorpe, Leics**

Served 23 Feb 59 - 22 Feb 65

## JOHNSON CHARLES LCPL (5251538)

**3 Feb 11 (Aged 90)**

**Pershore, Wills**

Enlisted Glos Regt 1938, transferred to Pioneer Corps 8 Jan 43 and served until 26 Jan 46 in 804 and 145 Coys

## BRIDGER GEORGE CHARLES SGT (22971914)

**2 Mar 11 (Aged 75)**

**Northampton**

Ex MHE Instructor at RPC Trg Centre



Sgt George Bridger



Lt Col Robin Wither

## WITHER ROBIN LT COL (479480)

**19 Dec 10 (Aged 67) Invellan, Argyle. Retired Apr 88**

The following appeared in The Royal Pioneer Issue 157 (Aug 84)

"We have said 'au revoir' to the 21C who had decided to sail single-handed around UK in one month.

He is following in the footsteps of our other Corps sailor, Capt McNaught, who crossed the Atlantic last year. It's not the Atlantic this time but something equally challenging as he has set sail on a single-handed around Britain cruise in a 14 ft Bosun Dinghy, aptly named 'Pioneer'.

He left Aldeburgh on the Suffolk coast on 16 June and is going clockwise round the mainland. He can be excused for missing out the Orkney and Shetland Islands, but will be passing on the outside of the Isle of Man. He planned to hop round the coast with the longest leg 85 miles.

He will be dropping anchor or parking alongside at night inshore and sleeping on the boat after spending approximately 15 hours a day at sea.

This is all pretty hair-raising stuff, especially when the waves on the static water tank, where he has been testing for leaks, were enough to put the ground-based Pioneer off.

He says he is 'fulfilling a personal ambition' – the length some people go to escape from the Training Centre!

As far as we know it's not been done before and it is in aid of three worthy charities, the ABF, RNLI and the Mayor's Fund for the Bedridden.





# WO2 Charles Henry Wood

**Warrant Officer Class 2 (WO2) Charles Henry Wood from 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC (Royal Logistic Corps), serving with the Counter-Improvised Explosive Device Task Force, was killed in Afghanistan on Tuesday 28 December 2010.**



■ Large crowds line the High Street at Wootton Bassett to pay their respects to 'Charlie'

Pictures: Supplied

**W**O2 Charles 'Charlie' Wood deployed on Operation HERRICK 13 on 6th November 2010 as an Advanced Search Advisor.

Trained to coordinate all aspects of Improvised Explosive Device (IED) detection, he was assigned to lead the clearance of a route through the Khushdal Kalay area of the Helmand River Valley to increase the freedom of movement and safety of the local population. In the early afternoon of 28 December 2010, with the task nearing completion, Warrant Officer Class 2 Wood was caught in the blast from an IED and killed.

WO2 Charles Henry Wood, aged 34, joined the Army in August 1994 and moved to 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC. His leadership abilities were recognised early and he gained rapid promotion and subsequent postings to the more prestigious and demanding jobs in his field. Operationally experienced, he completed deployments to Iraq in

2003 and Bosnia in 2007. He was posted from the Army Training Regiment Pirbright to 518 Pioneer Squadron as Sergeant Major in June 2009, and volunteered to lead his Squadron through their search training and on to their deployment to Afghanistan. A talented and successful Warrant Officer with masses of potential, he had Late Entry commissioning firmly in his sight.

An ardent supporter of his home town football club, Middlesbrough, he also represented his Regimental team on numerous occasions both on the pitch and, more recently, behind the scenes as trainer and manager. He was a successful fundraiser and raised many thousands of pounds for forces charities. He leaves behind his wife, Heather; his mother, Barbara, his father, John, and his sisters, Samantha and Amanda.

"The family have lost a son, a brother and an uncle and I have

lost my loving husband who was also my best friend. Charlie had an infectious personality who made a positive effect on everyone he met; he had a heart of gold and endeared himself to everyone. He will be sorely missed by those who had the good fortune to have met and known him. He will be forever in our thoughts for the rest of our lives."

**Charlie's wife, Heather Wood**

"Squadron Sergeant Major Charles Henry Wood was a soldier, leader, husband and a man I am proud to call my friend. A truly inspirational character, he had an irrepressible enthusiasm, an infectious and at times hilarious sense of humour and a true zest for life. He had the epitome of a 'glass half full' attitude to life. His lively and outgoing personality had a palpably positive effect on all he worked with; he was loved and admired by the Officers and all ranks, of our close knit Regiment.

The consummate professional, he always strived to lead from the front and by example. He would never expect his soldiers to do any task that he was not prepared to do himself. This was never more so, than in his role as an Advanced Search Advisor with the C-IED Task Force. He volunteered for this demanding job, along with fellow soldiers from his Squadron, in full knowledge of the potential risks. As always, he threw himself 'heart and soul' into this new challenge, with his usual energy and vitality. He led with boundless energy, endless encouragement and his typically light touch. He was, with every fibre of his being, a role model to his soldiers and a man of the very highest calibre.

Today his Squadron, 518 Pioneer Squadron, are without a Sergeant Major, but we have also lost a man passionate about his Pioneer trade and about his Regiment. He immortalised the adage 'ask not what your Regiment can do for you, but what you can do for your Regiment'.

His tragic death leaves a huge void amongst our ranks; but his memory will live on in all of us.

23 Pioneer Regiment has lost one of its finest; the Regiment is a darker and less colourful place without him. Our deepest sympathies go out to his wife Heather and his family at this most difficult of times.

Charlie had an infectious personality who made a positive effect on everyone he met; he had a heart of gold and endeared himself to everyone."

**Lieutenant Colonel Dom Fletcher RLC, Commanding Officer 23 Pioneer Regiment**

"Today our Corps has lost a great leader in the form of Warrant Officer (Class 2) Squadron Sergeant Major Charles Henry Wood RLC. Charlie was an extremely motivated Sergeant Major who was fiercely loyal and utterly dependable no matter

what the situation was. He was a complete stalwart within his Squadron and more so within the Regiment.

His passion and professionalism at work was an inspiration to all. He always led from the front in all that he did. He was a strong and caring Sergeant Major that always got the best from his troops. The Warrant Officers and Sergeants Mess has lost one of its great characters.

An outstanding soldier and a great friend, WO2 (SSM)

Charles Henry Wood RLC will be sadly missed in all aspects of Regimental life.

Our deepest sympathies and thoughts are with his wife Heather and family at this difficult time."

**Warrant Officer Class 1 Craig Johnstone, RLC Regimental Sergeant Major, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC**

WO2 Charlie Henry Wood was a keen sportsman who had a true passion and flare for football. He was an avid football fan he cherished his beloved Middlesbrough. Full of life, Charlie's positive outlook on life was infectious, 'the glass was most definitely half full in his eyes'. A perfectionist in everything he undertook, Charlie set the standard for his peers. He will be sorely missed by the Regiment."

**Staff Sergeant James Belcher-Marks, Operations Senior Non Commissioned Officer 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC, (now SSM 518 Sqn)**

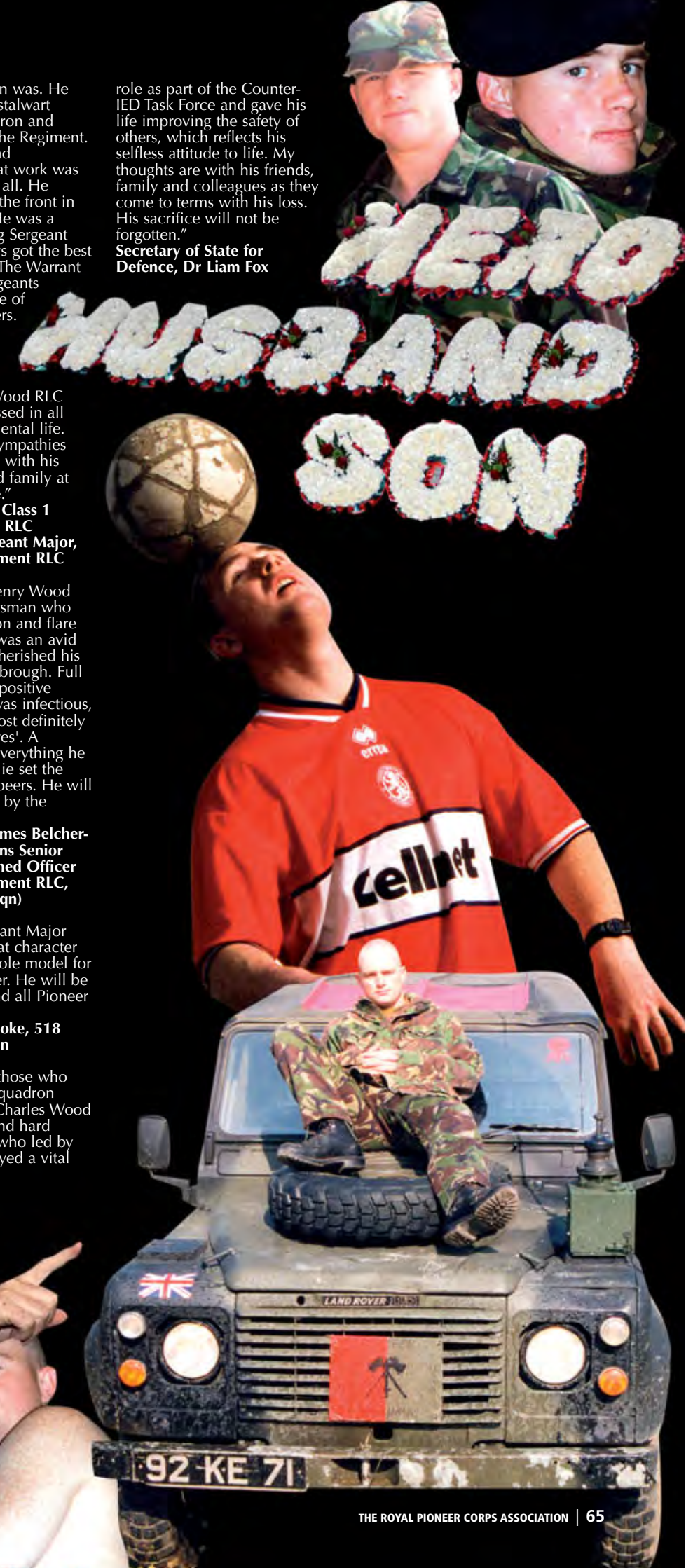
"Squadron Sergeant Major Wood was a great character and the perfect role model for any young soldier. He will be missed by me and all Pioneer soldiers."

**Private Lewis Rooke, 518 Pioneer Squadron**

"It is clear from those who knew him that Squadron Sergeant Major Charles Wood was a talented and hard working soldier who led by example. He played a vital

role as part of the Counter-IED Task Force and gave his life improving the safety of others, which reflects his selfless attitude to life. My thoughts are with his friends, family and colleagues as they come to terms with his loss. His sacrifice will not be forgotten."

**Secretary of State for Defence, Dr Liam Fox**







# And finally...



**Staff Speak - What the \*\*\*\*, Don Juan and Issue 174 of The Hornet from January 1967.**

**Report: Norman Brown**  
**Picture: RPCA Archive**

**H**AVE YOU ever been to a briefing where you are not quite sure exactly what it is you are being required to do? Have you ever come out of a briefing with an empty notebook not quite sure how the last 3 hours disappeared? Have you ever come away from a briefing not quite sure what the subject of it was? If so, you are not alone; you have been the unwitting victim of 'Staff Speak'.

Staff Speak is a form of communication by those talented few selected for high office.

The ability to communicate is essential to a staff officer and Staff Speak is the art of using metaphors (preferably mixed) to convey ideas, after all, a picture does paint a thousand words.

At least 2 clichés are required in every sentence and at no time should content be allowed to detract from presentation; points are deducted for anything that makes sense. The technique is particularly useful when one hasn't got the faintest idea what is going on, but credibility relies on saying something.

Bonus points are awarded when Staff Speak is used to delegate action,

accountability and culpability while holding on to all opportunities to garner any potential plaudits for oneself.

So, when did you last hear something like this, and does it make sense to you?

1. "I think we need to hit the ground running, keep our eye on the ball, and make sure that we are singing off the same song sheet. At the end of the day. It is not a level playing field and the goal posts may move; if they do, someone else may have to pick it up and run with it. We therefore must have a golf bag of options hot-to-trot from the word 'go'. It is your train set, but we cannot afford to leave it on the back burner, we've got a lot of irons in the fire right now."

2. We will need to un-stick a few potential pooh-traps but it all depends on the flash-to-bang time and fudge factor allowed. Things may end up slipping to the left and, if they do, we will need to run a tight ship. I don't want to re-invent the wheel but we must get right down in the weeds on this one. If push comes to shove, we may have to up stumps and then we'll be in a whole new ball park."

3. "I suggest we test the water with a few warmers into the bank. If JPHQ can produce the goods then we are cooking on gas. If not, then we are in a world of hurt. I don't want to die in a ditch over it but we could easily end up in a flat spin if people start getting twitchy. To that end, I want to get round the bazaars and make sure the movers and shakers are on side from day one. If you can hit me with your shopping list I can take it to the head honchos and start the ball rolling."

4. "If it goes pear-shaped, it is no good throwing our toys out of the pram or our teddy in the corner. Instead we may have to fine-tune it in order to do a re-gain. We'll be hung out to dry if it becomes a showstopper."

5. There is light at the end of the tunnel and I think we have backed a winner here. If it all gets blown out of the water, however, I will be throwing a track. So get

your feet into my in-tray and give me chapter and verse as to how you see things planning out. As long as our ducks are in a row I think the ball will stay in play and we can come up smelling of roses."

6. "Before you bomb burst and throw smoke, it is imperative we play the white man this time around; we need to nail our colours very firmly to the mast and look at the big picture, after all the Devil is in the detail. We've got to march to the beat of the drum, even though we could be on a sticky wicket. Just play with a straight bat and watch out for the low balls."

7. I've been on permanent send for long enough and I've had my 10 pence worth, I don't want to rock the boat or teach anyone to suck eggs. We must keep this very firmly in our sight picture or it could fall between the cracks. I don't want to be seen re-arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic but if the cap fits, wear it."

8. "At the end of the day, it's like a big game of space invaders, the aliens are getting closer and if we don't zap them it'll be game over for the lot of us. There are a number of wolves close to the sledge, and alligators close to the canoe, which need to be shot. As you are aware, it's a bit like punching a cloud round here. The heads of sheds often play fast and loose, so it's standby to repel boarders, I'm afraid."

9. "Right! Unless anyone wants to flag up any bullet points I'll be in my office. My door is always open and I'm as flexible as a palm tree in a hurricane. So, the ball is in your court; don't let the wheel come off. If it unravels, your arse is grass, I'm a lawn mower, and then it's 'Good Night, Vienna'."

If you are good at staff speak then maybe you have a bright future ahead of you., Talking the language is only half of it, though; you have to be able to use PowerPoint as well!

**A**ND finally, finally, had occasion to drive into Bicester one evening with the self-styled "Don Juan" of the Regiment. All the way he spoke of nothing but his forthcoming rendezvous with one of the choicest local blondes.

You can imagine my surprise when about two hours later I met him by himself in Yates's. Before I could ask about his date, he wailed, "I can't make it out! I just can't make it out! I waited over an hour for her, and she never arrived."

Then, realising that his reputation was at stake, he added quickly, "So I stood her up!"



## Coming up in the next newsletter ...

- Forthcoming events   ■ Your stories   ■ Your Letters   ■ Photo Gallery
- News from 23 and 168 Pioneer Regiments   ■ Report from Reunion Weekend
- Another unpublished complete story   ■ Reviews   ■ And much more!

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# THE HORNET

THE PICTURE STORY PAPER for BOYS 5d

## TWO MEDALS FOR 265!

THE Royal Pioneer Corps was formed in October 1939 as the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps. It was the recruit of the British Army, yet it earned the honoured prefix of "Royal" before the war ended. It was men like Corporal Scully who were responsible. He served in 265 Company, engaged in heavy rescue work in Birkenhead on the night of March 13th, 1941.

CORPORAL! CORPORAL SCULLY! I THINK THERE'S SOMEBODY TRAPPED IN THIS LOT OVER HERE!



NIP OVER AND TELL MISTER CHITTENDEN THAT I'M GOING TO TRY TO TUNNEL INTO THE DEBRIS. EVERYBODY ELSE CLEAR OUT. THEM WALLS DON'T SEEM SAFE.



HELP! FOR PITY'S SAKE, GET US OUT ...

TRY TO HOLD OUT, CHUM, I'M TRYING TO GET AT YOU.

CONTINUED ON BACK PAGE





Corporal J. P. Scully of the Pioneers was not forgotten. He was awarded the George Cross for his courage and fortitude. Lieutenant C. C. Chittenden received the George Medal. The Royal Pioneer Corps had begun to add lustre to its badge!