

THE PIONEER



PROUD AND EMOTIONAL FAREWELL

THE DISBANDMENT PARADE MARKS THE END OF **23 PIONEER REGIMENT**. A REGIMENT WHICH HAS SERVED THE COUNTRY IN AN EXEMPLARY AND PROFESSIONAL MANNER FOR MANY YEARS.







23 Pioneer Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps formed up and marched onto the parade square for the final time

Report: Capt Howes, Adjt 23 Pnr Rgt
Pictures: Paul Brown (unless stated)

THE intention was to go out with a bang and I certainly think that this was achieved. With the Disbandment Parade being held on the Friday people started to turn up on the Thursday, the first being Archie Cox who arrived at 0645 hrs!

Throughout the day what started as a steady stream turned into a rush in the afternoon with large numbers arriving together. Once accommodated they were fed in the Scully Club and on the Thursday evening all were invited into the Sergeants Mess courtesy of the RSM. During the evening Mr Michael Burling presented Mr Norman Brown with an engraved mirror in recognition of the work he does on behalf of all members of the Association.

Early Friday morning more members arrived some just in time for a parade rehearsal under the orders of the Association RSM(!) Mr Geordie Dewsnap. The Disbandment Parade started at 1100 hrs when 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC formed up and marched onto the square for the final time. Everyone put in a fantastic effort and with HRH The Duke of Gloucester in attendance, the standard of drill and turnout was excellent. During the Parade he made the following speech:

"Firstly, can I say what a privilege it is to be present at this parade today. This disbandment parade marks the end of 23

Pioneer Regiment – a Regiment which has served the Country in an exemplary, and professional, manner for many years.

It is a Regiment which is justifiably proud of its strong identity, culture and ethos. The heritage dates back several decades. This was no more evident than when the Regiment bade farewell to Bicester, earlier this year, after some 70 years presence in the town. Operationally you have served in many theatres but not least of which, most recently, Afghanistan. In roles such as High Threat Search, Force Protection and Mortuary Affairs, you have been right at the very heart of operational success. On your behalf I acknowledge the ultimate sacrifice paid by WO2 Charlie Wood, Corporal Andrew Roberts and Private "Sili" Silibaravi in their line of duty. I know many of their family and friends are here today and, let me assure you, our thoughts are with you.

To those on parade, your turnout and bearing today leaves me in no doubt that you have continued to deliver all that has been asked of you right until the very end. You have had notable successes on the military skills and sporting front out of all proportion to your remaining numbers. You remain the undefeated Royal Logistic Corps Gore Trophy Champions and no other Regiment in the Army, or Marines, has won the Commando Speed March more times than you. You should hold your heads high. These, amongst others, are notable achievements.

Finally, can I remark on how good it is to see so many Pioneer veterans here today. It is especially poignant for me as Patron of the Royal Pioneer Association. I look forward to your march past with pride and I would encourage you to continue to cultivate those friendships which have been formed over your military service. It remains a truism "Once a Pioneer always a Pioneer"

Thank you."

The ceremonial axes were then blessed by the Padre handed over to two Pioneer soldiers who are continuing in service. This is symbolically important: the axes will continue to be paraded on formal occasions in the future and, along with the axes on our cap badge, will remind others of our Pioneer identity, culture and ethos. Following a brief recital of the history of the Regiment, the lowering and folding of the Regimental Standard marked the end of the parade; the flag and ceremonial axes joined on at the rear, and the Regiment marched past the dais to cheers and a tumultuous applause from over 600 friends, families, well-wishers and old comrades.

What added to the poignancy of the occasion was that following on behind the regiment were 100 marching veterans of The Royal Pioneer Corps Association – again, to an equally rapturous applause.

In the rear was our In Pensioner Micky Hull in a wheelchair being smartly pushed by Mr Peter Thomas – the history books can now declare that Pete was the last Pioneer to march off the square.

DISBANDMENT PARADE

26th September 2014



The first reference to Pioneers serving with the British military was in 1346 - we will be back one day...

THE first reference to Pioneers serving with the British military was in 1346 when the English Army was busy fighting in France. Pioneers then were paid extra because they were deemed to have been trained to a higher standard than their colleagues in the rank and file, and because they contributed specialist skills to the King's Army.

As time moved on and the nature of warfare changed, the presence of Pioneers remained.

The beard and white apron – which have become so symbolic of the Pioneers – originated during the Napoleonic wars at the turn of the 19th century.

These items provided protection during his blacksmith duties by preventing splinters of metal from entering the skin and limiting burns sustained when handling explosives. The Pioneer Sergeant could easily be seen crossing the battlefield carrying his collection of tools including the large and terrifying axe – smashing open fortifications and providing close support to the Infantry.

In WWI it was the Labour Corps which provided the bulk of the manpower for some of the most important, but unglamorous, work of the War. By Armistice Day there were nearly 400,000 Labour Corps soldiers in the Army, which represented nearly 10 per cent of its strength. It was these men who cleared roads, built railways, dug trenches and erected barbed wire defences the length and breadth of the Western Front – often in range of the enemy who harassed them day and night with deadly fire.

The Labour Corps was disbanded in 1920 but not before a colossal cleaning effort had been completed to clear the battlefields of most of the visible ordnance and detritus from the war.

With the outbreak of war once again in 1939, the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps was formed. Renamed The Pioneer Corps in 1940, it was filled with mostly older

soldiers who could provide essential military assistance both in bomb damaged Britain and to the field Army fighting across the world.

Their tasks included providing support and manpower to civilian emergency services, acting as stretcher bearers, providing force protection, guarding POW camps and operating supply depots, to name but a few.

These essential tasks were also occasionally interrupted by direct fighting; for example, at Boulogne in May 1940, Pioneers fought a desperate rearguard action allowing withdrawing Irish and Welsh Guards to be evacuated before they themselves were finally pulled onto ships after having fought alone for six hours against German armoured forces.

There were other important heroic events for which the Pioneers would become famous. Indeed, the names Scully and Tancred will be instantly recognisable to anyone who has ever served with the Pioneers and it is these men, and many others, who evoked the Pioneer Spirit which we continue to emulate up to this day.

After the War the Pioneers remained in the British Army's orbit and in 1946 were granted the prefix 'Royal' to their name for recognition of their war-winning contribution in all the WWII campaigns. The Royal Pioneer Corps (RPC) went on to provide assistance to every conflict fought by the British Army; notably Aden, Northern Ireland and The Falklands.

The First Gulf War became the last war to be fought by the RPC before amalgamation in 1993. 23 Pioneer Regiment, of course, superseded the Royal Pioneer Corps and continued to provide the Army with specialist Pioneer skills throughout all its subsequent conflicts.

In Bosnia and Kosovo the artisan Pioneer came to the fore; in those deployments highly trained Pioneers rebuilt schools, houses and transport infrastructure whilst

uncovering mass graves and securing the population. When the British Military entered Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, the Pioneers were right at the forefront of operations.

They provided everything from prison guards to Force Protection, and from Mortuary Affairs Operators to High Risk IED Search teams. IED search became a demanding and, sadly, deadly Pioneer task during the Afghanistan conflict. In 2010 WO2 (SSM) Charlie Woods was killed while conducting an IED search in Helmand Province and, in 2012, Cpl Andrew Roberts and Pte Ratu Silibaravi were killed by indirect fire while operating from CF BURMA.

In addition to these fatalities, four more Pioneer soldiers received serious, life-changing, injuries as a result of IEDs. The last Pioneers to be deployed on operations were in the Mortuary Affairs role; the last team returned in 2013.

Although that marked the end of operations for Pioneer Soldiers, until very recently Pioneers continued to provide manpower in support of battle-group training exercises internationally in BATUS, Canada, and Belize.

Moreover, within the UK, specially trained soldiers from the Regiment have driven and escorted vehicles returning from operations at a variety of RAF bases and earlier this year individuals were tasked to support the military activities following the flooding in the south-west (Op PITCHPOLE).



END OF AN ERA





One of the most active and successful sporting regiments in the Corps and arguably the wider Army

THE regiment has recently been one of the most active and, arguably, successful sporting regiments both in the Corps and wider Army.

Pioneer soldiers have wholeheartedly subscribed to the CO's intent for the Regiment to "Sprint to the Finish" – and have delivered in spades.

This can be seen when glancing at the Regimental silver cabinet which is bursting with trophies won at Corps, Army and Inter-Service level.

The Pioneers set their exceptionally high sporting standard early in the year by retaining the annual RLC Military Skills "Gore Trophy" award. This was followed by victory in the RLC Cross Country Championships for the 4th year in a row.

In March this year, the Pioneers won every single first place trophy at the demanding Commando Speed March, including the fastest team trophy for the third time in four years. Success in endurance events is only part of the story; 23 Pioneer Regiment reigned supreme in other sporting events such as RLC Mountain Biking, RLC Duathlon, RLC Twenty20

Cricket, RLC Orienteering and the Support Command (UK South) Minor Unit Basketball Championship. The Regiment also sent teams to the RLC Ski Championships, and hosted a 104 Log Bde Boxing Night in which they competed in seven of the eleven bouts. The demise of the Regiment certainly leaves some large sporting shoes to fill by other units in the Corps.

The recent commissioning of the 'Pioneer Spirit' award is a fitting legacy for a regiment which has done so much to promote sporting and competition success throughout the Corps and beyond.

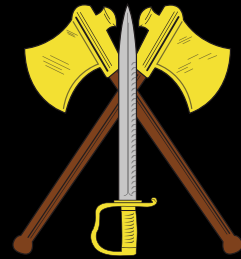
2013 marked the start of the CO's aspiration to place a Pioneer on every continent. Officers and soldiers from the regiment went on AT expeditions to Florida (Sub-Aqua diving), Spain (rock-climbing), India, South Africa and New Zealand (trekking). Although unable to make it to Antarctica, a team nonetheless made it to Greenland (Nordic Skiing).

For the participants, the expeditions were arduous and rewarding in equal measure which no doubt created life-long memories to be savoured.

2014 will see the last of the Pioneer AT expeditions depart. Lt Doyle-Tanner will lead an expedition to California (sky-diving), Lt Costin to Greece (rock-climbing) and Lt Du Plessis to Australia (sub-aqua diving).

These expeditions have proved to be an invaluable morale booster to the regiment in this difficult period.

Whilst requiring a fair degree of planning, organisational ability and leadership on the part of the young officer leading them, for many Pioneer soldiers they represented the last opportunity in their military careers to do something challenging yet extremely good fun.



The ceremonial axes will still be paraded at formal RLC occasions and will still feature on our headdress

It has been a reasonably turbulent couple of years since the A2020 decision was made to disband the Regiment. In the intervening period, although 268 soldiers have been made redundant, 130 have been transferred to other trades – a success story which is often overlooked.

That is not all though: a key part of any discussion of the 'Pioneer Legacy' would be incomplete without a mention of the 87 Pioneers (Cpl – WO1) who will continue to serve and share their knowledge and experience to the benefit of the wider Corps. Crucially, many of these will spend substantial periods of their remaining service within the training environment and therefore play an invaluable role shaping

the next generation of soldiers and helping to imbue them with that 'Pioneer spirit'.

Furthermore, the RPCA lives on. The annual reunion weekend for 2015 has already been booked – sadly not on St David's Barracks, needless to say – but the fact it's happening is reassuring nonetheless to all those Association members (including many serving officers) who still look forward with fondness to the annual get-together and chance to catch up with former colleagues and friends. In fact, the RPCA can still boast of a strong membership and camaraderie – in no small part due to the sterling work of Norman Brown who works tirelessly to publish the 'Pioneer' magazine and distribute it to association members.

Lastly, and as already mentioned, the Regimental symbol – the ceremonial axes – will continue to be paraded on formal RLC occasions and will still feature on our headdress. They will serve as a potent reminder to others of the Pioneer identity, culture and ethos long after the Regt has disappeared. ■



LABOR OMNIA VINCIT



END OF AN ERA





Front Cover

23 Pioneer Flag lowered for the last time

Picture: Paul Brown



Back Cover

Corps of Drums march for the last time at Bicester

Picture: Tracy Brown

EDITORIAL

THE ASSOCIATION has certainly had a very busy six months. It started with the planning for the Final March through Bicester Town on 26 July 2014 when "Old Comrades" were invited to march behind 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC. The 105 "Old Comrades" were very impressive as they marched through the town and raised great applause. A large number of Association members also attended as spectators.

Planning for the Reunion Weekend followed, it was the intention to celebrate our final Reunion with a good send-off and I think we managed to achieve this. Our thanks must go to 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC not only for their support this year but for the last 22 years. With the reduced numbers currently in the Regiment this has led to more work for the few left behind, a special mention must therefore be made to the Quartermaster's staff who worked very long hours to enable that we had a weekend to remember. They managed to 'borrow' extra beds (and the accompanying bedding!), they had to erect tents and marquees, they had to decorate the MT Hanger to make it presentable for our farewell "Red and Green" Ball – they achieved this and then on completion had to tidy up and make good!

THANK YOU on behalf of all members who attended.

We had 620 booked in for the Reunion Weekend, this does not include the many who turned up for the day or members of the Regiment. The 'Red and Green' Ball was a great success, it was closed by the Fijian Choir giving a display before the "Survivors" photograph was taken at 0315 hrs.

On pages 63-65 is a selection of letters from members who said how much they appreciated the weekend, we only had one complaint (except for those who moaned that they were accommodated at St George's Barracks) and we have published that message. One from 620 is not a bad figure!

Members of the Association Council have also been busy disposing of all Association property, the most expensive items (silver etc) have been donated to various establishments where they will be displayed and the Pioneers remembered. The Arab Dhow was presented to Bicester Town during the reception in Garth Park following the Parade through Bicester (see page 17). Other items have been sent to Bisley, Shrivenham, Sandhurst, Deepcut and HQ Land some sports trophies depicting the Mauritian Pioneers have actually been sent to Mauritius

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STOP PRESS

■ Photos that were took at the Disbandment/Reunion Weekend and also the Bicester Parade will be going online shortly.

STOP PRESS

■ Ex WO2 Bob McGuinness sadly lost his fight with leukemia and died on 27th October. Rest in Peace Bob.

STOP PRESS

■ Michael Robinson (ex WO2) is trying to find Dave Long, if you can assist please contact: michaelrobinson12@sky.com

■ Adrian Rumsey is trying to contact Ray Ball (from Leicester) who may have joined the Irish Police. Contact via Facebook.



and are to be displayed in the British Legion Club there. Items of smaller value were auctioned during the Reunion Weekend.

The two years' work in preparing the Pioneer painting came to fruition when it was unveiled by HRH The Duke of Gloucester after the Disbandment Parade on 26 September 2014. Maj Taff Teague has spent many hours in the research for this painting and it has been well received by all who have seen it. It is intended to sell prints of the painting, the first 550 will be signed by the Commanding Officers' of both 23 and 168 Pioneer Regiments and of course, the artist. Orders for these signed prints are now being taken, although at the time of going to press we do not have final costings.

As was mentioned during the Annual General Meeting, next year's reunion is to be held at the Royal Court Hotel, Coventry from 3 – 5 July 2015. The initial cost will be £140 per head for a three night stay, this includes 3 breakfasts, a carvery meal on the Friday and Sunday nights and a Gala Dinner on the Saturday night. The beer will be happy hour prices during the weekend - £2.20. It is intended that the Association will subsidise all members attending by £10 per night- full details are shown on the booking form which is enclosed with this

Newsletter.

This year our attendance at the Cenotaph is to be the largest yet with over 85 members booked to march. This doubles last year's attendance and once again we will be led by our President, Brigadier C Telfer. Let us hope we get a good mention by the BBC.

The WOs & SNCOs Pnr Reunion Club organise an excursion to the Army v Navy Rugby game at Twickenham each year, last year 130 attended. Next year it is to leave from St George's Barrack's, it is intended to allow non Club members to attend on a fill up basis on a first come first served basis. A booking form is included with this Newsletter.

I hope you find this Newsletter interesting, we are always looking for new material, have you a story to tell? If so please send it to us preferably with photographs.

Finally if you move please let us have your new address, a large number of Newsletters are still being returned "Gone Away".

Seasons greeting to all members and their families.

Norman Brown



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Can you spot the mouse?

12 members found the Cuneo mouse in the last edition. The winner was Frank Berry. Well done Frank!

The mouse was an easy one to find as well! It was on Page 39 on top of the Litter Barrel.

Can you spot the Cuneo Mouse in this edition?

Terence Cuneo painted 'Sword Beach' which shows the activities of the Pioneers who were among the first British

troops to land on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day.

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 this page!

Names of correct entries will be entered into a draw and the first 'out of the hat' will win a prize.

Entries should be submitted (by letter, email or telephone) by 15th December 2014.

Good luck.



23 Pioneer Regiment RLC marched through Bicester Town for the last time on Sunday 27 July 2014

Pictures: Paul Brown (unless stated)

THE day started with a Church Service at St Edburg's Church, Bicester. The Regimental Padre, Major Kevin Mentzel gave the following sermon:

"First thank you, Churchwardens and PCC and all of the St Edburg's family for inviting 23 Pioneer Regiment to what will be our final service in this church and in Bicester.

Charles Masheder, the Rector of Ambrosden, and a loyal supporter of the

Pioneers, was much looking forward to preaching this morning. Unfortunately, he has been somewhat under the weather for the last week or so and is very sorry he is unable to be with us this morning. He wishes us all the best this and we wish him a speedy recovery. A few hours ago, not far from here, something that had been a vital part of people's lives and given people a livelihood, that inspired loyalty and fired people's imagination was blown apart. At 5.00 this morning three of the cooling

towers at Didcot power station were blown down in a matter of seconds – I was there.

There had been a lot of resistance to the towers being demolished, they had been an important part of people's lives and were an iconic feature of the Oxfordshire landscape – how many people, on driving north up the A34, perhaps from being away on holiday or on business – or on ops – on seeing the Didcot cooling towers, have thought "We're nearly home!"? >





The cooling towers will be missed, so will the Pioneers, which have had a long and proud association, with both Didcot and Bicester.

The Pioneers' tasks on a battlefield can be traced back through the annals of military history – there have always been a few grafters doing the hard work – clearing the way for fighting troops with the axes, digging trenches with their shovels – or, unimportantly, but unglamorously, digging latrines or graves.

Often unseen and unsung, the work of the Pioneers has been vital to the success of many military operations.

The 23 Pioneer Regiment of today evolved from 23 Group Pioneer Corps initially formed in the 1st World War as the Labour Corps, and due to the invaluable work of the Pioneers in the 2nd World War, they were granted the 'Royal' prefix in 1946.

It was not until 1993 that the Royal Pioneer Corps were absorbed into the newly formed Royal Logistic Corps, also comprising soldiers from the Royal Corps of Transport, Royal Army Ordnance Corps, the Army Catering Corps, and the Postal & Courier Service Royal Engineers.

The Pioneers have had a long association with Bicester dating back to 1940 when Pioneers were digging trenches and moving stores, later building and manning the stores depots at Bicester and Arnott with their innumerable sheds and hangars and miles of railway tracks.

And since the 2nd World War, Pioneers have gone out from Bicester to serve in Cyprus, Malta, the Falkland Islands, Iraq, the Balkans, Afghanistan – and many other places – sadly, not all to return.

In 2005, 23 Pioneer Regiment were honoured to have been granted the Liberty of Bicester in recognition of their long and loyal service to the country and proud association with the town of Bicester.

And, more recently, the naming of Pioneer Square is a further honour. >

BICESTER PARADE

27th July 2014

'But now what?' we may ask. What's the point of it all after all this blood, sweat, and tears over many years? Well, we are not alone in asking this question. The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes, reflected in the same way some 3,000 years ago when he said 'Vanity of vanities, All is vanity'.

In the passage that the Commanding Officer read to us, we see the author of Ecclesiastes observing, somewhat wearily [read verses 1-3]. And he asks, v.10 'What gain has the worker from his toil?' It can all seem somewhat gloomy, resigned, and despairing. Is that all there is?

As Peggy Lee sang:
Is that all there is?
Is that all there is?
If that's all there is my friends
Then let's keep dancing
Let's break out the booze and have a ball

If that's all there is.
If that's all there is, I would suggest that there is more. It's all a matter of

perspective.

I'm told of a shoe manufacturer who decided to open the market in a distant developing nation sent two salesmen to the undeveloped territory. One salesman cabled back: "Prospect here nil. No one wears shoes." The other salesman reported enthusiastically, "Market potential terrific! Everyone is barefooted." - It's all a matter of perspective.

Yes, the writer of Ecclesiastes observes this oft-repeating cycle: 'a time to seek, a time, to lose; a time to keep, a time to cast away'.

However, the writer of Ecclesiastes also offers another perspective: [read vv 10-11].

'He has put eternity into man's heart'. I, for one, find that a most illuminating and uplifting, and encouraging notion. It means, yes, that everything has its time, but it is only in eternity that all things make sense. Rather being cynical and gloomy, the author of Ecclesiastes puts mundane realities into a heavenly perspective.

The Apostle Paul writing to the Corinthians encourages them – and us – to have this perspective:

'So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day - because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

(2 Cor 4: 16,18)

So what next for the Pioneers? As Ecclesiastes says: there is a time for war, a time for peace. Who knows what's around the corner? We live in interesting times. Some will soldier on in the Army, wearing the RLC cap badge that includes the Pioneers crossed axes, some will soldier with a new cap badge, and many will be embarking on new adventures in civvie street.

But all of us should thank God for the Pioneers, for this good and noble enterprise: 'He (God) has made everything beautiful in its time.' (v.11) >

Pictures: Paul Brown





And we should thank God that it has been our privilege to have been part of it: 'everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil - this is God's gift to man.' (v. 13).

So thank you, Bicester, for your interest, support, and loyalty to the Pioneers over many years. The Pioneers march on into history today - but I'm sure in the years to come many will stagger back to Sheep Street for a few lemonades.

Thank you. Amen." >

The Foreword for the programme for the Service was written by the Commanding Officer, Lt Col David Clouston:

On behalf of 23 Pioneer Regiment can I firstly express our thanks to everyone at St Edburg's Church for hosting the service so well today. We are also grateful to the Mayor and Councillors for facilitating the parade through to Garth Park later this afternoon. It promises to be a great occasion.

The words written on the back cover are taken from the Liberty of the Town scroll which was presented to the Regiment back in 2006. That liberty was greeted in recognition of the long standing connection that the Regiment has with the town. The Regiment was further honoured, in 2013, by having Pioneer Square named in recognition of our continued engagement with the town. At that opening I made an observation that Bicester has become home to many of my soldiers over the decades and, furthermore, for some it is the only home they have ever really known. That is some statement but you only have to talk to members of my Regiment to realise how true it actually is.

In reorganising the Regiment today I would ask that we all spare a thought for the families, in particular, of those soldiers who have paid the ultimate sacrifice in their line of duty: WO2 Charlie Wood, Corporal 'Ginge' Roberts and Private 'Sili' Silibaravi. We will all remember you this day and the price you paid.

Looking ahead, the Regiment's future is now reasonably certain. We will disband formally in September this year but a small number of soldiers will remain in the Barracks carrying out final associated tasks. We should see the arrival of the new Regiment by late 2015. I can only hope that they receive the same extremely warm welcome that our Regiment has over the years. We have been honoured to be associated with the town and on behalf of all those whom I represent a very warm 'Thank You' to you all.

Following the Church Service the Regiment proudly marched through the town to Garth Park, 105 'Old Comrades' followed, remarkably all in step! Mr Ian Dewsnap, a former drill instructor, gave the commands. The 'Old Comrades' were led by Mr Dusty Bryant carrying the Association Standard.

It was a moment of pride as the soldiers and Old Comrades were acknowledged by a crowd of over 1,000 spectators who applauded, cheered and whistled as they marched past. The salute was taken by Mrs Lynn Pratt, the Mayor of Bicester.

The Commanding Officer, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC, Lt Col David Clouston said that he was grateful to everyone who turned out and said it left him with a lump in his throat.

During the reception the silver-piece 'Arab Dhow' was presented to Bicester Town by the Commanding Officer.

In the evening a Regimental Dinner took place in the Scully Club where all members of the Regiment sat down to a first class meal. Each person received an engraved tankard and a slate place mat as a reminder of the Regiment. During the evening the Commanding Officer presented many awards, mainly for sporting achievements, which had been won during the year. >



The Silver Arab Dhow was presented to Bicester Town

Picture: Norman Brown



The silver-piece in the form of an Arab Dhow mounted on a base shaped like the island of Cyprus was commissioned in 1968 when 518 Company were disbanded. The inscription reads: "Presented by officers and soldiers who served with pride in 518 Company Royal Pioneer Corps". It was hoped to keep alive the memory of 518 Company, which upheld, in all theatres in which it served, the highest traditions of the Corps.

The Company was formed in Oct 48 and employed at CAD LONGTOWN as part of 10 Gp. It was selected to support the Suez Operation in Dec 56 and deployed to CYPRUS, arriving 11 Nov 56 where it was used on camp construction. Amalgamated with 524 Coy (in Cyprus) in Dec 59. A detachment was sent to KUWAIT in Nov 61. Company moved to ADEN in Nov 62. Employed on the Dhala

Road and in support of the RADFAN Operation (Dec 64). 1 man k.i.a. Responsible for the backloading of stocks and port operation Oct-Dec 67. Disbanded Jan 68. The Company was re-formed in June 1970 as the Royal Pioneer Corps' first Field Force Company and was based at Graven Hill, Bicester.

Oxfordshire Deputy Lord Lieutenant, Brigadier Ian Inshaw, spent five years as Bicester Garrison Commander. He said that the regiment had been disbanded twice before, with the foundations in the 19th Century Crimean War and the Labour Corps in 1917. He added that he would put a tenner on at 500/1 on it being reformed in the next 70 years.

Perhaps it may be resurrected again one day but for everyone present this felt like the end of 23 Pioneer Regiment. ■



Brigadier / Mayor Pictures: Paul Brown
Colonel in Church Picture: Supplied



PAST EVENTS



■ ON 6 May 14 Mr Dougie Durant represented the Pioneer contingent at the Army Dog Unit Northern Ireland Parade at the National Memorial Arboretum where he paid his respects to all dog handlers who were killed in the troubles including his old friend Cpl Derek Hayes who was from Lincolnshire and was Killed by a booby trap bomb in Crossmaglen in Armagh along with his dog Ben. Great honour to lead the parade.

Today I also saw a traction engine called the Pioneer - the owner wanted to nick my Pioneer umbrella!

■ 130 travelled from Bicester to Twickenham on May 13 2014, most of them wearing the red and green 23 Pioneer Regt RLC rugby tops, to watch the Army v Navy Rugby Match.

Once again the Army won 30 v 17. This year was the first time that Twickenham was a sell-out for this match with 82,000 attending. 57 of those leaving from Bicester were members of the WOs & SNCOs Pnr Reunion Club, it is hoped to continue this custom in future years.

■ ONCE AGAIN members of the RPC Nostalgia Group made their way to Redcar for their 8th reunion which was held on the 2/3 May 14 at the Clarendon Hotel Redcar.

A total of 44 members of the group from all over the country made the trip to meet old and new friends and to raise money for charity - this year's being Autism.

Members started to arrive about 1000hrs on the Friday. Dave Parris picked up Mick and Julie Radbourne with his taxi from Reading to Redcar. On arrival he gave a bill to Allan (Sooty) Sutcliffe for the amount of £200. After we picked him back up off the floor we all started the weekend.

The Friday night was a fancy dress and horse racing night held with the help of local man David Williams, this was followed by a Karaoke with the locals in the Clarry. Saturday night was the main night for the Reunion. There was an auction held by Allan Sutcliffe and Kevin Young with the help of their wives Liz and Anne-Marie. The Tombola was done by Michael and Julie Radbourne, all prizes having been donated by members of the group. So for that we thank you all. A local girl and Allan's Granddaughter Kelsey Sutcliffe from Skelton sang a few songs on the night. And a few of the ladies had tears in their eyes with them.

The only sad bit of news during the weekend was to hear that it will be our last reunion weekend in the Clarendon Hotel as Russell and Sarah Clark are moving on after hosting the reunion for four years, we all wish them the best of luck in their new venture. They have supported the group and could not be better hosts to us all.

So from all of us from the RPC Nostalgia Group, "Thank You". We will be back next year at Redcar at a new hotel and this time Russell and Sarah can join us socially with all the staff from the Clarry.

The total raised for Autism over the weekend was £537.50. A big thank you again to everyone who helped us raise this amount and we hope to see you all next year.

Going full circle

Returning a silver cup to Liverpool Chamber of Commerce and after 46 years a return to a very familiar building



■ Handover of the silver cup and a sign in Liverpool !

Pictures: Norman Brown

ON 12 July 2014 Lt Col John Starling and Mr Norman Brown travelled to Liverpool to return a silver cup to Liverpool Chamber of Commerce.

This cup had been presented to 17 Group Pioneer Corps in appreciation of their work in Liverpool Docks. The inscription on the cup reads:

Presented to Lt Col The Hon HC Alexander DSO of the 17 Group Pioneer Corps by the Members of The United Warehouse Keepers Conference, Liverpool In appreciation of services rendered 1942 – 1944

During the handover Lt Col Starling gave a brief talk to the Chamber of Commerce Staff explaining why the cup had been presented. The RPC Association had, thanks to Mr Peter Thomas, added two inscriptions, one of which stated:

Returned to the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce on the Disbandment of the Pioneer Trade July 2014

17 Group moved to Huyton, Liverpool on 27 Aug 41 for fire watching and labour

duties in Merseyside and stayed at that location until 24 Jul 44 when they moved to London to repair bomb damaged properties. The war diary of the unit shows the following on 19 Sep 44:

"CO went to Liverpool to be presented with a Cup by the Liverpool United Warehouse Keepers Conference in appreciation of the work undertaken fire watching by the Coys."

Whilst walking through Liverpool we saw the following sign outside a nightclub – it could only be Liverpool!

IN EARLY 1968 Pte Norman Brown left Simpson Barracks, Northampton on completion of basic training, his first unit was Headquarters 23 Group RPC, Bicester as a potential clerk.

The Headquarters in those days was in Building 19 (the bungalow behind the guardroom). Some 46 years later the Association moved from its old office in Block 3 to Building 19 and he is now situated in what in those days was the Adjutants Office.



■ Group photograph before the Command Dinner Night

Picture: Paul Brown

What it means to be a Pioneer

To mark the disbandment of 23 Pioneer Regiment Royal Logistic Corps a Command Dinner Night was held on Tuesday 10 June 2014

AMONG THE guests at the dinner were one Lt. Gen, three Maj Gens, 5 Brigadiers and 5 Colonels. All former COs' and RSMs' of the Regiment were also invited together with all serving Pioneer WOs.

During the meal selected personnel were asked to give their views on "What it means to be a Pioneer". The first to give his views was former RSM Bob Fox, the following is an extract from his speech.

"I've been asked to speak for around 40 seconds on what it means to be a Pioneer; I've been a Pioneer for more than 40 years and I'm still learning about the actions of our forebears, so the chances are this story might overrun.

The Pioneer Spirit of 'First in/Last out/Last man standing'. Versatility, Anything/Anywhere, with a can do attitude. We laugh in the face of adversity and remain cool and calm. Above all professional all the way. We trained as infantrymen and have artisan trades, and I remember the works parties we send down the sites in many Ordnance Depots like Bicester and Kineton. A strong Esprit de Corps, comradeship, brotherhood, a family feel with friendships that last a lifetime. Coming here to Bicester "The Home of the Pioneers" is like coming home, as was once Northampton before its closure. We are

called names like Chunkies and sometimes worse, but they knew we could do their jobs and they could not do ours. I am proud to be a Pioneer, The following poem entitled The Fighting Pioneers sums up my feelings:

Just listen to my song of joy – come on, boys, make a crown.

I want to tell a story which makes old-timers proud.

It didn't take us centuries – in fact, not even years

To earn our official" name, the "Fighting Pioneers."

You have heard of the "Fighting Fifth", the "Diehards" and the "Bays",

The "Lincolns", the "Bedfords", of "Fusilliers" and "Greys",

The "Scotties" in their kilts, or noble "Grenadiers",

Now you'll hear a bit about the "Fighting Pioneers".

Of course, we are not all fighting men. Lord Haw-Haw made that gaff,

He called us wreck and ruin and termed us all riff raff.

I hope old Hitler told him how we held his "Jerry Band"

When we fought them back at Arras and fought them hand to hand.

We fought them beside the "Durham's" with picks and hammer shanks,

We pinched a lot of Tommy guns and sneaked his blinking tanks.

We had a lot of shooting too, and slew them by the score.

We earned out share of honours, and hope to win some more.

I've told you just a little bit, in time you'll hear the rest;

We hope to have another go, somewhere East, or maybe West.

We've had enough of jokes and fun, now stop you're blinking sneers

We've won our place among the best – we are the "Fighting Pioneers".

The above poem mentions Lord Haw Haw, it must be remembered that he was actually captured by a Pioneer Capt (Capt Jeffrey Perry). It should also be remembered that we fought a rear-guard action at Boulogne, the Welsh Guards abandoned their weapons at the Docks. The Pioneers picked them up took them back to UK and returned them to the Guards – we did not get a letter of thanks".

Another Warrant Officer asked to give his views on what it feels like to be a Pioneer was WO2 John Donaghue. His speech:

"To be a Pioneer is to be the minority amongst the majority.

The majority strife to be us the minority We the minority will always be right amongst the majority".

PAST EVENTS

■ ON 5 June 2014 Messrs Brown, Bryant and Dewsnap together with 6 members and their wives of 23 Pnr Regt RLC attended Founders Day at Chelsea Hospital.

The salute this year was taken by the Countess of Wessex. After the parade the normal picnic was held on the lawns of the hospital.

Even Frankie Gerrald enjoyed the pre-packed lunch and even agreed that it was good value for money!

■ THIS YEAR the Past and Present Pioneer Officers Dinner was held in the Bicester Garrison Officers' Mess, Ambrosden and was very well organised by Maj Billy Dilkes, QM Bicester Garrison.

It was the 68th year and HRH The Duke of Gloucester KG GCVO was the Principal Guest and Brig CB Telfer CBE was in the chair. Others present included Major-General GW Field CB OBE vice Patron of the RPC Association and 56 serving and retired Pioneer Officers.

The CO 23 Pioneer Regiment, Lt Col D Clouston, gave a brief update on the disbandment of the Regiment and the disbursement of his troops.

FUTURE EVENTS

■ THE NORTHAMPTON Branch will be holding a Christmas Party in January 2015 (when prices are cheaper!).

Details will be sent out to Northampton Branch members when details have been finalised.

■ EACH YEAR the WOs & SNCOs Pnr Reunion Club organise a trip to Twickenham to watch the Army v Navy Rugby match, this is a great opportunity to meet former colleagues.

Next year the coach(s) will be leaving from St George's Barracks, Bicester. Members of the club will again receive subsidised travel but it is expected that there will be vacancies for Association members.

These will be allocated on a first come first served basis. A booking form is enclosed, please note that this must be received by 1 Feb 15.

■ AS ANNOUNCED at the Annual General Meeting the Pioneer Reunion for 2015 is to be held at the Royal Court Hotel, Coventry from 3 – 5 Jul 2015. The cost for the weekend is as follows:

3 Nights (Fri. Sat & Sun) £140 – Association members will pay only £110.
2 Nights (Fri & Sat) £120 – Association members will pay only £100.

1 Night (Sat) £100 – Association members will pay only £90.

(i.e. Association member and wife/partner for 3 night stay will pay £250)

This cost includes a carvery meal on both Friday & Sunday nights and a gala dinner on the Saturday evening!

It is intended that we will run a coach to the National Arboretum at a small charge.

There will also be happy hour bar prices in selected bars throughout the weekend.

The hotel has a gymnasium and a swimming pool which are free to use.

A Booking form is attached – this must be received by 20 May 2015.

Graven hill purchase

The sale of Bicester's Graven Hill site has been completed from the Ministry of Defence



■ Draft plan of the development

Picture: Cherwell District Council

THE SALE of Bicester's Graven Hill site has been completed with Cherwell District Council, through a company limited by shares, taking ownership of the site from the Ministry of Defence (MoD).

In February this year councillors voted to purchase the land from the MoD to enable the delivery of the UK's first large-scale self-build community of up to 1,900 homes. Contracts between Cherwell and the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), which is the MoD's property and services provider, were exchanged in March and have now been completed.

Cllr Barry Wood, leader of Cherwell District Council, said: "The sale of this site is representative of several years' work behind the scenes to secure this purchase and completes the first stage of our vision to deliver the UK's largest self build community.

"From then on the focus will be on residents as they start to choose, design and build their dream homes to put Bicester firmly on the map with the creation of the UK's first self build community."

In addition to the homes, the 187 hectare site will also accommodate one million square feet of commercial space and create up to 2,000 new jobs and apprenticeships.

Planning consent has been granted for the new homes along with a primary school, employment space, pub/ restaurant and a small number of local shops. More than half of the site will be set aside for community woodland with public access, parks and open spaces.

The self-build concept will be delivered in various forms as councillors are keen to

meet the needs and budgets of all future residents. This will include kit homes which are purchased from catalogues, watertight shells, group/ community self-build schemes and custom build projects where the owner designs the property but employs contractors to build it. The properties will vary in size and design according to the residents' needs but are likely to include detached, semi-detached and terraced homes of differing sizes, apartment blocks and bungalows.

The Graven Hill project will adhere to the ethos of the Eco Bicester One Shared Vision, which uses the aspirations of the future eco-town to promote sustainable development across the area through measures including a low carbon energy strategy.

The MOD will continue to run its warehousing operation on the site until 2019, although limited areas of the site will be vacated to enable roads and infrastructure to be laid ahead of the first homes being built in 2015.

Wendy Ivess-Mash, the Defence Infrastructure Organisation's deputy head of programme and project delivery said: "I am delighted the sale has now completed and that this secures the way ahead for Cherwell District Council to implement its exciting plans for the site. Graven Hill was one of the MOD's larger surplus sites planned for housing and the completion draws to a conclusion significant input and collaborative working by both sides to generate the development opportunities for the site."

For information on the Graven Hill project visit www.gravenhill.org.uk

Lovely pair of guns on march

Pte Emily Wren proudly marches through Bicester for the final time with 23 Pioneer Regiment

We recently posted this photograph of Emily on the Association's facebook page and it certainly caused a bit of fuss.

The Ministry of Defence has relaxed the rules on tattoos and a spokesman said: "Tattoos have become more acceptable in society over the last decade and, in recent years, there has been an increasing number of personnel with tattoos on visible areas".

A previous rule on excessive tattoos has also been lifted but its stance on offensive, obscene and racist tattoos still stands.



Pictures: Paul Brown





Pictures: Tracy Brown / Paul Brown



Farewell to Graven Hill, thanks to 23 Pioneer Regiment for an excellent 22 years of reunion weekends

FRIDAY afternoon started with the Annual General Meeting of the Association which was held in the Scully Club (the minutes are shown on page 56).

After this it was "Bring a Boss" in the Corporals Club (although the Club was in a marquee on the MT Square). Also in the afternoon a viewing was held for RPC Association Property which was to be sold by sealed bids. The fairground also opened on the Friday afternoon and attracted crowds throughout the whole day.

In the evening everyone moved to the Sergeants Mess where over 400 portions of Fish or Pie and Chips were served in two hours. Mr Cudgie Smilie presented Mr Norman Brown with a very large cake with the Pioneer badge on top, it was intended to raffle this cake on the evening but someone decided to steal the cake from the Sergeants Mess (it was found during

the clean-up in Block 3, badly damaged – I hope someone has a guilty conscious).

Saturday morning started with the usual Church Service at the War Memorial which was preceded by a march of the Old Comrades led by the reformed Corps of Drums with Dusty Bryant at the front. As there were so many marching the contingent had to be split into two columns one controlled by Mr Ian Dewsnap and the other by Mr Peter Thomas. The Last Post and Reveille was blown by 3 buglers from the Corps of Drums and they sounded very good.

Following the Church Service there was the usual march past by the Old Comrades with the CO 23 Regt RLC and the Association Chairman, Col A Barnes, taking the salute. A group photograph was then taken on the steps of the Officers' Mess, this was the largest group photo ever taken at a Reunion Weekend.

The afternoon consisted of stalls and exhibitions as well as the fairground which was kept very busy, there was also plenty of rides for the children with free popcorn and candy-floss as well as pony rides. Pioneers being Pioneers the beer tent was also kept busy.

Saturday evening saw the "Red and Green" Ball in the MT Hanger. The evening started with an auction of 10 items of Association Property – this raised £985 for the Association, thanks to all the bidders. The ball went very well and a 'Survivors Photo' was taken at 0315 hrs, this was preceded by the Fijian Choir who even at that time sang very well.

I thought it would be appropriate to thank 23 Pioneer Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps, for not only allowing us to hold our Reunion this year but also for the last 22 years, they have always looked after us so well. **THANK YOU.** ■

Pictures: Paul Brown



REUNION WEEKEND

26th-28th September 2014



Pictures: Tracy Brown unless stated



Picture: Scouse Bradley

Pictures: Paul Brown



Picture Left: Tracy Brown Picture Middle and Right: Paul Brown





Picture: Scouse Bradley



Pictures: Tracy Brown



Pictures: Paul Brown

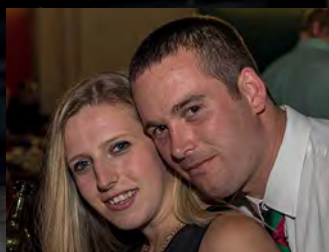




Pictures: Paul Brown / Scouse Bradley / Tracy Brown / Supplied

THE PIONEER

Pictures from this years events
will soon be available to view
in the online dropbox





THE PIONEER

Pictures from this years events will soon be available to view in the online dropbox

Pictures: Paul Brown / Norman Brown / Supplied / Thanks to Matt Mckerlie for the last picture (what a night!)

NEWS IN BRIEF



■ **PERSONNEL FROM 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC** travelled to Aldershot to build a War Monument at Tiehurst Care Home.

The CO received the following letter from the Manager:

"Dear Lt Col Clouston, on behalf of residents, staff and visitors at Tiehurst, I would like to offer our sincere thanks and gratitude to you, RSM Lane and 23 Pioneer Regt for giving their time to build our war monument.

Many of our residents have connections with the British Forces and will appreciate having the opportunity to sit and reflect on their memories and hold their own Remembrance Day Service."

Photograph on Page 54 shows Mrs Laura Dewsnap (yes one of Geordies wives) with the workers from 23 Pioneer Regiment.

■ **TRAIN COMPANIES** have extended the offer of Armed Forces travel document scheme to tens of thousands of volunteer reservists.

The deal signed between rail companies and the Ministry of Defence now means the HM Forces Railcard will now cover all active volunteer reservists, their spouses and children.

The railcard will save reservists a third off fares for family days out and trips to visit friends, meaning they get to enjoy time with loved ones for less.

With growing numbers of volunteer reserves supporting the country and working as part of a fully integrated force, train companies have worked closely with the Ministry of Defence to make the benefit available to all active troops.

www.hmforces-railcard.co.uk/

■ **WE OFTEN** receive, both by letter and on Facebook, enquiries about back copies of the "Royal Pioneer" magazines.

Members might like to be aware that a complete set of these Magazines dating from 1940 when the first edition was published to 1993 when the Corps was merged on formation of the Royal Logistic Corps can be found at www.rlcarchive.org

The Magazines can be browsed from page to page or searched by a word or phrase of choice for those wishing to learn more of individual officers or soldiers who served in the RPC, the magazines can be a very useful source of research.

At the very least they can provide general background information to an officer's or soldier's time in the Corps and are full of memories of key activities and milestones over the 64 years of RPC history.

They also make fascinating reading especially the older issues which contain many articles on our history.

Access to the magazines is on a pay per view or subscription basis.

■ **SINCE APRIL 2014**, reservists have been eligible for MOD Standard Learning Credits scheme, which provides financial support for a range of learning activities.

All around the country and across the RN, Army and RAF, regulars are using their Standard Learning Credits (SLCs) to take courses in anything from a diploma in teaching or project management skills to an MSc in leadership and management.

New medal awards

This Autumn, the first of the new military awards, a result of the independent medals review, will be issued.

THE MINISTRY of Defence Medal Office is now planning the implementation of the new awards. A phased approach has been adopted to allow time for their design and manufacture. The details are:

Cyprus 1963-64. Those servicemen who served in Cyprus during the period 21 December 1963 to 26 March 1964 will be awarded the General Service Medal (1962) with clasp 'CYPRUS 1963-64'. Applications for the new clasp will be accepted from 1 March 2015 onwards. The first of the awards will be despatched towards the end of that month. (However these timings remain under review).

Berlin Airlift - The General Service Medal 1918-1962 with clasp 'BERLIN AIRLIFT' will be awarded for at least one day's service to all aircrew, RAF and civilians, who took part in the Berlin Airlift operation from 25 June 1948 to 6 October 1949 inclusive. Applications for the new clasp will be accepted from 1 March 2015 onwards. The first of the awards will be made towards the end of that month. (However these timings remain under review).

There are also changes to existing Medals and Clasps that are to be awarded under revised qualifying criteria:

South Atlantic - The qualifying period for the award of the South Atlantic Medal without the Rosette will be extended from 12 July to 21 October 1982, when the airfield at Mount Pleasant was made operational. Applications for the South Atlantic Medal, under the new time extension, will be accepted from 1 October 2014 onwards. The awards will begin to be despatched towards the end of that month.

Cyprus 1955-59 - Those who participated in the suppression of acts of terrorism in Cyprus between 1 April 1955

and 18 April 1959 will qualify for the General Service Medal 1918-62 with clasp 'CYPRUS' if they served for 90 days or more. The qualifying period has been reduced from 120 days, bringing it into line with the qualifying period for service during the Kenya anti-terrorism campaign. Applications for the clasp 'CYPRUS' under the new qualifying period will be accepted from 1 October 2014 onwards. The first of the clasps will be despatched towards the end of that month.

Full details on how to claim the new awards are available at <https://www.gov.uk/the-ministry-of-defence-medal-office> but please note the above dates from which applications will be processed. With the exception of the South Atlantic Medal, RAF and Civilian Pilots are encouraged to submit copies of their flying logbooks to provide evidence of eligibility. Please note all applications will be dealt with in date order.



Heroes return extended

The Big Lottery Fund has extended its Heroes Return 2 programme to enable veterans to make second trips

AS DAWN broke 70 years ago on the 6th June 1944, the first of 156,000 allied troops stormed the Normandy beaches. By sunset there would be 10,000 casualties. It would be one of the most momentous days of history and the start of a two month epic struggle to liberate Normandy, one that would cost over 225,000 dead, wounded or missing in action.

In salute to their memory the Big Lottery Fund is proud to have supported over 250 UK Normandy veterans who made a Heroes Return journey back to the shores of France to join the 70th commemoration ceremonies to pay their respects to lost

comrades.

The Big Lottery Fund has awarded over £28 million to ensure that over 57,000 Second World War veterans, widows and carers have had the opportunity since 2004 to go back to battlefields to attend commemorations.

The fund has extended its Heroes Return 2 programme to enable veterans to apply for funding to make second trips.

The programme deadline for closure will now be at the end of 2015.

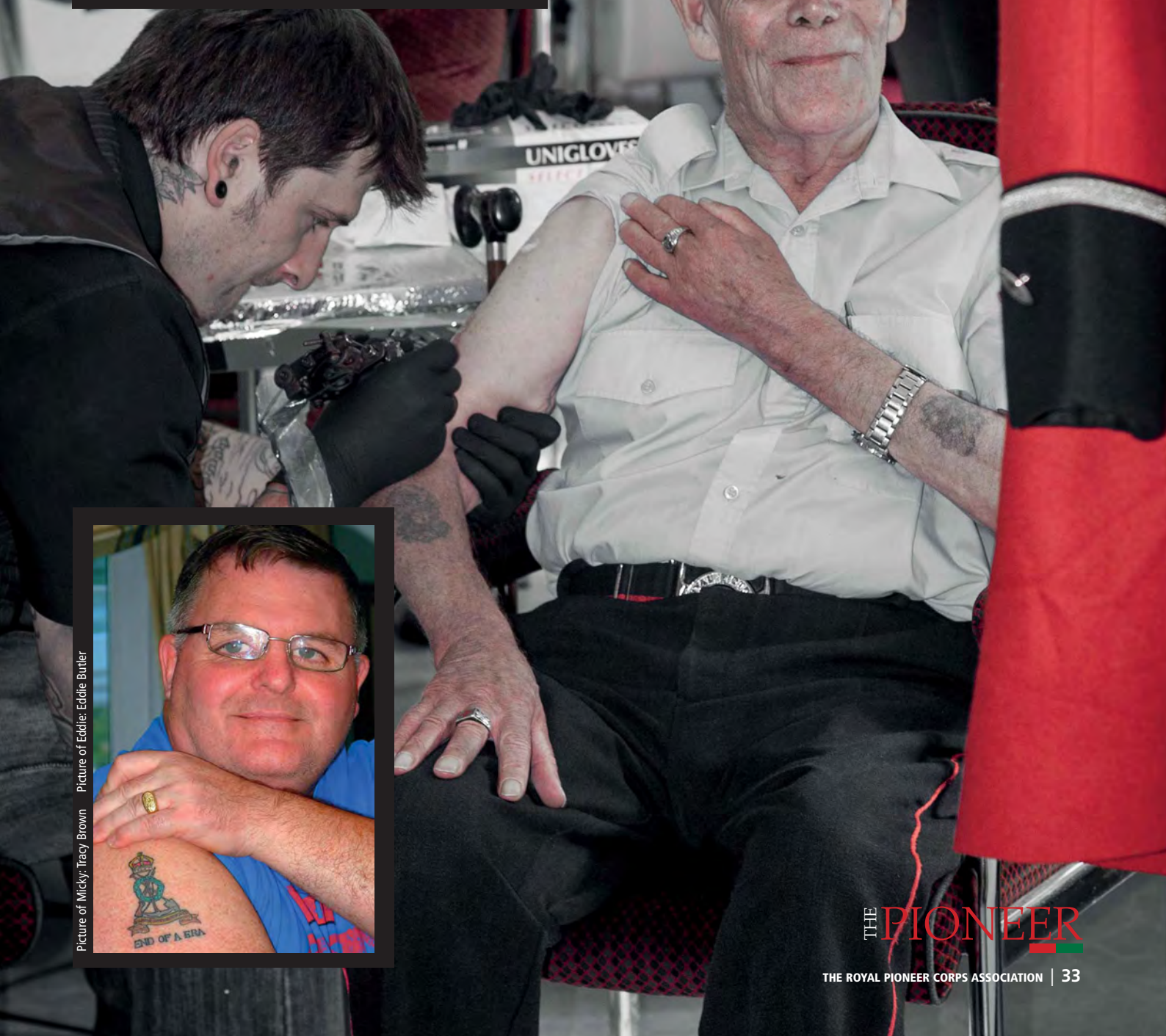
Applications can be made by telephone (0845 00 00 121) or by visiting their website www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/heroesreturn

More Pioneer tattoos at the reunion

Micky our in pensioner and our out pensioner Eddie Butler showing off their new Royal Pioneer Corps tattoos

It is hoped that the tattooists will be at the Reunion Weekend at Coventry in 2015.

(Ed note: Both Pioneer tattoos have the Kings Crown cap badge. From Association records they both served with the Queens Crown)



Picture of Micky: Tracy Brown

Picture of Eddie: Eddie Butler

PIONEER

The painting depicts selected historical military events of the Pioneers in war and operations

THIS painting was commissioned to commemorate the removal of Pioneers from the British Army Order of Battle both Regular and Army Reserve.

It represents selected historical military events of the Pioneers in War and on Operations from World War 1 to Operation HERRICK (Afghanistan).

168 Pioneer Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps (V), Army Reserve was disbanded 26th October 2013.

The last Pioneer Unit of the Regular Army to be disbanded was 23 Pioneer Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps on 26th September 2014.

"LABOR OMNIA VINCIT"

Motto: Labor Omnia Vincit

March: Pioneer Corps

Colours: Scarlet Red and Brunswick Green

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

The presence of individual Pioneers with infantry Regiments was common throughout the 17th and 18th Centuries. Military labour units were present at the Crimean War and 'pioneers' are referred to in records of campaigns in France from as early as 1346.

There is also a description of a soldier we might now describe as a 'Pioneer' in the Book of Nehemiah, part of the Old Testament. However, there is little evidence to directly link these 'pioneers' to the Pioneers of today. During the First World War, regiments or corps of the British Army had their own 'Labour Companies' and infantry regiments often had their own 'Labour Battalion' for field engineering tasks. On 21st February 1917 the Labour Corps was formed.

They worked in Forward Areas making and repairing roads and digging trenches, very often under sustained enemy fire. Many awards for gallantry went to members of the Corps.

Despite its disbandment in June 1920, the Labour Corps is now recognised as the predecessor of the Royal Pioneer Corps.

At the outbreak of the Second World War the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps (17th October 1939) was formed. On 22nd November 1940 it was re-titled the Pioneer Corps. In addition to British

soldiers, the Pioneer Corps was heavily composed of men from the British Empire and Nazi-occupied Europe.

On 26th November 1946 an Army Order announced that in recognition of their past service His Majesty the King had been graciously pleased to approve that the Corps should in future enjoy the distinction of "Royal". In 1950 it was decided that the RPC should form a permanent part of the Regular Army.

On 23 July 1991 the Secretary of State for Defence announced that the Royal Pioneer Corps would combine with the Royal Corps of Transport, the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, the Army Catering Corps and the Postal and Courier Service of the Royal Engineers to form a large Logistic Corps.

On 5th April 1993 units of the RPC both Regular and Army Reserve amalgamated into the Royal Logistic Corps.

1. The Labour Corps

The Labour Corps was formed on 21 February 1917; the Corps grew to some 389,900 men (more than 10% of the total size of the Army) by the Armistice. Of this total, around 175,000 were working in the United Kingdom and the rest in the theatres of war.

Labour Corps units were often deployed for work within range of the enemy guns, sometimes for lengthy periods. In April 1917, a number of infantry battalions were transferred to the Corps. The Labour Corps Area Employment Companies were formed in 1917 for salvage work, absorbing the Divisional Salvage Companies.

In the crises of March and April 1918 on the Western Front, Labour Corps units were used as emergency infantry.

The Corps always suffered from its treatment as something of a second class organisation: for example, the men who died are commemorated under their original regiment, with Labour Corps being secondary.

The scene depicts a description of Labour Corps working under artillery fire on the many miles of railway in Flanders taken from the book "With a Labour Company in France" written by Capt TC Thomas OBE MC, Commanding Officer 58th Labour Company, Labour Corps.



2. The Defence of Boulogne 1940 5 Group Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps

During the Battle of France in 1940 a large Pioneer formation, 5 Group Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps was ordered to Boulogne on 20 May. 5 Group, consisting of about 1,500 men was ably lead by Lieutenant Colonel DJ Dean VC (a VC which he won during the First World War).

On arrival in Boulogne Colonel Dean found that two Battalions of the 20th Guards Brigade, the 2nd Irish Guards and 2nd Welsh Guards, under the command of Brigadier WAFL Fox-Pitt, had arrived from England with orders to hold Boulogne "to the last man and the last round." Colonel Dean reported to Brigadier Fox-Pitt for instructions.

The Irish Guards had taken up a position with their right flank at La Postel on the coast and their left on the banks of the River Liane; the Welsh Guards holding a line from the left flank of the Irish Guards and along the western slopes of the Mont- Lambert ridge, which commanded the greater part of the town and harbour, to St. Martin. The two Battalions covered a six-mile front and were, therefore, thin on the ground. Brigadier Fox-Pitt asked for 150 Pioneers to be sent to reinforce the Welsh Guards and this was done.

The German 2nd Armoured Division was now closing in relentlessly on the town. During the afternoon of the 22 May 1940 an attack with tanks and artillery was made against the Irish Guards, but this died away after an hour's fighting. As darkness fell a further tank attack was made on the front held by the Welsh Guards and again the enemy was repulsed, but it became apparent that he was feeling out for a weak spot in the defence. By nightfall Wimereux became untenable and Colonel Dean withdrew 5 Group into Boulogne and, on instructions from Brigadier Fox-Pitt, took up a position covering the area from the Welsh Guards left flank at St. Martin to the coast, this movement being completed by the early hours of the morning of the 23 May 1940. Scarcely had 5 Group AMPC taken its place when a further German attack, still feeling for the weak spot, developed against the

Pioneer front, but after some fighting the enemy again withdrew, to be followed by a more resolute attack against more of the Pioneer road blocks. Here, since they were only opposed by rifle fire, the leading tank commenced climbing over the road block, but this had been anticipated and when the tank was at an angle which precluded its guns from firing on the defenders the road block was drenched with petrol and set on fire, the tank beating a hasty retreat. Under cover of the pall of smoke from the fire a further road block was constructed.

Throughout the whole of this operation the defenders were being dive-bombed and shelled by mortars. In the early evening of the 23 May 1940, and during Colonel Dean's absence, Colonel Stanier of the Welsh Guards had called at 5 Group AMPC Headquarters and informed the Adjutant that the Guards were withdrawing to the harbour for evacuation, at the same time paying high tribute to the 150 Pioneers attached to his battalion. He also stated that the bridge across the river, the only British escape route, was shortly to be blown up.

Since he had been given to understand that the Guards were to hold Boulogne at all costs, and in view of the fact that it was little more than twenty-four hours since their arrival in France, this information was received by Colonel Dean with some surprise. Unfortunately the Welsh Guards had commenced their withdrawal before Colonel Dean received the message and had an opportunity of realigning the Pioneers at the eight road blocks which he held.

In consequence his right flank was now exposed and German advance troops infiltrated through the gap. Using men of 47 Company, which he had held in reserve, he relieved two of his forward positions; four others were able to retire without trouble; the remaining two were over-run by the enemy and the men killed, wounded or taken prisoner.

This short action with insufficiently trained and indifferently armed troops was a bloody affair and the Group suffered a number of casualties. With the enemy now at close >

THE FIGHTING PIONEER

by Anthony Richard Grenville Cowland

quarters Colonel Dean's responsibility became two fold, to fight a rearguard action in order to protect the retiring Welsh Guards and to try to save as many of his own men as possible, a task which the paucity of officers to other ranks on the Pioneer establishment made more difficult. The Group was slowly withdrawn to the Gare Maritime where they manned the barricades which had been left by the Guards Brigade.

5 Group now held all approaches to the harbour. Here the 150 Pioneers who had been lent to the Welsh Guards, but whom they left behind on embarkation, rejoined the Group and here, too, were found sufficient weapons and ammunition to equip those Pioneers who were still unarmed.

This store of rifles and ammunition had been left behind by the Guards on the insistence of the Naval authorities who were concerned at the over-crowding and over-loading of their destroyers. The Group was now under continuous heavy tank and mortar fire from across the river, and rifle fire from the German infantry closing in on them. Towards midnight Colonel Dean recovered consciousness and again resumed command. Except for intermittent rifle fire the fighting had now died down. The Gare Maritime continued to burn fiercely. The rearguard of Pioneers, now reduced to about 600 all ranks, was withdrawn to the quay where company commanders sorted out and reorganized their men in preparation for the final stand they expected to make at daybreak. Stragglers from other companies had joined up with the Group during the preceding day.

Shortly after 0200 hrs on the 24 May 1940 it was reported that a vessel was approaching the harbour and in the hope that it was a British ship Colonel Dean signalled it with his torch, upon which HMS Vimiera backed slowly in to the end of the mole in the eerie silence which lay upon the town. Rounding up many stragglers from other regiments in the area Colonel Dean got them on board and finally 5 Group embarked soon after 0300 24 May 1940 after fighting alone for six hours. With 1,400 men on board the Vimiera sailed for England, the last ship to leave the port before it fell entirely into German hands, and all organized resistance in Boulogne came to an end. Over a period of years it became the practice of the officers of the 68 Company RPC(V) (which was to become 102 Pioneer Squadron RLC(V)) to honour and drink a toast to 'The Defenders of Boulogne'.

3. Corporal JP Scully GC & Lieutenant C Chittenden GM Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps

This scene depicts Corporal JP Scully bowed under the weight of debris which he bore for seven hours during the night 13 March 1941, thereby saving two people from certain death. Corporal Scully was awarded the George Cross for this act of bravery.

Two sections of 256 Company Pioneer Corps were engaged on rescue work in Birkenhead on the night of 13th March, 1941, under the direction of Lieutenant C Chittenden.

Corporal J Scully located a man and woman trapped under debris and with great difficulty penetrated to the spot where they were buried, covering them with his body whilst wood of suitable length was being procured to shore up the

debris. Corporal Scully and Lieutenant Chittenden had fixed temporary props in position and a long plank was inserted to take most of the weight. Realizing the ever-present danger of the mass of debris falling on the injured persons through the instability of the temporary props, Corporal Scully inserted his body beneath the plank to provide additional support. Gradually the weight increased until the temporary prop slipped leaving Corporal Scully supporting one end of the plank and Lieutenant Chittenden the other. At this stage Corporal Scully could have got away but knowing that if he did so the fate of the trapped persons was sealed he remained under the plank.

Slowly the weight of shifting debris increased forcing Scully down until he lay across the body of the trapped man whilst Lieutenant Chittenden, still holding one end of the plank, reached over and supported the corporal's head to prevent him from being suffocated by having his face pressed into the debris. Although fast becoming exhausted Scully continued to talk encouragingly to the woman.

The man was unconscious. He remained in this position throughout the night until, seven hours later, a rescue party was able to extricate him and the injured people. When they first entered the house the two Pioneers realised the risk of injury or death as the high walls nearby appeared about to collapse at any moment. Had this occurred both would have been buried under many tons of debris. Corporal Scully risked his life to save the two people and although the position looked hopeless Lieutenant Chittenden remained with him. Corporal Scully was awarded the George Cross and Lieutenant Chittenden the George Medal.

4. Private J Tancred Pioneer Corps

Private Tancred served with 187 Company Pioneer Corps during the allied advance through Italy in 1943. Whilst carrying ammunition to the fighting troops on Monastery Hill, Monte Camino he discovered a wounded officer. Private Tancred carried the officer overnight (16 Hours) to an Aid Post, encountering and avoiding the German machine gun positions en route.

The officer was taken for treatment and it is believed that he survived. However, Tancred died of exhaustion as he rested. His Commanding Officer at the time, Major GR Vivian, describes his conduct as 'gallant and valiant beyond all words of expression'. Private Tancred was never cited for an award.

It is no reflection on anyone that Tancred was not awarded any specific honour, for courage was the common currency on Monastery Hill and he would have been the last man to wish for any preferential treatment over infantrymen who endured so much more in greater danger.

On 24 November 1966 at Northampton a silver statuette depicting Private Tancred carrying the wounded Officer, was presented to the Central Officers' Mess of the Royal Pioneer Corps by Officers of the Army Emergency Reserve, RPC. This stood proudly in the Officers' Mess 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC.

On 17 January 1983 a new Field Force Company came into being which was officially designated 187 (Tancred) Company, Royal Pioneer Corps. On the Amalgamation into the Royal Logistic Corps the Company was renamed 187 (Tancred) Pioneer Squadron, Royal Logistic Corps.

These units were the only Company/ Squadron in Army Order of Battle to be named after a Private soldier.

5. The Mulberry Harbour

The Mulberry harbour was a portable temporary harbour developed by the British in World War II to facilitate rapid offloading of cargo onto the beaches during the Allied invasion of Normandy. Two prefabricated or artificial military harbours were taken in sections across the English Channel from Britain and assembled off the coast of Normandy as part of the D-Day invasion of France in 1944. 11,000 Pioneers were employed in the construction and running of the British Mulberry Harbour in Arromanches France 1944.

6. The sinking of the troopship Lancastria

It is estimated that 4000+ souls who were lost aboard the Lancastria on 17th June 1940.

At 1548 hrs the requisitioned Cunard cruise liner, Lancastria came under attack from enemy aircraft. She received three direct hits from a German Junkers 88 bomber and within 20 minutes, the 16,243-ton luxury liner sank, taking with her an estimated 4,000 victims. The sinking is the worst single disaster in British maritime history, and claimed more victims than the sinking of the Titanic and Lusitania combined. It is also the largest single loss of life for British forces in the whole of World War 2.

It is a disaster which has remained largely forgotten by the history books and that in part has led to a silence which continues to this day. The exact death toll may never be fully known and estimates range from as low as 2,500 to over 6,000 lives lost.

The Lancastria's acting Adjutant had desperately attempted to compile a list of those boarding from the small fleet of vessels ferrying men and refugees out to Lancastria and initially put the figure at almost 9,000 embarked, a figure backed up by a number of survivors. That figure may be exaggerated and it is certainly disputed by the British Government. Recently, authors such as Brian Crabb have managed to pull together a full list of those known to have perished aboard Lancastria but there is evidence to suggest that many more individuals boarded the Lancastria than official records indicate. This depicts Private William Steel 39 Company, Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps winning his Military Medal. His citation read: On the 17th June 1940 Pte Dean of the 39th Company, AMPC was on board SS 'LANCASTRIA.'

The first bomb which struck the ship killed or wounded the crew of a nearby Bren Gun. Pte Dean had nothing to do with the Gun Crew or the Gun, but seized it and commenced to fire with the idea of keeping the enemy aircraft to the ceiling of the Gun. After firing the Gun for several minutes, he was struck on the head by a piece of flying debris and rendered semi-unconscious. He was revived by Cpl Mellor who tried to persuade him to leave the rapidly sinking vessel. Pte Dean refused to do so, at the same time urging his comrades to leave the vessel. He continued to fire the Gun until the water had reached the part of the deck where he was standing. By remaining on the ship to the last, Pte Dean risked being drawn under by the suction from the sinking of such a big vessel, at the same time, at the risk of his own life, and by his own devotion to duty



■ Taff Teague shows off 'The Fighting Pioneer' painting at this years Reunion Weekend

Picture: Paul Brown

and courage, he undoubtedly saved the lives of many of his comrades who were being machine-gunned in the water, by continuing to fire the Bren Gun at the enemy aircraft. Over 250 Pioneers lost their lives on board the Lancastria.

7. The Aden Emergency

The Aden Emergency was an insurgency against the British Crown forces in the British controlled territories of South Arabia which now form part of the Yemen. A state of emergency was declared in the British Crown colony of Aden and its hinterland, the Aden Protectorate. The emergency escalated in 1967 and hastened the end of British rule in the territory which had begun in 1839. On 30 November 1967, British forces withdrew and the independent People's Republic of South Yemen was proclaimed. It was during this time the members of the Royal Pioneer Corps were deployed to Aden. They were involved in a number of tasks including local employment, fortification of field defences and patrolling. A number of casualties were sustained during grenade attacks and small arms fire. This scene depicts 518 Company Royal Pioneer Corps patrolling in support of the Royal Marines.

8. Army Graves Registration Team (AGRT) Falklands Conflict 1982

In 1982 An Army Graves Registration Team from the Royal Pioneer Corps deployed to the Falkland Islands to recover and identify British and Argentine personnel killed during the conflict and relocate bodies into military cemeteries. All the casualties were buried in temporary graves

and it was the task of the team to carry out the operation in a dignified manner. Of the 255 British servicemen killed during the conflict, 81 had been temporarily buried on the Islands. 44 of these were at Ajax Bay near the old Refrigeration Plant that had been used as a Field Hospital, 29 bodies were at Teal Inlet, 4 at Estancia House and one at San Carlos Settlement. The three remaining single graves were Goose Green, Port Howard and Darwin and were left undisturbed in accordance with the wishes of the next of kin. This was no easy task but the Commander of the operation Maj M Wilson concluded in an article he wrote and was published in the Pioneer Magazine October 2009:

"I look back now, many memories prevail, but, above all, of the high standards of self discipline, morale and companionship of the Team throughout. These are the happy memories. There are other memories, of course, less happy, private memories that will always be with me".

After the Falkland's War the Army War Graves Service became a major Pioneer responsibility renamed to Joint War Graves Service and later changed to Mortuary Affairs.

9. Cyprus 1955

Pioneers were stationed in Cyprus during the National Organisation of Cypriot Combatants (EOKA) campaign, a guerrilla organization aimed at over-throwing the British administration. The tasks carried out by Pioneers during this time were the construction of a wing to the Kyrenia Home of Sick Children, a cinema to seat 200,

digging a 9,000 metre telegraph cable trench, escorting the military mail, the movement of ammunition and fuel, in the islands forest fire-breaks were cleared to prevent cases of arson and finally the provision of a guard force for the Nicosia Central Prison which housed 700 EOKA terrorists, which the scene depicts.

10. BAOR

After the Second World War, Pioneers were employed throughout Northern Germany in Defence Platoons. They guarded all the major HQs and other military establishments. Also managing civil labour support these became Pioneer Labour and Support Units. The scene depicts the major role carried out by Pioneers of 70 and 114 Companies, Royal Pioneer Corps in support of 8 Regiment, Royal Corps of Transport and 50 Missile Regiment, Royal Artillery and the number of large Cold War Exercises carried out during this period.

11. Pioneer Labour and Support Unit

Providing Civil Labour to the military has been a Pioneer responsibility since the Second World War, employing 10s of thousands of civilians throughout the world. During the Gulf War in 1991 a number of Pioneer Staff were deployed to the region with the sole purpose of employing local labour to assist the British Army. Its main responsibility was to establish labour requirement, locate and negotiate a price with local contractors and deliver the labour daily to its place of need.

By the end of the conflict its staff of 15 Pioneers was employing in excess of 600

civilians. The majority were labourers, but there were also drivers, clerks, translators, mechanics, electricians and even a desert navigation instructor. 200 labourers were employed as a pool and formed into platoons supervised by one or two young Pioneer Corporals.

This was the last time Pioneers would carry out this task on Operations as the Royal Pioneer Corps.

12. Northern Ireland Op BANNER 1969 to 2007

The painting depicts the Pioneer Prison Guard force at the Maze Prison during the late 1980s. The Saxon vehicle represents the Roulement Transport Squadron tour which Pioneers carried out in 2001.

On the 21 May 1988 Corporal Derek Hayes, aged 28, a soldier of the Royal Pioneer Corps was killed at Crossmaglen when an IRA booby trap bomb exploded. He was asked to investigate a partly hidden box in a ditch.

As his Labrador approached it, the device exploded. He is one of the many Pioneers who have lost their lives during the conflict. This part of the painting also represents all Pioneers who served either in the Pioneer/Infantryman Role in Northern Ireland during Operation BANNER.

13. Gulf War One 1990/91

One of the many tasks carried out by Pioneers during the Gulf War was Prisoner of War handling.

The scene depicts 2 Platoon, 518 Company, Royal Pioneer Corps conducting this task. The Platoon was commanded by Captain Steve Berry and Sergeant Jim Hamilton.

The prisoners were searched, segregated, given blankets and water. They were held for a short time and handed over to the Rear Operations Battle Group.

Pioneers carried out a number of different roles camp construction, guarding key locations, HQs, War Graves and chemical decontamination, to name but a few.

14. Counter Improvised Explosive Device Teams Afghanistan

More recently, in Afghanistan, Pioneers have assisted with the high-profile role of providing Improvised Explosive (IED) search capability. Checking the ground methodically with different pieces of specialist equipment, Pioneers from 23 Pioneer Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps found and isolated 100s of devices hidden in the dusty ground -all designed to kill or maim. During this time a number of Pioneers lost their lives or sustained life changing injuries.

15. Force Protection Iraq/Afghanistan

This scene depicts the tasks carried out by Pioneers during Operation TELIC/HERRICK (Iraq & Afghanistan).

Pioneers provided the Kabul Patrol Company, Guard Force for the Prison at Shaibah Logistics Base and Force Protection for the Combat Logistic Patrols. They also held the responsibility for the running and patrolling of Umm Qasr Town and Port and the running of Mortuary Affairs. Two composite Squadrons from 168 Pioneer Regiment, RLC also deployed on Op TELIC.

16. The Badges of Pioneers

Top Left: The Badge of the Labour Corps, Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps and Royal Pioneer Corps. The Labour Corps formed 21 February 1917 originally wore the Royal Arms as cap-badge, with the letters LC as shoulder titles until ACI 837 of 1917 authorised the issue of a new badge, described in heraldic terms as; "A rifle, a shovel and pick 'piled' on them a laurel wreath, all ensigned with a crown. Beneath, motto Labor Omnia Vincit". This badge was again taken into use on the creation of the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps on 17 October 1939 and was continually worn by Pioneers until 1985. Top Right: Royal Pioneer Corps 1985 to 1993.

In 1983 it was decided to change the Cap Badge of the Royal Pioneer Corps.

The Re-Badging parade took place on Wednesday 13 February 1985 at Simpson

Barracks Northampton. The new badge is described in heraldic terms thus:

"Two Pioneer Axes in saltire beneath their heads and surmounted of pioneer sword and laurel wreath below the same a scroll inscribed Royal Pioneers and the whole ensigned by the Royal Crown all argent."

Centre Badge: The Royal Logistic Corps 1993 to Date

The Royal Logistic Corps (RLC) was formed on Monday, 5 April 1993, by the union of five British Army corps:

Royal Pioneer Corps
Royal Corps of Transport
Royal Army Ordnance Corps
Army Catering Corps
Royal Engineers Postal and Courier Service

The RLC cap badge is an amalgamation of the cap badges of the forming corps:

The crossed axes are from the Royal Pioneer Corps

The star is from the Royal Corps of Transport

The laurel and garter band is from the Royal Engineers

The shield in the centre is from the Royal Army Ordnance Corps

The motto, "We Sustain", is from the Army Catering Corps

The inscription on the garter band "Honi soit qui mal y pense" can be translated as "Evil to him who evil thinks". It is often seen on the insignia of Regiments and Corps with 'Royal' in their title.

17. The Regimental Cypher.

The Regimental Cypher was introduced to 23 Pioneer Regiment in 2000. It comprises of Two Pioneer Axes in saltire beneath their heads and surmounted of pioneer sword. This is the Regimental symbol and appears on the Regimental Flag, Tee Shirts, and stationery and letter heads. Pioneers are extremely proud of the symbol.

18. The Three Pioneers

The Three Pioneers represent the different periods of dress in our history. The Pioneer on the left is dressed as Pioneers were during the 1940s. The Pioneer to the right is dressed in uniform of the 1980s, note the Brown Beret (1983) worn by Pioneers prior to the amalgamation into the Royal Logistic Corps. The Pioneer in the centre represents the modern Pioneer who served in Afghanistan Operation HERRICK.

During Operation HERRICK three Pioneers lost their lives, Warrant Officer Class 2 Charlie Wood (Centre) was killed by an explosion while he cleared a road of IEDs, Corporal Andrew Roberts (Right) and Private Ratu Silibaravi (Left) died after a mortar rocket attack on their operating base. They were the last deaths on operations and represent the tens of thousands of Pioneers to lose their lives during the service of their country.

The Artist

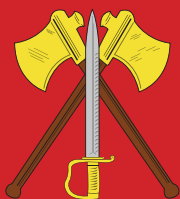
Anthony Richard Grenville Cowland. Born in Hove, Sussex, England 1956. Brought up in Barbados, Singapore & UK.

He is a full time Artist. His works include: airliners, architecture, automobiles, aviation, bridges, dance, engineering, equestrian, exhibitions, horses, houses, interiors, landscapes, marine, military, museums, ocean liners, oil rigs, people, photography, portraits, ships, sports cars, travel, wildlife and yachts. ■



■ Proud Mum, Pauline Roberts admires the new painting "The Fighting Pioneer". Pauline's son, Corporal Andrew Steven Roberts (Ginge), 23 Pioneer Regiment, RLC was killed in Afghanistan. He is depicted in the painting and he is the third soldier across in the middle of the painting. The soldier on the middle left is Private Ratu Manasa Silibaravi, 23 Pioneer Regiment, RLC and he was killed the same time as Ginge. The soldier in the middle is WO2 Charles Henry Wood, 23 Pioneer Regiment, RLC, who was killed in operations in Afghanistan whilst serving with the Counter-Improvised Explosive Device Task Force.

Picture: Paul Brown



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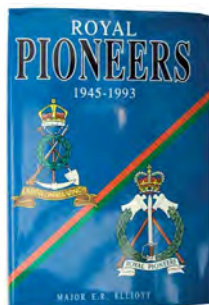
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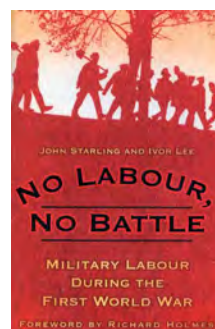


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The Post-War History of the Corps was written by Major Bill Elliott, who generously donated his work and rights entirely for the Association's benefit. It was published by Images, Malvern in May 1993 and is on sale in the book shops at **£24**.
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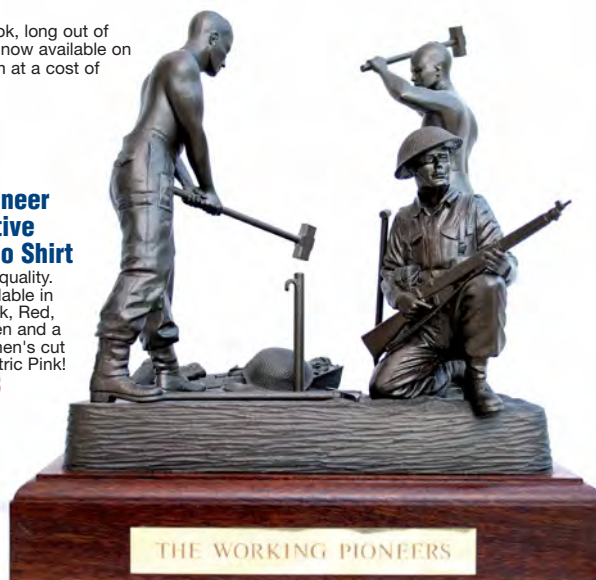


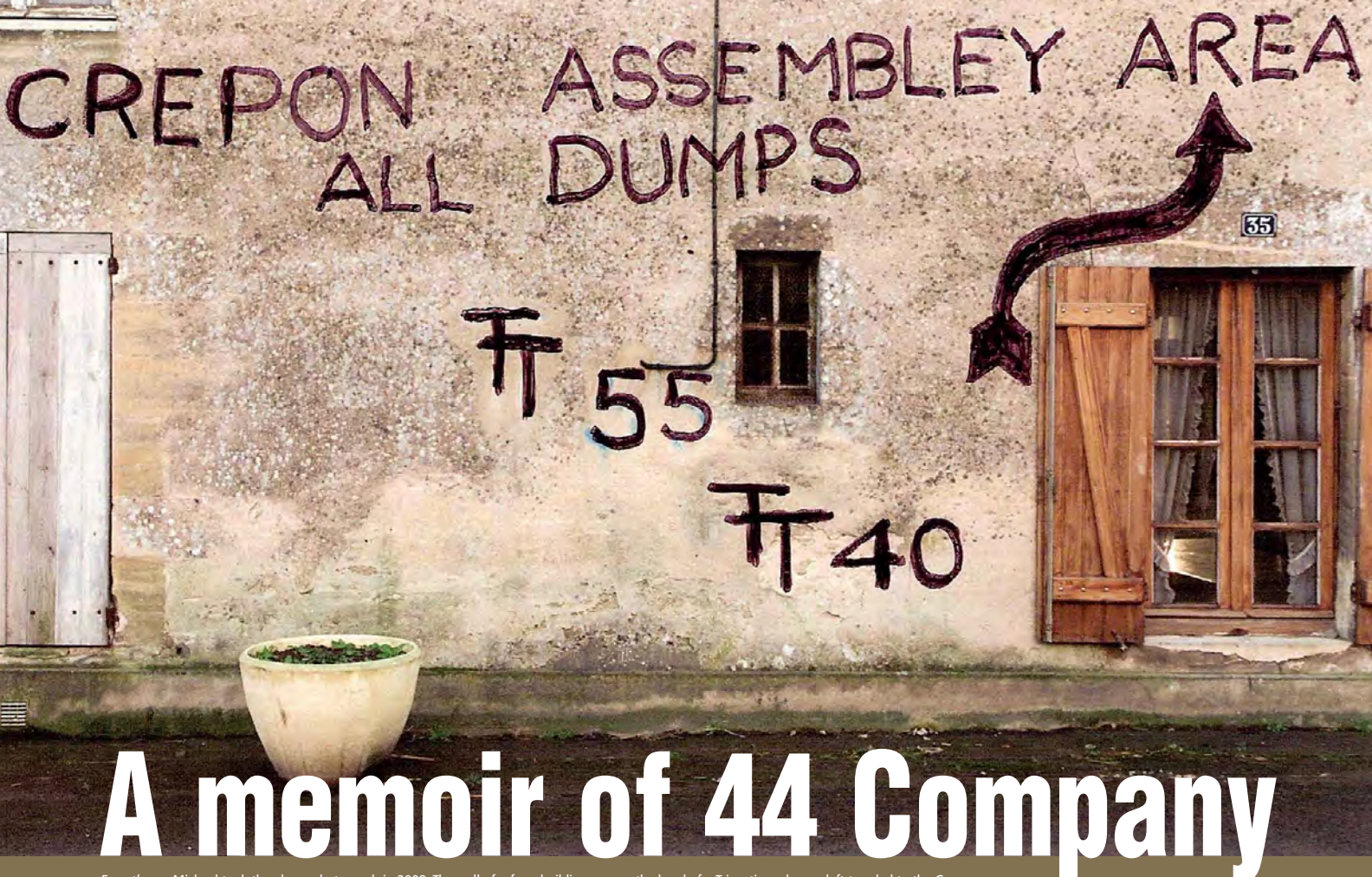
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A memoir of 44 Company

Ernest's son Michael took the above photograph in 2008. The wall of a farm building was on the head of a T-junction where a left turn led to the German defences but a right turn led to Crepon and on to Bayeux. Ernest had told him about it so we set off to look for it, because bitumen had been used, the writing was not overrun by moss/lichen and so survives to this day.

Ernest joined 44 Company in 1942. This Company after landing in France had worked further forward than any other in the Corps, building bridges to speed the advance.

Report: Ernest Henry Handley 14234238
Pictures: Michael Handley

ON Sunday 1st June 2014 Lt Col J Starling and Mr N Brown travelled to Windsor to meet a 96 year old ex Pioneer on the invitation of his son Michael.

He is Ernest Henry Handley (Service number 14234238), his date of birth was 21 February 1918. He currently lives in Stockport but had travelled to Windsor prior to visiting Belgium and then Normandy for the 70th Anniversary of D Day. Ernest's memory was amazing, he recalled most of the soldier's names and even their home town. He managed to 'add life' to the War Diary which at times did not record what the Company was doing.

During the early part of the war he was in a reserved occupation, working in an aircraft factory. However, when it was realised that extra manpower for the forces would be required for the build-up for the invasion of France one in ten in reserved occupations were conscripted. Ernest drew the short straw and received his call-up papers. He served initially in the General Service Corps for his basic training which was carried out at Blackpool (most personnel at this time initially joined the GSC for basic training). His training commenced on 16 July 1942 and he was transferred to the Pioneer Corps on 26 August 1942 and posted to 5 Centre

Pioneer Corps – this Centre was formed at Huyton, Liverpool in 1939, moved to Denbigh in July 1942 and was disbanded in October 1942.

From 5 Centre he was posted together with thirty other personnel to 44 Company which was then located at Cleethorpes. This Company had moved to the East Coast after its return from France with the BEF. On the party's arrival at the Company they had to display all their kit on their beds ready for inspection by the Company Second in Command.

His kit was perfect and the 2IC asked if he had had previous military service, Ernest replied that he had not. He thinks this was the reason that shortly after he was posted to HQ Section where he remained for the remainder of his time with the Company. He worked initially as the Pay Corporal before receiving promotion to Acting Company Quarter Master Sergeant.

Whilst at Cleethorpes he states that the Company worked repairing bomb damage, a point not shown in the war diary of the unit. Maj AC Burrows MC was the OC on his arrival with 44 Coy but he moved to 49 Group as the 2IC in March 1943 and was replaced by Maj TP Kennedy. Also in March 1943 the Company received mobilization orders and started training.

The Company moved to Kelwick Parcy, Pocklington in April 1943 and then to Shardlow Hall near Derby in May 1943. In March 1944 they moved to Bournemouth

and were billeted in hotels (a luxury for them). They were administered by 9 Beach Group. The job of a Beach Group was to organise and cope with the landing of an assault force. Such a multitude of tasks - clearing beaches and exits of mines, making additional exits, supervision and unloading of all craft, both troops and stores, organising dumps for ammunition and petrol, signal systems, beach dressing station for wounded. There was also rearward movement for evacuating more seriously wounded and POWs. All this whilst under a constant hail of shelling, mortar and small arms firing!

The luxury of the hotels was not to last, they were ordered to "Swop" accommodation with the Americans and moved once more under canvas to Hursley, near Winchester to allow the Yanks the hotels. The 2IC, Capt WD Roberts was promoted and appointed OC as Maj Kennedy had been medically downgraded. When Ernest and his friend George Taylor were in Trafalgar Square whilst in London waiting for D-Day they saw Maj Kennedy, Ernest thinks he was on his way to the MOD to be de-mobbed. Maj Roberts was later to be awarded the MC for his work with 44 Coy – full details are shown below.

His friend, George Taylor, a bookie from Blackpool, was very nervous about D-Day and wanted Ernest to desert with him. Ernest informed him that this course of action would spoil his life and he would



Ernest in 1945 at Estholf



Ernest (second left, middle row) in 1945 at Estholf
44 Coy Pioneer Corps cricket team at their self-made cricket ground close to Coy HQ where Ernest was based under Major W D Roberts. He was billeted with HQ in the only restaurant in the village which was owned by the Meyer family. The little blond German boy is Herr Meyer the son of the owner who was running what is now the Sandkrug Hotel in 2006 when we stayed there. Ernest is second left in middle row who was a full Corporal; 4th left is a senior officer who dad thinks was a Lt Col; at the end of the middle row is Sgt Jack Armstrong.



Ernest, 2014



Ernest, 2014

always be looking over his shoulder. George did, in fact, desert and Ernest was asked if he had any idea where he would go, and he replied that they should check the trains to Blackpool. Later in the war Ernest saw George but he was then in another unit.

Most of the Company embarked from St George's Docks, London on 3 June 1944, the OC, two Lieutenants and 185 men on craft 3758 and two Lieutenants and 41 men on Craft 3759. The war diary shows Lt Inwood and 39 men were left behind for later craft. Ernest was one of those left behind. They sailed later that day on HM Troopship "Neurelia" but not to Normandy, they were part of Operation Fortitude the "Decoy" Armada and sailed towards Calais. They were heavily shelled by German guns from Calais and stayed close to the South Coast to avoid being sunk. Operation Fortitude was the code name for a World War II military deception employed by the Allied nations as part of an overall deception strategy (code named Bodyguard) during the build-up to the 1944 Normandy landings. Fortitude was divided into two sub-plans, North and South, with the aim of misleading the German high command as to the location of the imminent invasion.

Neurelia

Built: 1912 at Barclay Curle & Co., Glasgow. Tonnage: 9, 082g, 5, 656n, 9, 900 dwt. Engines: Twin Screw, 2 x 4 Cylinder Quadruple Expansion 6, 000 I.H.P. 15.7 knots trials, 14.5 Knots Service. Passengers: 128 First Class, 98 Second Class.

Launched 12th September 1912, completed 18th November 1912. The largest ship in the British India Fleet at this time. Yard No. 497.

Both Fortitude plans involved the creation of fake field armies (based in Edinburgh and the south of England) which threatened Norway (Fortitude North) and Pas de Calais (Fortitude South). The operation was intended to divert Axis attention away from Normandy and, after the invasion on June 6, 1944, to delay reinforcement by convincing the Germans that the landings were purely a diversionary attack.

The main part of the Company landed on Gold Beach King on 7 June but Ernest and his party under Sgt Clarke did not arrive until 10 June, they had, in fact, been reported missing, they also landed at Vers-sur-Mer on Gold Beach King. Ernest described the difficulty of climbing down a rope ladder off a cruise ship in rough seas with an 80lb pack and carrying a rifle. On landing on the beach he was wading ashore when he stepped in a large hole (probably made by a tank after it left a landing craft) and immediately was up to his neck in water but still managed to keep his rifle dry above his head. On the ship he and his mates had managed to acquire large amounts of cigarettes and had filled their pouches and pockets. The beach was littered with thousands of cigs' that had to be thrown away after being immersed in water. After moving to Bayeux the Company was employed on mine clearance, they even had to clear their own bivouac area. A note in the war diary stated that the Company had been "Sized" whilst in the UK, the tallest being in 1 Section and the shortest in 10 Section – this proved useful for Bailey Bridge construction and was favourably commended by Commander RE, 30 Corps Troops.

Following the Normandy breakout, 44 Company at one stage passed along the 'road of death' in the Falaise where the retreating German Army had been attacked by Typhoons as it tried to break out. Ernest remembers the enormous piles of German dead awaiting cremation as well as the many horses killed in the action – it is often forgotten that even in 1944 a lot of the German Army was still horse drawn.

The Company were then to be attached to the Royal Engineers with their main employment on Bridging. They became proficient Bailey Bridge builders. Ernest said they followed the Guards Armoured Brigade throughout their advance into Germany even waiting in vain in the heavy rains in support of Operation Market Garden towards Arnhem.

During July the Company experienced considerable artillery shelling but suffered no casualties as they were well dug in. At the beginning of August 1944 they moved to La Rousellerie 5 Aug) and then to La Bigne (7 Aug), Saint-Germain-Du-Crioult (17 Aug), Landigou (19 Aug) and Touquettes (23 Aug). The war diary for 23 Aug states "At position West of GRACE whilst the Coy was moving to a new position Cpls Meldrum & Irvin were killed and Sgt Ibinson wounded by an explosion. No witnesses and cause could be established." Ernest clearly remembers this incident as he always made sure the stretchers were the last items loaded onto the trucks. They had disobeyed orders which had stated they must stay on main road, do not enter houses or pick anything up. As the Coy was packing up to move on they had gone through a hedge (for a toilet break) found a Bazooka which they picked up. Unfortunately it had been booby-trapped.

(Ed note: during the interview Ernest stated that he thought Sgt Ibinson also died from his wounds. However the Association records show that he was not killed. It shows him being posted to the Y List (X and Y Lists controlled non effective personnel) on 30 Aug 44 - this is probably the date when he returned to UK, He was then posted to 6 Centre Pioneer Corps on 26 Feb 45 (he must have been in hospital, sick leave etc between these dates). He was then posted to 724 Prisoner of War Company in May 45 and was finally discharged in Jan 46. When given this information Michael traced Christopher Ibinson's marriage in Mar-Jun 1947 in Durham East, spouse's maiden name Wanless, they had a son James in 1949. Christopher was born in 1919 in Sunderland and he died in Jul-Sep 1967 aged 48 years.)

On 28 Aug they moved to near Menilles and on 30 Aug crossed the River Seine near Vernon and moved to near La Chapelle. The following is a report signed by Maj Roberts on the work of 10 Section:

SUBJECT – Work of Pioneer Corps Sections in Forward Area 44C/W/D
To: CO No 41 Group Pnr Corps

Sir,

I beg to forward an account of the work done by 10 Section, 44 Coy Pnr Corps, under Lt O L Roberts, on the night 23/24 August 44.

At 22.30 hrs Lt OL Roberts received instructions from OC 210 Field Coy RE to proceed with his section, in tipper lorries to an RV north of STE GAUBURGH – ST COLOMBE, map ref Sheet 8G/1 – 636392.

OC 210 coy would then meet Lt Roberts, and No 3 Platoon RE and guide them to LAIGLE where they were to build a class 40 Bailey bridge, probable length 70 feet.

Lt Robert's party, proceeded by No 3 Platoon moved off at 23.00 hrs.

The night was particularly dark owing to heavy rainclouds, and No 3 Platoon, who were leading the convoy, took a wrong turning. Lt Roberts realized this and stopped his section. He sent a DR after 3 Platoon to tell them that they had taken the wrong road, and that he would proceed with his section and tipper lorries to the RV as ordered. He then continued his way and arrived at the RV at approx 0130 hrs, having had a most difficult journey along extremely dark roads. It was also raining heavily at the time. The lorries were not allowed to show lights, as there were believed to be some enemy in the vicinity, and at one point they had to make a detour as they were told the enemy was holding the road.

No 3 Platoon had not arrived at the RV when Lt Robert's party reached it. He waited there until the OC 210 Fd Coy RE arrived there at 0210 hrs. It was still pouring with rain, but the men were quite cheerful and anxious to get on with the job. OC 210 Fd Coy was unable to contact his No 3 Platoon and decided to do the job with 1 section of No 1 Platoon which he located, and 10 Section Pioneers. The Section of No 1 Platoon RE was very tired, having been working since early morning 23 Aug.

They arrived at LAIGLE at approx 0400 hrs. It was absolutely pitch dark. The damaged bridge was reece, and bridging commenced at approx 0500 hrs, as they had to wait for the RASC Bridging Platoon to arrive.

The section of No 1 Platoon RE laid out the launching rollers, whilst the Pioneers unloaded the bridging, and then helped to build the bridge. At this point they were working in an area held by the leading infantry, but there was not much opposition, being mainly sporadic mortar fire, and some LMG and rifle fire.

Lt Roberts states "I am proud to say that my men, although realizing their dangerous position, took no notice of the firing and continued to work as hard as possible."

At 0800 hrs the RE section of No 1 Platoon was withdrawn, as they were completely exhausted. The Pioneer section continued working on the bridge, and at 0900 hrs Div Engineers arrived to help finish the task. The bridge was completed at 1000 hrs.

The OC 210, who had been working with them the whole time, complimented Lt Roberts very highly on the way he and his men had worked. The CRE 11th Armoured Div, also sent a message congratulating the Pioneers on the work they had done.

The OC 210 Coy RE then told Lt Roberts to recce a camp site and get his men bedded down as they were absolutely tired out. This was done, and as the section came out of the town the infantry were still mopping up pockets of resistance.

Lt Roberts states "No words I can say would be sufficient to praise the efforts of my section, who worked themselves to a standstill under the most difficult conditions."

In case it should be wondered why No 1 Platoon RE were withdrawn at 0800 hrs, whilst the Pioneer section continued until the task was completed, the reasons are as

follows:-

a. No 10 Section Pioneers had been resting the whole day 23 Aug, until called out at 22.30 hours as it was anticipated that there would be some night work.

b. The section of no 1 Platoon RE had been working all day 23 Aug, and would not have been employed on this task had not No 3 Platoon RE gone astray.

I enclose two copies of this report in case they should be considered of sufficient interest to warrant onward transmission to DDL 2nd Army.

30 Aug 44

Signed W D Roberts Major Field Commanding 44 Company Pioneer Corps

Further moves quickly followed, to Dangu (31 Aug) Hebecourt and then to Warlus near Arras (1 Sep). Next they crossed the Somme at Albert and through Bapaume to Arras where Ernest recalls seeing the Vimy Ridge Canadian WWI Memorial at night time and all disbelieving that it could be happening again just 26 years later. The column received enthusiastic welcomes by the civilian population in each town they went through.

They moved through Lens and into Belgium at Tournai on 3 Sep followed by Charleroi arriving in Brussels on 4 Sep and drove through massed cheering crowds in the Grand Place offering their "liberators" chocolates, fruits, food and wine in abundance. In just four days they covered over 300 miles as Ernest recalls "Jerry was retreating so fast that we had a job keeping up with him"

They moved to Deurne near Diest on 7 Sep and on 10 Sep bridged the Albert Canal at Beernigen, on 14 Sep they moved to Bourg Leopold and then assisted 209 Fd Coy RE in launching a Bailey Bridge over Meuse and Escart Canal – the bridge a 130 foot double.

They continued the rapid advance and on 24 Sep had breakfast at Eindhoven and arrived at Nijmegen at 1200 hrs, on one occasion they actually advanced over 200 miles! Apart from the limited Company Transport all the vehicles were supplied by the Royal Engineers.

They were then held up as the Germans had broken through at Veghel and had cut the road. On 25 Sep they were about 4 miles from the German border.

The war diary for 26 Sep stated that the Cookhouse was hit by shellfire but there were no casualties. Ernest disagrees with this statement. The cook sergeant had just hung up his jacket in the cookhouse prior to the shelling and then ran for cover. When he returned his jacket was in tatters, he was then in shock and had to be returned to England!

On 27 Sep the war diary states "Much shelling and aerial bombing" – the objective was a bridge over the River Waal. This bridge was blown up the following day by a floating torpedo.

4 Sections crossed over the Waal on the evening of 30 Sep and started working on roads. 3 Sections were working on Nijmegen bridge during the night.

The Company moved to the west of Nijmegen on 6 Oct and found it much quieter and moved to a school on the outskirts of Nijmegen on 11 Oct. On 17 Oct working with 11 Fd Coy RE they bridged the Maas-Waal canal. On 3 Nov they moved from Nijmegen to Bourg Leopold a distance of 73 miles.

On 2 Nov the Royal Engineers, who they

were supporting, submitted the following report:

Dear Col Evans-Lombe

I am anxious to put on record the excellent work done by numbers 9 & 10 Sections, 44 Pioneer Company which have been under my command since June.

During the past five months the bulk of our work has been maintaining, the narrow, indifferent continental roads in such condition that they will stand up to the enormous volume of traffic of this Corps – a scale of traffic never envisaged by the designer of the roads. This work is extremely monotonous and has demanded infinite patience and long hours from the Pioneers. In addition, the worse the weather conditions, the more urgent the road repairs became and the more readily have the Pioneers responded.

Our work has not been confined to road work, and the Pioneers have figured largely in the following tasks. A Bailey bridge was built by us at CONDE SUR SEULLES during the hours of darkness and the Chief Engineer expressed his pleasure at the speed with which the bridge was built. All the unloading in the restricted site was done by Pioneers.

In the advance beyond ARGENTAN we were on the move from 0900 hours until 2100 hours – the Pioneers travelled in bad weather in open Tipper Trucks. At 2200 hours they were called out and moved up to LAIGLE where they arrived at 0500 hours with the assistance of a few Sappers of the Field Park Company of the 11 Armoured Division they completed a 70 ft Bailey Bridge by 0900 hours.

They assisted the construction of the approaches to VERNON Bridge across the SEINE again working all night. They took part in the building of the BERINGEN Bridge across the ALBERT Canal (night work). The evening after NIJMEGEN Bridge was severed by enemy action, Bailey Bridging equipment was unloaded by these Pioneers on the Bridge, although it was being shelled, and enemy aircraft were dropping flares.

The Pioneers spent two days assisting Sappers who were erecting a camouflage screen on NIJMEGEN Bridge which during this time was under observed enemy shell fire and subjected to bombing attacks.

The Company carried out certain operations across the NEDER RHINE and the Pioneers went up to within a few 100 yds of the enemy and loaded up silently and successfully the assault boats which had to be used.

The forgoing by no means gives the full extent of our activities but I sent it to you as I feel it will be of value to those who are compiling statistics and facts about the part played by the Pioneers during this war.

Yours,

Copy to:- Lt col R E Black RE

On 4 Nov 44 they moved to Bunde (57 Miles) and again helped 209 and 210 Fd Coys RE in constructing Bailey Bridges.

The war diary for 6 Nov shows the following:

1 & 2 Sections – with 209 Field Coy constructing Eastern approach of BORGHAREN Bridge having complete their portion of bridge construction

3 & 6 Sections – support 11 Field Coy constructing a bridge at URMOND

7 Section – with 128 Bridging Coy RASC near MUNSTERBILSEN

8, 9 & 10 Sections – with 21 Field Coy

constructing approached to West side of BORGHAREN Bridge having complete their portion of bridge construction

4 Section arrived from Nijmegen on 8 Nov and 5 Section returned on 16 Nov. Heavy rains at the end of Nov made roads difficult and roads had to be built up to keep above the rising water level. Borgharen bridge was out of action as the approaches were under water.

On Christmas Eve the Coy moved from Bunde to Holsbeek a distance of 85 miles and money changed back from Guilders to Belgium Francs. Further moves quickly followed Louvain (28 Dec), Cognellee (31 Dec) Yvoir (3 Jan) and returned to Nijmegen on 7 Feb. This series of moves was as a result of the German breakthrough in the "Battle of the Bulge" to the South. Ernest recalls the sudden moves from around Maastricht south around Liege to the citadels of Namur and Dinant where the Coy bivouacked overnight as part of XXX Corps contingency defence of the north western bank of the Meuse in the event of the Germans breaching the US Ardennes defensive battle. Here they were employed on keeping roads open due to soft ground and the volume of traffic. Sections were working all night on roads, log dumps were made along the verges to assist in laying down stretches of corduroy roads.

On 17 Feb the Coy moved to the Reichswald Forest in a convoy with XXX Corps Main and Corps Engineer Troops. On 21 Feb they built a Bailey Bridge over a railway at Hommersum. On 4 Mar they moved to Goch and then Kavelaar on 6 Mar before returning to Nijmegen on 9 Mar.

On 18 Mar the Coy moved to a concentration area near Asperden and supported the British 2nd Army 'Operation Plunder' the crossing of the Rhine near Rees on 23 Mar. Following the successful amphibious crossing they helped during 24/26 Mar to build 'LAMBETH' bridge over the Rhine – during this they suffered 1 killed and 11 wounded. The large Allied Military Cemetery at Kleve holds the 44 Coy fatality and many other RPC losses amongst the combat troops who took Rees.

On 26 Mar, the OC, Maj Roberts submitted the following recommendations for Mention in Despatches (All were awarded and these were published in the London Gazette on 8 Nov 45 – page 5454)

SUBJECT: Mentions in Despatches

CONFIDENTIAL

To: Commanding Officer

44C/RECS

No 41 Group, Pioneer Corps

No 801477 W/Sgt Sydney WILKES

On 24 Mar 45 at approx 14.15 hrs this NCO was wounded whilst engaged on RHINE BRIDGING OPERATION. Six others of his section were also hit, one being killed outright. Sgt Wilkes assisted in getting the injured man to the RAP and he did not disclose that he had been wounded until all his men had been attended to. His calmness and cheerfulness under fire had a most steadying effect on his section.

No 102775 W/Cpl Albert BUCKLEY

On 24 Mar 45 whilst engaged on RHINE BRIDGING OPERATION, this NCO displayed keenness and initiative of a high order. He was working on the bank in charge of an unloading party. There were a number of lorries standing by to come forward singly to the unloading point. The drivers were

not available, so Cpl Buckley drove away the unloaded lorry, and brought the next lorry for unloading. He then got out of the cab and supervised the working party until the lorry was unloaded, when he returned the empty lorry and brought down another full one. This happened at least six times to my knowledge.

No 13023510 L/Cpl David BALL

This NCO was left in charge of the remainder of no 9 Section after it had sustained seven casualties including the Section Sgt. Owing to his willingness and keenness in returning to his task, although there was an amount of spasmodic shelling, the remainder of the section worked on a disciplined and organized manner. This NCO was responsible for restoring their morale at the moment when all his men were considerably shaken both from the shelling and having seen the injuries sustained by their comrades.

No 131003891 Pte Alexander WATT

This soldier, although 42 years of age, worked hard and well throughout the operation. He was directly responsible for keeping part of his section together at a time when there were none of his section NCOs immediately available. His section sustained seven casualties, and Pte Watt's example helped to maintain the morale of the remainder of his section at a high level. His coolness and cheerfulness were at all times exemplary.

26 Mar 45

Commanding 44 Company Pioneer Corps

On 28 Mar the Coy moved to Esserden (crossing the Rhine). A series of moves quickly followed: Enschede (3 Apr), Sudlohn (6 Apr) Freren (10 Apr), Steinfield (13 Apr), Bassum (14 Apr) Emtinghausen (19 Apr). Here they worked with 210 Fd Coy crossing the River Weser at Verden to build a bridge from East Bank this was completed on 22 Apr.

On 23 Apr the Coy took up defensive positions near Reide and moved back to Emitghausen next day. On VE Day the Coy was split as follows:

3 sections (Lt G H Glaze) with 209 Field Coy at HASSEL

3 sections (Lts J Aitken & M Brown) with 211 Field Coy at ZEVEN

2 sections (Lt V Westaway) with 11 Field Coy at ESTORF

2 sections (Lt O L Roberts) with 210 Field Coy at ATHESDORF

Before establishing their base in Estorf the Coy went on to Hanover where they commandeered the showers of the Hannover FC to enjoy the luxury of their first shower since June. Visits to the Army Club in Nienberg were welcome as English beer could be drunk.

Ernest recalls that 44 Coy converted an old brick barn in Estorf into a theatre and created football and cricket pitches, on his visit in 2006 he found that the theatre, although built up to what is now the village community centre and the football pitch is still in use. No trace could be found of the cricket pitch! When they were in the hotel the hotel owner produced an identical copy of the photograph which is shown on page 41.

In Aug 45 the Coy administered 30 Corps Trade Training School (Ed note: a full description of this appeared in the Oct 12 Newsletter).

Maj Roberts left the Coy in Oct 45 on

release from the Army. The following is a citation for his award of the MC:

Name	Roberts
Forenames	William Demaine
Rank	Capt (T/Maj)
Number	256704
Unit	44 Coy
Theatre	North West Europe

Action for which commended

Major Roberts landed in Normandy on D + 1. His Company has been engaged on forward bridging operations under C.R.E. 30 Corps Tps Engineers throughout the campaign, frequently under enemy artillery fire. At the assault crossing of the Rhine his company worked on "Lambeth" Bridge opposite REES, Germany. In spite of Mortar fire the bridge was thrown across and open by 0730 hours on 26 Mar 45. Major Roberts encouraged and heartened his men throughout 48 hours of exhausting work. His presence and example when casualties were being sustained, materially helped in the rapid completion of the bridge at a very critical time. His conduct throughout the campaign has been worthy of high praise.

Recommended By Lt Col S J Stanbrook

CO 41 Group 14 Jun 45

Col de Pass

DDL Second Army

Lt Gen

Comd Second Army 12 Jul 45

Honour or award MC

London Gazette 24 Jan 46 page 640

Previous Awards MID 22 Mar 45 NWE

Initially recommended for MBE but upgraded.

The Company returned to the UK on 22 Dec 45 and proceeded to Thetford and was disbanded at Cambridge on 3 Jun 46. Since landing in France this Coy had worked further forward than any other in the Corps.

During the Battle of Tilly-sur-Seulles in Normandy in early June '44 Ernest remembers being sent forward with a section to fill in shell holes at the road junction which changed hands 23 times before being held.

On the way to collect hardcore in the village he saw a sign which stated that the Germans shelled the area every hour on the half hour. After loading the truck he and a couple of mates went into the village church where they found an organ. One of his friends could play and decided to try it, the sound of his playing must have been heard by the Germans as they immediately started to shell the area.

When they returned to camp an officer asked if that was the time for the shelling as it had occurred outside the normal schedule, Ernest would not confess they had caused the shelling.

Many years later, on a visit to the church, Ernest told his son to reach under the organ and on a ledge would be the key to the organ, the key was still there. Several times during this battle they were strafed by the odd German fighter plane.

From January 1946 Ernest returned to England and administered the return of supplies and equipment for his Coy as acting QMS.

Also collecting and returning AWOLs and deserters for disciplinary proceedings as well as POW camps where his considerable football skills and knowledge attracted him to the way the German POWs played the game. (the spectre of world Cup dominance clearly evident then?)

When Ernest was on leave in 1945 he was a Substantive Corporal but Acting Staff Sergeant (CQMS) – he missed the rank of Sgt, because while playing football on a short leave he split the cartilage in his knee and this delayed his return. Because of this he missed his substantive rank of SSgt and was discharged as a Cpl but still retained his “3 stripes with Crown” to show to his sons.

On 6th June this year Ernest and his son Michael attended the 70th Anniversary of D Day and Michael sent the following report:

Ernest and I attended the D-day 70th Anniversary Memorial Ceremony at Gold Beach King (Ver-sur-Mer) last Friday.

Because of time and the crowds we didn't venture into Arromanche so we did not see any presence from the RPC.

Michael has also forwarded the following newspaper article, the journalist may have made one or two slight errors of fact but the Pioneer Corps had good coverage in Manchester and Stockport.

The Gold Beach America Museum in Ver-sur-Mer now includes 44 Coy Pioneer Corps following the visits of Ernest and his son Michael. It is worth including on any Normandy tours.

Michael states I wish I had made contact

with you years ago because with the diary and all the place names in France, Belgium, The Netherlands and Germany our trips with dad could have been so much more productive.

He did, however, recall very clearly places like, Crepon, Creully, Bayeux sleeping in the large attic of a building next to the railway station which is still there, Tilly-sur-Seuilles strafed by Messerschmitts in July whilst mending the roads for the tanks, Villers Bocage terrible civilian losses due to Allied decision not to drop warning leaflets and so avoid warning Jerry, Aunay-sur-Odon, Argentan huge piles of German dead awaiting disposal due to French refusal to allow burial on their soil, Falaise utter carnage in the narrow high sided lanes, Vernon to cross the Seine, Albert for the Somme, Bapaume, Arras and Vimy Ridge, Lens, Tournai, Charleroi, Brussels and the almost Roman welcome in the Grand Place, Leuven staying overnight in a brewery, Diest, Eindhoven, Nijmegen then driving south past Maastricht in a hurry to the Ardennes staying overnight in Namur and Dinant overlooking the Meuse whilst the Americans repulsed the “Bulge”, back north for Kleve and the Rhine crossing at Rees.

Then in Germany dad is less detailed - he saw the night sky lit up by the bombing raids on Bremerhaven and drove through the streets of Hamburg where he saw many civilian corpses - then Hannover and the Football Club showers and ‘proper’ toilets in the players’ changing rooms. Staying and visiting Nienburg where there was a very good ‘mess’. Finally setting up base and HQ in Estorf in the commandeered restaurant of the Meyer family whilst they lived over the stables.

On 18th August 2014 Michael and his wife visited Leuven, Aarschot, Diest (where there is a citadel that must have been where 44 Coy ‘kipped’), Beringen, Leopoldsberg, Lommel and Geel. All places on the route from Brussels to Eindhoven, we used the old roads and avoided the motorways to see the most probable route of 1944.

In Leopoldsberg (which is in Flanders and, therefore, definitely Flemish speaking not French thus not Bourg Leopold!! as in the Coy diary) we visited a large WWII Military Cemetery of over 700 graves - 16 unknown Brits, 31 Canadians, about 10 Australians/New Zealand/S African, 20+ Poles, 4 Dutch and the rest all British. Many air force men from aircraft lost to and from bombing missions.

There are 12 Pioneer Corps graves. They are:

13063620 Pte Norman BLOMLEY died 5 Oct 44 aged 25
14542399 Pte Roy BROWN died 19 Oct 44 aged 41
13077217 Pte Reginald Frank JAMES died 5 Nov 44 aged 25
13086185 Pte Francis Dunn LLOYD died 13 Oct 44 aged 32
13010521 Sgt Michael MALONEY died 18 Oct 44 aged 49 (327 Coy)
13068520 Cpl Samuel OVEREND died 1 Jan 45 aged 32
407885 Pte Arthur Patrick PEART died 8 Feb 45 aged 29
13089087 Pte Wilfred SMITH died 13 Oct 44 aged 40
13097780 Pte Charles Henry SPEAR died 5 Oct 44 aged 23
4917962 Pte Wilfred Douglas STONE died 5 Oct 44 aged 25
2992088 Pte Murdo WHYTE died 9 Dec 44 aged 36
13006711 Pte Stanley WINTERBOTTOM died 12 Sep 44 aged 35 (44 Coy) – Mentioned in Despatches. ■

Veteran's tears on his D-Day return

TODD FITZGERALD

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@TFitzgeraldMEN

AD-DAY veteran who visited the French village he helped liberate 70 years ago broke down in tears as hundreds gathered to honour him.

Ernest Handley was sent to Ver-sur-Mer during the Normandy landings.

The 96-year-old, who lives in Reddish, served in the XXX Corps and Royal Pioneer Corps and travelled across France, Belgium, Holland and Germany.

Ernest – Ernie to his friends – made the trip for the June 6 anniversary and was handed two commemorative medals.

He is one of only three survivors of the Ver-sur-Mer raid still alive.

He said: “It was overwhelming, I broke down crying.

“The thanks they gave me was incredible, I couldn't control myself at times. I was very proud.”

The great-grandad, born in Reddish in 1918, was called up to the army in

1942. After training, Ernie was posted to 44 Company, Royal Pioneer Corps. By June 1944 he was a corporal.

He finished the war as a quartermaster sergeant.

Ernie embarked from the Port of London on the SS Neuralia in June 1944, before spending eight days at sea around the Pas-de-Calais under fire from the German artillery batteries.

His journey was part of a massive decoy invasion.

Ernie said: “They were shelling like mad from Calais.

“We had to wade through water up to our chins with 80 pounds on our backs while holding a rifle above our heads.”

His unit built bridges, repaired roads and worked on Mulberry Harbour. Ernie managed the cash payroll for 365 men in five different currencies in barns, tents and anywhere else he could find.

One night in a Belgian forest, during heavy shelling and a snowstorm, he dug a hole in the ground, covered it with planks and worked by candlelight.

Ernie was left heartbro-

ken when he was sent a newspaper from home and read that school friend Archie Turner – who he had seen weeks before – had been killed.

He said: “You had to harden yourself for the things you saw, but when it's one of your mates, it hurts.

“I was scared, but somehow when you're defending yourself, you find something from within.

“I always felt lucky not to have been tossed right into the action.

“I had a bit of a guilty conscience.

“But what we did allowed the assaults to happen.”

Ernie, who married his late wife Gertrude in 1939, has four children.

Twins Michaels and Roger were born the same month he was demobbed in 1946.



Ernest in 1942



Back after 74 years

Fritz Lustig with his son visit the Isle of Man. Fritz was interned on the island and after 74 years is revisiting. 13803534 Fritz Lustig (born 21 March 1919) joined 3 Centre on 5th October 1940 and transferred to Intelligence Corps on 19th May 1943.

Report: Robin Lustig
Robin Lustig

IT'S blowing a gale, and thunderous waves are crashing against the sea wall. I've brought my 95-year-old father to the pretty little town of Peel, on the west coast of the Isle of Man, and the weather is not being kind.

We're standing on Marine Parade, in front of nine Victorian red-brick houses, four storeys high, with magnificent views over the water to the ruins of Peel Castle, parts of which date back to the 11th century. Houses here sell for up to half a million pounds; a two-bedroom penthouse flat is on the market for £200,000.

But we're not here to buy a holiday home. This is where, in 1940, just months after the beginning of the Second World War, my father was interned, behind high barbed wire fences, after having been officially categorised as a "friendly enemy alien". He'd arrived in Britain the previous year, a refugee from Hitler's Germany. And this is the first time, after 74 years, that he's been back.

The summer of 1940 was a scorcher. So much so that my Dad and his fellow internees were occasionally allowed out from behind the barbed wire, down to the beach for a quick dip in the sea. To my father's amusement, soldiers with fixed bayonets stood guard. What were they frightened of? That a prisoner would suddenly make a break for it and start swimming across the Irish Sea to Ireland?

Then, as now, much of Marine Parade was hotels and guest-houses. Their owners had been given seven days' notice to get out -- because with the German army poised menacingly along the coasts of

France, Belgium and the Netherlands, Churchill was taking no chances. He worried about the 80,000 Germans and Austrians, refugees or not, who were living in the UK, and issued his famous order: "Collar the lot." (When Italy entered the war in June 1940, another 19,000 Italians were added to the list.)

And so it was, that on 4 July 1940, my father was arrested at the school in Derbyshire where he'd been working as a part-time gardener and cello teacher, and carted off. A few weeks later, he was put on a train to Liverpool and then on a ferry to the Isle of Man. The island had already been used to intern potential enemy aliens during the First World War -- so it had some idea what to expect.

The world of the internees was suddenly restricted to no more than 250 metres of a seafront promenade, each end sealed off with barbed wire and armed guards. As my father and I stand on a corner, looking up a side road that leads away from the sea, he says: "I never knew what was up there before. We couldn't even look round the corner."

But it could have been worse. Unexpectedly, my Dad's cello turned up, having been sent, without his knowledge, by his sister who was living in Cambridge. (He had expressly asked her not to send it on, for fear of it being damaged, but his letter arrived only after she had already dispatched it. The fact that it survived intact -- and that he plays it to this day -- is one of the many minor miracles of our family saga.)

There were several musicians living behind the wire in Peel, and soon a scratch orchestra had been put together. It was agreed that their morale-boosting concerts

for fellow-internees were likely to be of greater benefit than any other chores they might have been set, and for the rest of his time on the island, my father's time was spent rehearsing and performing.

Now, he says, it feels extremely strange to be back. We sit on a bench on the promenade, buffeted by the wind and spray, and after a while, he says the longer he looks at those imposing Victorian villas behind us, the more familiar they become.

On the way back to the airport, we stop off at the Manx Museum in Douglas, where they have an invaluable archive of material relating to the internment of aliens in both world wars. We look at files of government orders, specifying exactly how much food each internee should receive (even what contingency plans should be made if not enough kosher meat was available) and how many blankets they must be allocated.

But what they can't tell us is exactly how many people -- men, women and children -- spent time on the island behind barbed wire. The records are far from complete, especially from Peveril Camp, where my father was held. After he was freed, the camp was used to house British Fascists, Mosleyites, and IRA suspects -- perhaps because their records were considered ultra-sensitive, they were destroyed, along with those from my Dad's time.

So how did he get out? Simple: he enlisted in the British army -- and eventually was marched away from the barbed wire, taken to Douglas to board the ferry back to the mainland, and told that the moment he set foot on the ship, he would be regarded as a member of the British armed forces.

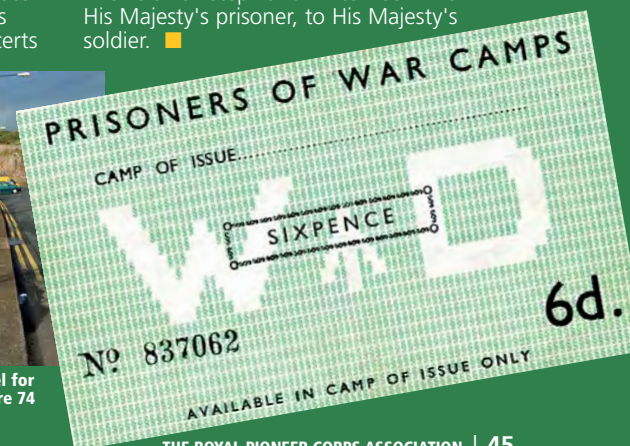
One small step for an internee -- from His Majesty's prisoner, to His Majesty's soldier. ■



Fritz in Marine Parade, Peel, in 1940 this was Peveril Camp housing 150-200 mainly Jewish internees from Germany and Austria behind barbed wire fences



Fritz Lustig 95, on the seafront at Peel for the first time since being interned there 74 years ago



Ryan' portrays some of the events here. The 1st Infantry assault experienced the worst ordeal of the D Day operation. The Americans suffered 2,400 casualties but 34,000 Allied troops had landed by nightfall. Divided into Charlie, Dog, Easy and Fox zones.

GOLD - Code name for beach from Longues-sur-Mer to La Riviere, 5 miles long and includes Aromanches where the Mulberry Harbour was established. British 2nd Army, 30th Corps landed here and by nightfall, 25,000 troops had landed and pushed the Germans six miles inland. There were just 400 British casualties. Divided into How, Item, Jig and King zones.

JUNO - Code name for beach spanning either side of the port of Courseulles-sur-Mer from La Riviere to Saint-Aubin-sur-Mer, 6 miles wide. Canadian 3rd Infantry Division & British 2nd Army, 1st Corps. Out of 21,400 men landed there were 1,200 casualties. Divided into Love, Mike and Nan zones.

SWORD - Code name for beach stretching 5 miles from Saint-Aubin-sur-Mer to Ouistreham at the mouth of the River Orne. British 2nd Army, 1st Corps with French & British commandos. It was nine miles north of the city of Caen - a major route centre of Northern France. The British landed 29,000 men and suffered just 630 casualties. Divided into Oboe, Peter, Queen and Roger zones.

Pioneer Involvement on D-Day

On D-Day, thirteen Pioneer Companies landed on the beaches with the first tide, and ten more with the second. By the end of D + 2, the finish of the initial assault, three Group HQs and forty two Companies had landed, and by D + 5, the totals had increased to ten Groups and sixty three

Companies.

Alongside other troops, Pioneers coming ashore on the first few tides landed 'wetshod' which often meant a long wade is full equipment. Some had to swim ashore from grounded craft and it must be assumed that most of the men reported missing at this stage were drowned.

The conduct of No. 13079390 Private A MOORE, of HQ 41 Group, deserves mention. Due to the sudden movement of the craft he, with two other soldiers, was thrown head first into the sea with eighty pounds of kit and equipment on his back. One of the men, Lance Corporal Webb, could not swim and sank. Private MORE dived under the water for him and swam with him to the beach, a distance of about thirty yards. His promptitude and bravery undoubtedly saved the life of his comrade, and it was a magnificent feat to swim fully loaded towing a non-swimmer even though aided by a small lifebelt.

Most of the Pioneers landing in the early stages came under heavy artillery and small arms fire but casualties were surprisingly light.

Various parties of Pioneers became involved in some of the fighting before starting work on the beaches. Sixteen men of 120 Company (Major TCHAPLINE) distinguished themselves by rounding up eighty six German Marines. Major TCHAPLINE caused much dismay amongst them by telling them he was a Russian and that thousands more of his countrymen were landing. 225 Company (Major MULLARD) also captured one officer and twenty-six Germans. A party of 53 Company (Major PRINCE) behaved very bravely and coolly when an aircraft crashed onto a petrol dump and started a conflagration which spread to an ammunition depot. The men of this Company formed a chain to save the ammunition and to localize the damage.

The task of the one Company incorporated in each Beach Group was to lay flexible causeways from landing craft to shore, often working waist deep in water, clearing beach obstacles, making roadways off the beaches and forming beach dumps of ammunition, petrol, Ordnance stores and

R.A.S.C. supplies. Other tasks for which Pioneers had been specially trained were the operation of RHINO ferries which transported vehicles from ship to shore, and the clearance of dead and wounded from landing craft and beaches and carrying stretcher cases to Field Dressing Stations. Much of the work was carried on under intermittent fire with the continual risk of touching a land mine.

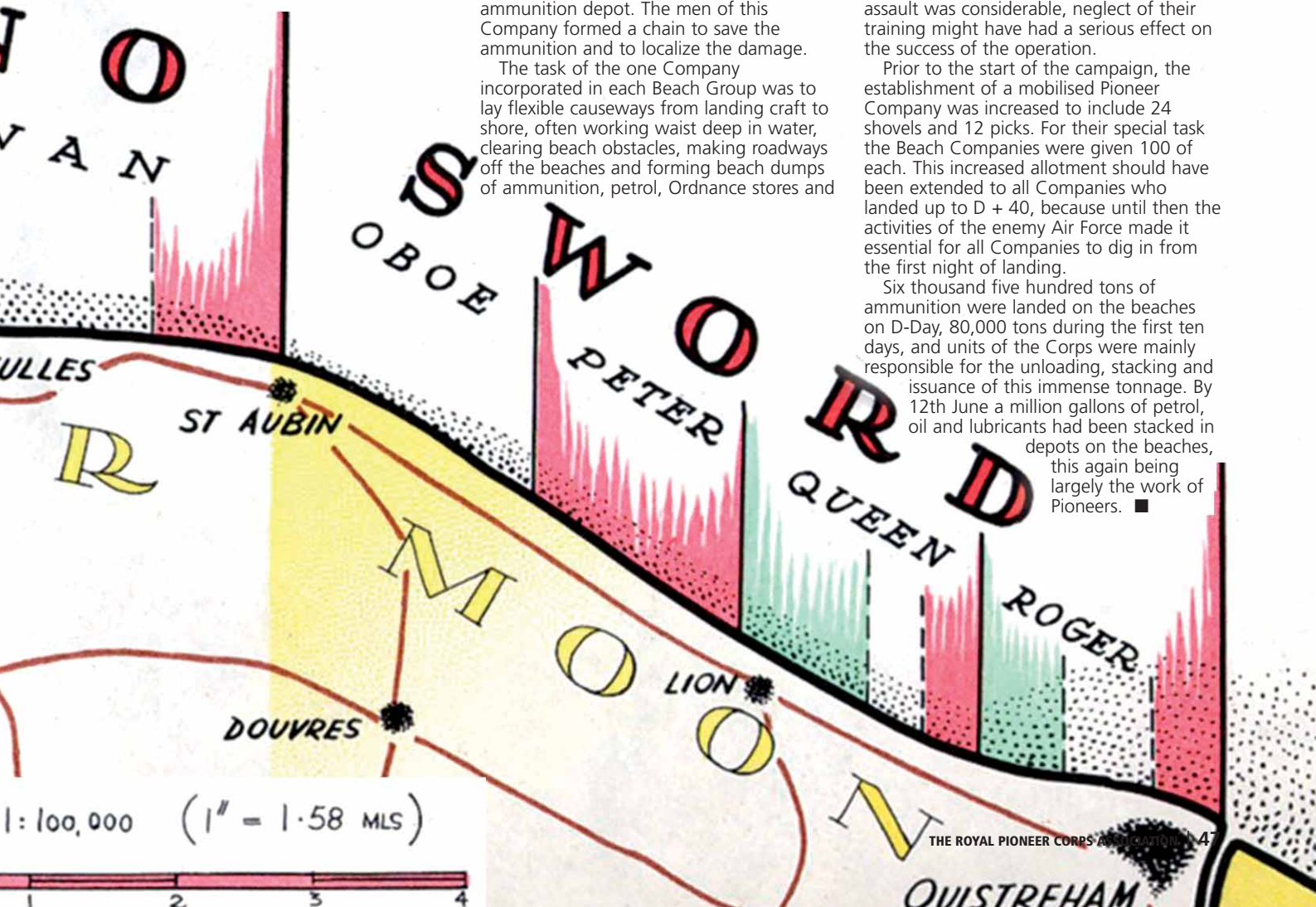
Airfield Construction Companies had also landed. They worked unceasingly until an airstrip was completed by the night of D + 3. Special Smoke Companies were also operating to prevent enemy observation of the beaches. One Company established a smoke point on an old battleship anchored off the estuary of the Orne. The ship was hit twenty times by shell fire and once by torpedo, but casualties were light.

For the assault an Assistant Director Labour was allocated to each of the two Corps; their function were to act as labour advisers, to supervise labour in the beach-head, and, after the landing, to use Pioneers where they were most needed. All anticipated commitments had been covered in planning, but the problem of how labour would have to be used in the first few days could not be entirely foreseen. A senior labour representative was therefore necessary to advise on new allocations and to coordinate the Group HQs. As Group Commanders landed they took over operational command of their Companies and brought the Companies which had been affiliated to a particular service for the assault, back into the general labour pool.

There was no doubt that the realistic training, battle drill and battle inoculation, which the assault Companies had undergone in the U.K. were essential and valuable. Since the Pioneer part in the assault was considerable, neglect of their training might have had a serious effect on the success of the operation.

Prior to the start of the campaign, the establishment of a mobilised Pioneer Company was increased to include 24 shovels and 12 picks. For their special task the Beach Companies were given 100 of each. This increased allotment should have been extended to all Companies who landed up to D + 40, because until then the activities of the enemy Air Force made it essential for all Companies to dig in from the first night of landing.

Six thousand five hundred tons of ammunition were landed on the beaches on D-Day, 80,000 tons during the first ten days, and units of the Corps were mainly responsible for the unloading, stacking and issuance of this immense tonnage. By 12th June a million gallons of petrol, oil and lubricants had been stacked in depots on the beaches, this again being largely the work of Pioneers. ■



Memories of National Service

Cpl Allen recounts his memories of his time doing national service at 71 Company and 260 Company, Royal Pioneer Corps

Report: Cpl A J Allen 23100516
Pictures: Cpl A J Allen 23100516

IN January 1955, at the age of 18, I started my National Service and reported to the Training Centre at Horsley Hall, Gresford, Wrexham. Horsley Hall was a large semi derelict house which contained the NAAFI.

A few of the other rooms were in use for administration purposes, but the soldiers were billeted in timber buildings around the large grounds.

After completing 8 weeks basic training I was sent on a Cadre course to the more modern Hermitage camp, also in Wrexham.

My next posting, in May 1955, was to 71 Coy R.P.C. Buckingham (Tingewick camp, which is about 2 miles from Buckingham). The Pioneers were attached to the RAOC and used the same camp to form CAD Buckingham. Both Pioneers and Ordnance worked on moving ammunition on two old wartime aerodromes, known to the soldiers as areas.

The two old airfields were at Greater Horwood and Hinton in the Hedges. Ammunition was moved from Hinton to Brackley railway station and from Horwood to Winslow station.

The Pioneer and Ordnance soldiers were

billeted in timber billets at Tingewick, warmed in the winter by two coal stoves.

During my posting at Buckingham I went on two courses, namely Nuclear Protection at Wilton, near Salisbury, and Fire Fighting at Aldershot.

Insufficient time left to serve meant those of us who joined in early 1955 were not sent to Egypt when the Suez crises erupted in late summer 1957.

My final posting was to 260 Company Basingstoke (Sherfield on Loddon).

The Pioneers had their own camp at Sherfield and were attached to the RAOC at nearby Bramley to form CAD Bramley. The work at Bramley once again was moving ammunition.

CAD Bramley had its own railway system and about 30 miles of railway tracks in the camp which had been an ammunition area for many years, possibly since the First World War. The Pioneers were billeted in timber huts, even more basic than those at Tingewick.

In January 1957 I was demobbed from Basingstoke.

What has happened to the camps since?

I visited Horsley Hall a few years ago to find a partly demolished Hall and overgrown grounds. I had great difficulty finding the Hermitage camp but did

eventually locate it and could only recognize the old Guard Room. The camp at Tingewick when I last visited had been demolished and only the concrete bases of the timber buildings remain. Cattle were grazing over the site and possibly some of the camp had been taken into the nearby golf course.

The 260 Company camp at Sherfield on Loddon has been demolished and only the entrance to the camp where the Guardroom was is still recognizable, as can be seen in the attached photo.

Large pine trees now grow on the area, and part of the camp may have been taken into a new housing site nearby.

CAD Bramley is still used as a base for training purposes for the Territorial Army (now of course renamed the Army Reserve), but much of the site has been taken for industrial buildings and residential use. However, the road sign is still in place adjacent to Bramley Rail Station, directing traffic to CAD Bramley. ■



Sherfield
C.A.D. Bramley 1

The Strathallan

The Strathallan was built at Barrow-in-Furness and was launched on 23 September 1937 and handed over to P & O for service in March 1938

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

THE Strathallan weighed 23,722 tons and measured 668 ft x 82 ft and was powered by Parsons geared turbines with twin screws and capable of 21 knots.

In 4 February 1940 the ship was requisitioned by the Ministry of War Transport as a troopship.

In November 1942 it participated in Operation Torch, the landings in North Africa.

At 0223 hrs on 21 December 1942 U Boat 562 fired a spread of four torpedoes at the convoy KMF-5 which was about 40 miles north of Oran. Only the ship of the convoy commodore, the Strathallan was hit by one torpedo which struck on the port side in the engine room.

The explosion killed two engineer officers and two Indian crewmen on watch below, damaged the bulkhead separating the engine and boiler room and fractured a tank causing oil to enter the boiler room. The ship immediately developed a 15 degree list to port and the master ordered the nurses and troops to abandon ship in calm seas in the four motor boats, 16 lifeboats and rafts.

After it became clear that the ship would not sink fast, the evacuation was stopped and the troops ordered to the starboard side to help its stability. The 1,300 survivors in the boats and rafts were picked up by HMS Verity.

HMS Laforey took the Strathallan in tow and 2,000 survivors were transferred to HMS Panther.

It still appeared that the ship could be saved but at 1315 hrs oil came in contact with the hot boilers and the fumes exploded, sending flames up through the funnel.

The ship was soon ablaze amidships so the master ordered the ship to be abandoned. All men went aboard the tug except a skeleton crew and were then transferred to HMS Laforey. The ship capsized to port and sank 12 miles off Oran.

The Strathallan had 440 crew members, 26 gunners, 248 Queen Alexandra nurses and 4408 British and American troops (among them 296 officers, some possibly of the Headquarter staff of the 1st US Army) on board. Of this number, only six crew members, five nurses and five troops were lost.

The following list which was forwarded to us by the family of 13035077 CQMS TH Callam shows the nominal roll of survivors from the lifeboat E15 of the Strathallan:

13035077 Cpl CALLAM TH
13071366 Cpl JONES HH
13044431 LCpl EMSHE A
13013212 Pte ANDREWS W
6546382 Pte BUNCE S
13017869 Pte BISHOP J
58322496 Pte BUFTON D
13081233 Pte DINARDO D
6465779 Pte DANIELS T
13082691 Pte DAVE C
13115423 Pte DIDDAMS H
13110952 Pte CHAPMAN A
2185308 Pte HAMLIN
888174 Pte HANRATTY W
6465250 Pte HART J
13080007 Pte HOLLIDAY T
274310 Pte HUDSON D
6460960 Pte JENKINS L
13105023 Pte JOHNSON S
13099199 Pte JONES J
952368 Pte JONES H
13075811 Pte LORIMER D
1531139 Pte McDONALD D
13088984 Pte McNICHOLAS J
13115912 Pte METCALF A
6212203 Pte NORMAN G
13091919 Pte ORME J
1536046 Pte PLANT S
13099250 Pte RIGBY T
13075669 Pte ROBINSON R
13067079 Pte SAVAGE J
13115514 Pte STARKEY K
6472847 Pte VAUS J
13091977 Pte WADDINGTON
FC13107749 Pte WILLETTTS W
13081780 Pte WISEMAN E
13075909 Pte WILSON A
5956653 Pte McGLORY J
7040622 LCpl TILES W (ACC attached)

23 Company PC
(Stationed at PHILIPPEVILLE from November 1942)
13091766 Pte TORTOLANO B

296 Company PC (Stationed at BOUGIE, North Africa – dock operating coy)
2368471 Pte MARSDEN E
13051163 Pte McKINLAY G

204 Company PC (Station at Algiers – working in Docks)
13063118 Pte LUMBER RH

2 Company PC (Stationed at Algiers – working in Docks)
13052693 Pte BROOMFIELD A

263 Company PC (Stationed at PHILIPPVILLE 5 sections on docks and 5 sections on smoke duties) 13073536 Pte FODEN WE

The following is the final record of U – Boat 562:

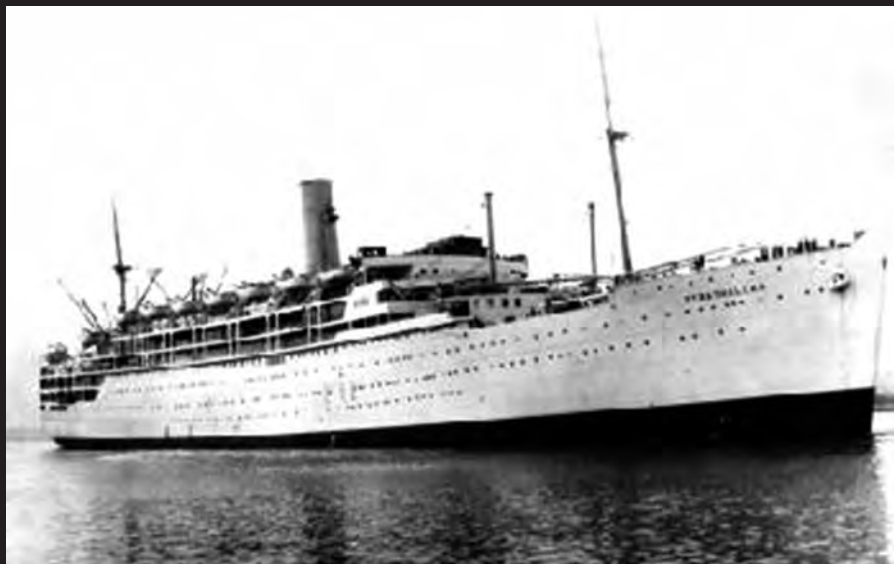
10th & Final Patrol Mediterranean From 07-02-1943 until 19-02-1943 13 days

Following a considerable lay-up time at the La Spezia base, over six weeks, which would suggest that the U-Boat might have been undergoing damage repairs, U-562 sailed from La Spezia for the Eastern Mediterranean, on what was to be her final war patrol.

On the 19th of February 1942, in a position NNE of Benghazi, Libya, U-562 was sighted by a Wellington aircraft (38 Squadron), forming part of an escort of an Allied convoy (XT 3) on passage from Alexandria to Tripoli.

The U-Boat was subjected to attack by the Wellington bomber and the British Destroyers HMS HURSLEY and HMS ISIS. Depth charge attacks by the British destroyers were successful and U-562 was destroyed in this action.

There were no survivors from the U-Boat's complement of 49 officers and ratings. ■



10 Salvage Unit
15990 Lt AE PRICE
13009043 Sgt LINDSAY A



■ Regimental Sport Award Winners

Picture: Paul Brown



■ WO2 Martin Lewis receives his Warrant

Picture: Paul Brown



■ WO2 Rob Aspinall receives the same Warrant

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Dusty Bryant

Picture: Paul Brown

EVENING DINNER AFTER BICESTER PARADE GALLERY



■ Reg sorts out the Port fines

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Regimental Dinner following parade through Bicester

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Ready for grace

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Paul Casey caught smiling

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Fond farewells

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Still waiting for grace

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Has Sarah defected to the East?

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Sgts Mess after the dinner

Picture: Paul Brown



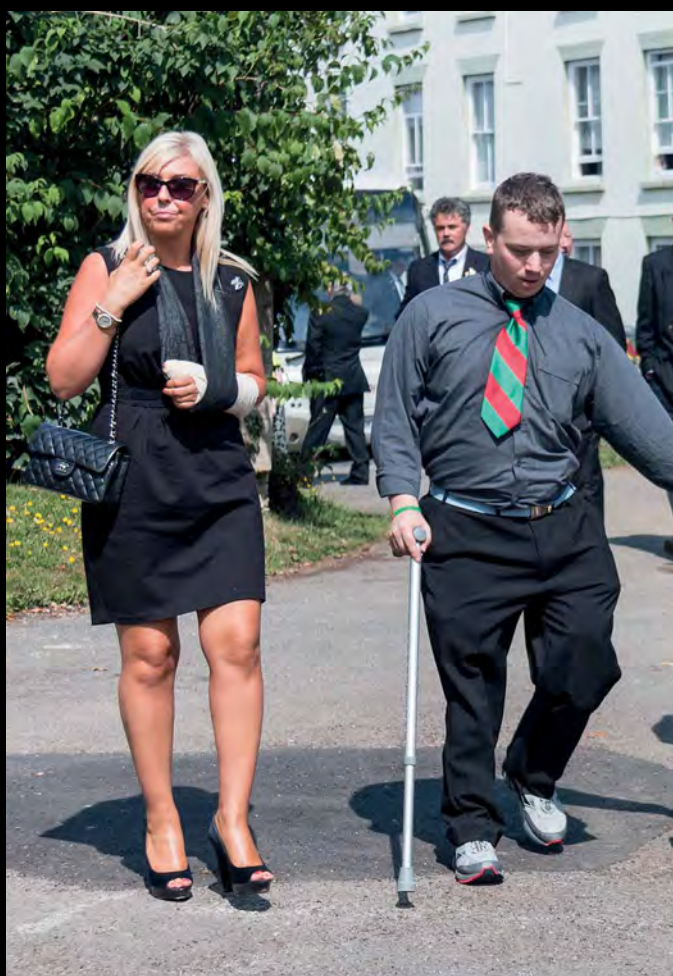
■ John Robertson and Bob Popkin

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Marjorie Flemming and Ross Bennett

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Heather Wood and Josh Campbell

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Association members arriving for Church Service

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Taking the salute

Picture: Supplied



■ The Axe Men

Picture: Supplied



■ Association members with the Mayor of Bicester

Picture: Paul Brown

BICESTER PARADE GALLERY



■ Association members march through Bicester

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Association members march through Bicester

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Association members march through Bicester

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Association members march through Bicester

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Association members march through Bicester

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Association members march through Bicester

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Association members march through Bicester

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Michael Burling presents Norman with a lovely gift

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Cudgie Smilie presents a cake to Norman

Picture: Scouse Bradley



■ Mrs Laura Dewsnap with the workers from 23

Picture: Mrs Laura Dewsnap



■ Pioneers at Founders Day, Chelsea Hospital

Picture: Supplied



■ Norman Brown with the Duke of Gloucester and the CO

Picture: Paul Brown



■ The mobile bar at the Army/Navy Rugby, Twickenham

Picture: Supplied



■ Dougie Durrant at the National Arboretum

Picture: Dougie Durrant



■ The Pioneer traction engine

Picture: Dougie Durrant



■ Nostalgia Group at Redcar

Picture: Kevin Young



■ Nostalgia Group at Redcar

Picture: Kevin Young



■ Taff Teague and Graeme Russell, Reunion Weekend

Picture: Tracy Brown



■ Labour Corps Veteran

Picture: Supplied



■ CO arrives in a prison cart

Picture: Supplied



■ Tom Appleyard return The Peacock Trophy

Picture: Supplied



■ A Cadet carries the Association Standard

Picture: Supplied

AGM Minutes

The 66th Annual General Meeting of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association

President: Brig CB Telfer
Chairman: Colonel A Barnes
Secretary: Mr N Brown
Members Present: 78

THE 66th AGM of the RPC Assoc was held in the Scully Club, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC, Bicester on Friday 26th September 2014.

The President opened the meeting at 1500 hrs by welcoming all present to the last AGM in St David's Barracks and hosted by 23 Pioneer Regiment. He congratulated the CO and all ranks of the Regiment on the first class standards achieved on the disbandment parade on the previous day, before handing over to the Chairman and the Secretary.

After receiving apologies from Brig HJ Hickman, Lt Col D Fletcher, Maj D Robertson, Mr G Lloyd, Mr D Fender, Mr W Mullen, Mr M Prince, Mr D Keeling and Mr D Burton the Chairman requested 1 minutes silence in memory of those members who had sadly died during the last year after their names had been read by the Secretary. They were: Ex Pte Roy Scott, Ex Cpl Darren McCormick, Ex Sgt George Pugh, Ex WO1 (RSM) Joe Smilie, Ex SSgt Jimmy Dunbar, Ex Cpl Norman Parker, Ex Sgt Harold Rossney, Ex Cpl Thomas Whipples, Ex Sgt Henry Ratner, Ex Pte Ronald Symonds, Ex Pte Lewis Martin, Ex Cpl Rex Petheram, Ex Pte John Roberts, Former Lt Col William Lanaway, Former Capt George Turnbull, Former Capt Don Belugum, Ex Sgt Robert Goddard, Ex Pte Simon Moran, Ex Cpl James Farrar, Former Brigadier and Director of the Corps John Ryall, General Sir John Stibbon, Ex Cpl Bill Goode, Ex Pte Peter Thomas, Ex Cpl Albert Jackson, Ex Pte David Suckling, former Maj Robert Wildgoose, Ex Cpl Harold Tipping, Ex Cpl Bill Plested, Ex Pte William Kemp, Ex Pte Arthur Spriggs, Ex Pte Cyril Hawksworth, Ex Pte David New, Former Lt Col Arthur Biggs, Former Maj Geoffrey Perry, Former Capt Henry Rudge.

ITEM 1. MINUTES OF 65th AGM

1. The minutes of the 65th AGM were unanimously agreed. There were no points arising.

ITEM 2. REPORT ON PIONEER ACTIVITIES

2. Lt Col D Clouston CO 23 Pnr Regt RLC gave the following report: (Ladies) Gentlemen, It is good to see so many of you return to Bicester for this final Pioneer Weekend here in St David's Barracks. It was also good to see so many of you represent the association when we paraded through Bicester earlier in June – what a day. The support and encouragement from the local community was overwhelming. Numbers today are up on previous years – testimony to many things but not least of which the significance of today's parade. I'm also conscious of the enormous amount of time and effort put in by Norman. He unquestionably wants to do the very best

by us all. Simply put, without him it wouldn't happen. Norman – on behalf of everyone here; thank you.

I would now like to address some key areas as they affect the Regiment.

Firstly, People. People have always been, and remain, right at the very heart of everything we do here. Last year I briefed that the Regiment saw 96 of our soldiers selected for Redundancy with the vast majority of those being Pioneer LCpls and Ptes. Numbers in this final Tranche were 87 – of which 60 were volunteers. These were again, almost exclusively, Pioneers.

Numerically that approximates to 10% of the Army redundancies. It would be fair to say that of the non volunteers there were no surprises and they simply needed a little more time to put their affairs in order. They will leave Colour Service in June 2015. This is proof, as if proof was needed, of the outstanding work that has been going on here to prepare our people for the future.

We have also continued to have a very successful rate of transfers.

To date around 100 Pioneers have been transferred to other capbadges or other trades within the RLC. We have done our very best to deliver, to our soldiers, what they seek. For some that is "soldier on" for others it is redundancy. Inevitably, not everyone has managed to achieve what they seek but I remain confident that our soldiers leave the Army with the very best preparation we could have given to them.

I know many of you here today have helped my soldiers find wider employment and again, on their behalf, I am grateful and pass on their thanks.

Moving onto change. We now sit at 2 Squadrons – 144 (HQ) Squadron and 187 (Tancred) Squadron. This amounts to approximately 190 personnel. Now we have held our disbandment parade, those who will continue to serve will be assigned out from the Regiment. My direction is that that by the time Christmas comes, our Rear Ops Group will have formed leaving an extremely small footprint here to essentially manage the Barracks and see out our final redundees. The Barracks will become fully occupied again in the Summer of 2015 when 1 Regiment RLC arrive.

Sporting success. The Regiment continues to have a proud tradition of fitness and military skills. Despite our dwindling numbers we remain, and now forever will be, the RLC undefeated Gore Trophy champions. We also won the Commando Speed March trophy for a third time – as a result of which we have been allowed to retain the old trophy which will be etched with the Regimental cipher. We have won so many other trophies I simply don't have the space here to list them all. The results are out of all proportion to our numbers and testimony to the indomitable "Pioneer Spirit"

I am conscious that this will be the last Regimental update by Commanding Officer 23 Pioneer Regiment. When I look back at what I have written I feel proud that the Regiment has continued to fight and, importantly, win. I have often said it comes

from a determination to succeed, an unwillingness to get knocked down and, above all, an overall strength of character. All of these attributes, we have in abundance.

To the future – look after each other. We are all soldiers and will always remain Pioneers.

ITEM 3. REPORT ON BENEVOLENCE

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

Unfortunately, in benevolence terms the Pioneer is a dying breed. The number of applications for assistance that we have received since 2009 has progressively reduced from 259, 218, 179, 176, 128 respectively and we are unlikely to reach 110 this year. The good news is that you are dying at a much slower rate than the other Forming Corps!

Total expenditure on RPC grants is likely to be slightly higher than last year at £40,000, albeit the number of cases has reduced. The reason for this is that over the years we have steadily been increasing the level of grant - £315 to the current average level of £424 – in order to equalize grants as close as possible across the Forming Corps. We should not forget that we are also admirably served by ABF The Soldiers' Charity and this year their level of support to the RPC will be not far short of our own total.

There has been no significant change in the type of application received and no unusual or noteworthy cases this year. For the RPC the need majored on increasingly expensive home adaptations/repairs to enable disabled people to live at home as a result of their lack of ability to meet nursing home fees, mobility aids and EPVs.

The current national financial situation has resulted in our pensioners experiencing a lack of return on savings. This, in turn, means that they do not have the money to pay for replacement household goods, heating, holidays, clothing and in some cases, food, plus of course, increased debt. We have helped with all of this and will continue to do so.

ITEM 4. PIONEER PAINTING

4. Maj (Retd) R Teague gave an update on the Pioneer Painting which had been unveiled by HRH The Duke of Gloucester earlier in the afternoon.

Full details of the painting can be seen at page 30. There will be 550 Limited Edition copies produced and signed by the last Commanding Officers of 23 and 168 Pioneer Regiments.

Number One print will go to the RLC and number 23 and 168 to both COs', number 32 to the Roberts Family, 34 to Charlie Woods mum, two other copies will be set aside for Heather Woods and the Ratu family. 100 copies will be set aside for those on the disbandment parade.

It is intended to raffle other important number e.g. 68, 70, 100, 101, 102, 144, 170, 187, 206, 518, 521 and 522 at next year's reunion. The remainder of prints will be sold on a first come first served basis by

the Association.

THE FUTURE STRATEGY OF THE RPC ASSOCIATION

5. Col Barnes gave a resume of the future strategy of the RPC Association. The removal of the Pioneer CEG from the Army means that the Royal Pioneer Corps Association will move to representing members who all no longer serving in Pioneer Units, although of course we will still represent a mixture of serving and retired ex-Pioneers.

So where does the RPCA go from here?

Given the very significant changes to Pioneers in the Army, the RPCA Council has looked at how it needs to change and adapt to the significantly changed environment.

Twelve months ago the Council set up two sub-committees; one to consider the assets owned by the Association, and another to consider the future role and function of the RPCA Council.

A great deal of work has been done by both sub-committees and I am pleased to be able to say that the way forward has now been worked through.

The purpose of this summary is to explain the Councils way forward.

The Royal Pioneer Council will continue, although its membership will reduce in size from the current 18 to approximately 10. Members of the future Council will have specific roles or functions, in addition to their wider Council membership and representational role. The Council is likely to meet four times per year to consider routine and ad-hoc issues.

Members of the Council will continue to represent the views and interests of the Pioneer fraternity on the current range of Royal Logistic Corps committees, including the Heritage Committee, Museum Committee, RLC Association, RLC Trustees and Benevolence Committees.

The Constitution of the Association will continue to provide for a Patron, a Vice-Patron and a President.

The RPCA Office and Secretary will continue to be based here in St David's Barracks. Norman Brown will continue in his role as Secretary of the Association.

Funding of the RPCA currently comes from the RLC along with any income we generate from the twice yearly RPCA Draws. This situation will not change. The Council have however negotiated increased funding to support the RPCA Annual Reunion which will offset the costs for those attending the summer weekend event.

For the foreseeable future; from 2015, the Reunion will be held at the Royal Court Hotel in Coventry.

An arrangement has been negotiated with the hotel – and as I mentioned earlier, with additional RLC financial support – to provide a weekend programme which includes accommodation on Friday and Saturday night with breakfast on Saturday and Sunday, and incorporates a carvery meal on Friday evening and a Gala Dinner on the Saturday.

The cost for all attendees will be in the order of £130 per person for the whole weekend – excluding 'refreshments' which will, as now, be met personally.

We plan to hold a short Memorial Service, similar to our existing service, at the National Arboretum on the Saturday morning and coach transport will be arranged for those not able to make their own way from and back to the hotel.

The Pioneer Memorial will be relocated and rebuilt in a Memorial Garden which will be created outside the wire of the new RLC HQ at Worthy Down.

The move will not be possible until the

new HQ RLC is built in approximately 2017. This move will be funded in full by the RLC.

The Pioneer Newsletter will continue in its current format so long as Norman Brown and his son are able to produce it. The same applies to the web site and the Facebook page.

The Pioneer plot at the Field of Remembrance at Westminster Cathedral each November will continue whilst the numbers of Pioneers attending remains buoyant.

The Cenotaph Parade each November currently has a good RPCA commitment and the Council anticipate that that this will continue.

Annual Dinners are currently held for Officers and WOs and SNCOs in respective messes at 23 Regt in Bicester.

The WOs and SNCOs Pnr Reunion Club currently hold two functions each year; one at the Army V Navy match and also a Ladies Dinner Night.

The Officers' Annual Dinner will continue, but will from this year be held in the Bicester Garrison Officers Mess and it is likely that it will continue to be held there for the foreseeable future.

The Northampton Branch is the only branch of the Association and expected to continue.

65 Branch members attended a function held in Northampton last January and it is possible that gatherings in the future will be held throughout the country.

Historical questions are raised by family, friends and others regarding ex Pioneers on a weekly basis and this generates a small income for the Association.

These questions have always been fielded by either Norman Brown or Lt Col John Starling and this arrangement will continue.

The Pioneer Corps of Drums - recently reformed is now thriving. The Council have supported this development and will continue to do so.

Benevolence for ex-Pioneers has for some time been provided by the RLC from Deepcut. This arrangement has provided extremely well for those of us in need and the Council are happy for the arrangements to continue.

RPCA property - it is planned that by the end of the summer, the RPCA will no longer own any property.

All 'significant' property items have been signed over to other organisations to be kept for posterity. These include The Royal Military Academy, the Defence College at Shrivenham, The RLC and the RLC Corps Museum and Regiments across the Army.

Property not of interest to other institutions, but of interest to the Pioneer Community is being offered by auction to members of the RPCA and I know that many here will be keen to bid for memorabilia this week-end.

In summary, your Association is adjusting to the future, rather than undergoing significant change. Its central focus will be the Pioneer Community of ex-Pioneers, whether serving or retired. The future is positive and the Council is preparing itself appropriately.

I and my colleagues on the Council will be happy to address any question you have either now or perhaps over the week-end on a one-to-one basis.

ITEM 6. GENERAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

6. Mr N Brown gave the following report:

a. Accommodation – Once again we have had to accommodate a large number of personnel in St George's Barracks, this year we have had to supply beds for a record number.

It would be appreciated if those staying in either Barracks would strip their beds

prior to leaving.

b. Thanks. I must thank the members of 23 Pioneer Regiment who have worked so hard to make this weekend a success. Special mention must be made to the Quartermaster's staff who have worked wonders in not only arranging extra beds but erecting tentage, marquees etc.

c. Membership. It is pleasing to report that the number of active members has increased in the last few years and is now standing at nearly 3,000 mark.

d. Auction. You will notice in the programme that the Association will be having an auction, this will take the form of sealed bids and will work on the same principle as EBay. In other words if you complete a card with your maximum bid, if, for example, you put £10 for an item and the second bidder has a bid of £7 your will pay £7.50 for the item (50p increments).!

e. Cenotaph Parade.

This year the Association has been allocated a total of 54 tickets after I have already received 48 requests for a ticket so if you would like to join us please let me know. I also have tickets for the Field of Remembrance.

f. Next year's Reunion. Next year the Reunion is to be held at the Royal Court Hotel, Coventry starting on Friday 3 July. The total cost of a three night package will be £140, however it is hoped that the Association will subsidise members.

The package includes 3 nights accommodation, 3 breakfasts, a carvery meal on the Friday, a gala dinner on the Saturday and a carvery meal on the Sunday. We will also have happy hour prices on selected bars during the whole weekend.

It is hoped to run a coach to the National Arboretum on the Saturday. A booking form will be sent out with the April Newsletter.

g. Thanks. Finally I would like to place on record my appreciation of the help given to me by the Regiment not only during the build up to the Reunion Weekend but throughout the year.

I would also, once again, to show my appreciation for the work carried out by my son Paul for all his work, not only in preparing the Newsletters but for all the other work he does on behalf of the Association during the year.

ITEM 7. ARRANGEMENTS FOR NEXT REUNION/AGM

7. The date of the next reunion/Annual General Meeting will be 3 – 5 July 2015.

ITEM 8. CLOSING REMARKS FROM THE PRESIDENT

8. Having thanked all present for their support in attending this re-union, the President referred to the fact that the Association would need to be more independent than it has ever been.

The excellent work that has been done by the Council and in particular by Norman Brown in increasing the active membership to close on 3,000 is an encouraging sign that whilst the direct link to the serving Army is now at an end, the Association can be successful in the future if members remain actively involved.

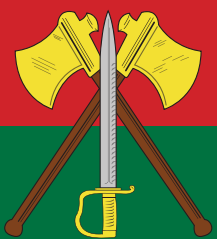
Everyone present was asked to spread that message.

The President closed the meeting with best wishes to all for an enjoyable weekend.

ITEM 9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

9. There being no further business the meeting closed at 1540 hours.

N BROWN
Secretary



Blast from the Past

Here are a selection of photographs from our archives. Do you recognise any of these Pioneers?



Press Cuttings for 1944

The following have been taken from our archives. These cuttings are all from the year 1944. It is the intention in future Newsletters to print details from other years.

Report: Norman Brown
RPCA Archive

THE following have been taken from our archives which detail Pioneer related events from various publications. These cuttings are all from the year 1944.

The Times 17 Feb 44 RACING GREYHOUNDS DRUGGED

After a trial lasting three days at the Central Criminal Court, William John Spicer, 39, alleged to be a deserter from the Pioneer Corps, and Charles Arthur Wells, 37, auxiliary fireman, were found Guilty yesterday of conspiring to defraud by administering drugs to greyhounds at Hackney Wick Stadium. Spicer was sentenced to 21 months' imprisonment, and judgement on Wells was deferred until the next session.

Hansard 13 Jun 44 BRITISH REGIMENTS (AUSTRIAN PLATOONS)

Mr. Bartlett asked the Secretary of State for War whether, following the precedent created in the case of the Danes, he will consider the advisability of grouping Austrians in the British Army into Austrian platoons attached to British regiments.

Sir J. Grigg The position of the two groups is somewhat different.

The Danes were enlisted in a body for combatant duty in the Buffs. The Austrians were originally enlisted into the Pioneer Corps. When the restrictions on aliens serving in other corps were relaxed the Austrians who volunteered were transferred to other branches of the Army where their trade and other qualifications could be most fully used.

To withdraw them now and regroup them in Austrian platoons of British regiments would involve wasting skill and experience, and in my view would not be in the best interests of the Service.

Hansard 20 Jun 44 WOUNDED SOLDIER, MANCHESTER (COMPLAINT)

Mr. J. Henderson asked the Minister of Health if he is aware that Private Thomas Doran, 4462241, of the Pioneer Corps, who fought throughout the African campaign and who was recently wounded in Italy, was discharged from a certain military hospital, of which he has been informed, on 7th June on two crutches with a kit weighing 70 lbs. to carry, without his family being notified of his homecoming; that consequently there was no one to await his arrival at the Central Station, Manchester, and he arrived home in an exhausted condition; and will he take immediate steps to prevent a recurrence of this treatment of wounded soldiers which has caused indignation in Manchester.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health (Miss Horsbrugh) There

are, as my hon. Friend is no doubt aware, other and distressing features in this case which are not referred to in his Question. I am sending him a full report of the facts, which includes information about the particular point raised in the Question.

This information shows, in my opinion, that no blame is to be attributed to the hospital.

Mr. Henderson Surely the hospital authorities have charge in this matter, and is it not elementary that, before a wounded soldier is released under the conditions named in the Question, the authorities should take precautions to see first, that he has the necessary assistance and transport right to his home, and second, that his relatives are made aware of his homecoming? Is it not a scandalous thing to see a wounded soldier hobbling along on two crutches and struggling with a kit of 80 lbs., and is my hon. Friend aware that the people of Manchester are very indignant indeed?

Miss Horsbrugh I would remind my hon. Friend that I am sending him full particulars, but in view of what he has asked, I must say that the man was going on leave and there was no need for him to take these things.

He was given leave from the hospital. It is a distressing case, and I think it would be better if my hon. Friend were to read the full answer I am sending him and then, if he thinks it necessary, he can raise the question again.

The Times 20 Aug 44 ON THE ROAD TO DEAUVILLE - A RAPID PURSUIT - QUIET AFTER THE FIGHTING FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT IN NORMANDY AUG 25

So fast are the allied forces moving after the enemy retreating towards the Seine, even in the coastal area where things were for so long difficult and slow for us, that to see any action anywhere means almost impossibly long journeys on incredibly crowded roads.

Today I managed to see something of the battlefields around the mouth of the Orne and down to battered Troarn, which will be for ever associated with the 6th Airborne Division and certain Commandos, but the limit of progress before the time came to turn back was Deauville.

From there one could just look across the River Touques to Trouville, where, as lately as yesterday morning, a few groups of the enemy were still holding out at points east of the centre of the town. Trouville, like Deauville, was quiet this morning, and there was no great demand for the boat service which is being worked across the Touques in place of the demolished bridge. I learned, however, that Deauville had been by no means quiet yesterday when many women and girls, alleged to have consorted with or assisted the enemy during the occupation, had their heads shaved in public.

BELLS RUNG AGAIN

People were talking of the aged priest who for four years refused ever to have the bells of his church rung and of the delight with which he set them ringing a few days ago when Belgium and Dutch troops of the Canadian First Army came triumphantly into Deauville. There were young men of the FFI with rifles patrolling in the town this morning and their information was that the allied troops were then in Honfleur and meeting a certain amount of resistance from strong-points.

An outstanding impression of the day's drive was the almost complete absence of signs of battle apart from those which not be cleared quickly, such as shattered and shell-pierced buildings, half cut-down trees, bomb-cratered roads, and occasional wrecked tanks, mostly German, either standing on the roads or with their tracks in the air on the grass verges.

Works on the roads is continuous, including widening and tarring in places and the construction of roundabouts and by-passes. Amid the remains of a bomb-shattered village to the west of Troarn men of the Royal Engineers and the Pioneer Corps, using a bulldozer, a mechanical "grab" and a pneumatic drill to help the work or picks and shovels, toiled stripped to the waist in the hot sunshine to make the road passable again.

The Times 15 Sep 44 EVACUEES STILL RETURNING - PIONEER CORPS HELP WITH LUGGAGE

Incoming traffic at Paddington Station yesterday was no lighter than during the last few days. The return of evacuated mothers with their children continued. Apparently the cessation of flying bomb attacks and the announcement of the relaxation of the black-out regulations in London have so cheered the evacuees that their one thought is to get home.

A philosophic railwayman whose work has been greatly increased by the huge influx of luggage cheerfully remarked, "I cannot blame them. They have been led to believe that it's all over, bar the shouting. It's a pity though that they have not stayed away, for we would have liked to have brought them back at the proper time in apple-pie order and in much greater comfort."

Yesterday the arrival platforms were stacked with luggage from end to end, and in order to deal with it more expeditiously the station staffs were augmented by men of the Pioneer Corps and of the Civil Defence service. The help of husbands who had found time to get to the station to greet wives and children was also welcomed. A constant stream of taxi-cabs flowed through the station exit bearing happy families on the last stage of their journey home. "Let's hope that they won't have to be sent back," was the sympathetic thought of the railway official.

Although perhaps not so pronounced as

at Paddington, the traffic problem persisted at other stations. Crowded trains arrived at Euston and King's Cross. Piles of luggage were built up on platforms. Prams, although awkward pieces of luggage, provided accommodation for stowaway dolls and other precious toys. One mound of luggage was surmounted by a large wooden toy engine, no doubt carefully placed there by a railway servant as an object worthy of reverence.

The hard-working porters are consoling themselves with the thought that this great rush home cannot last much longer.

Daily Sketch 21 Sep 44 THEY GO EVERYWHERE – AND THEY'LL DO ANYTHING

The men of the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps have used their picks and shovels – and their rifles – in battle zones across the world. Their official motto is on their badge.

Their unofficial motto is: "We do the difficult immediately. The impossible takes a little longer."

These men wage war with a pick and shovel chiefly – but are ready to use at a split second's notice. The jobs they are called upon to do are legion; their ages vary from the teens to the fifties. In a single day they may be stretcher-bearers, airfield constructors, road-makers – and fighting soldiers.

They are the men of the Pioneer Corps, masters of trained technique and swift improvisation, yet men of whose courage and skill we hear little of.

In their ranks you'll find a grand blend of A1 young soldiers with "old sweats" of the last war. Wherever we have carried the war they have been among the first to go into action.

Greatest moment in the history of the Pioneer Corps came on D-Day. Thirteen pioneer companies went in on the first tide – there are about 400 men to a company. They had to wade ashore with full equipment. It was quite a way to the beaches, and the rough seas continually threatened to sweep them off their feet against the Tide.

Hansard 23 Sep 44 MILITARY SERVICE (BUILDING TRADE OPERATIVES)

Mr. Molson asked the Minister of Labour how many men have been called up from the building trades for service in the armed forces since 31st March, 1944; and how many of them are in the constructional companies of the Pioneer Corps.

Mr. Bevin So far as can be ascertained the number of men in building and civil engineering occupations who have been posted to the Forces since 31st March, 1944, is 10,371. These men were posted to the Navy, Army and Air Force, and I cannot say how many of them are now in constructional companies of the Pioneer Corps.

Mr. Matson Would the right hon. Gentleman make representations to the Secretary of State for War to see whether it

would be possible for some of these men to be released for work in bomb-damaged areas?

Mr. Bevin I cannot do that. If I take these men out of the Army, I have to call-up an equal number from another strained industry. Most of these men are young men and essential to the Army. I must keep certain trade sections in the Services and I would have thought that my hon. Friend would have realised this during the advance through Holland.

Mr. McEntee Is the Minister aware that, at the present time, instructions are still with the local employment exchanges for the calling-up of slaters and tilers; and in view of the fact that we cannot provide cover for people who have been bombed out, does he not think that these people should not be called up?

Mr. Bevin I do not know whether I have any instructions for slaters and tilers, but there are no slaters or tilers to call up anywhere.

Mr. McEntee Well, there are, and they were being called up as recently as yesterday.

The Times 8 Nov 44 GOVERNMENT AND GAS STRIKE - MEN ORDERED BACK TO WORK FROM OUR LABOUR CORRESPONDENT

Besides calling in soldiers as an emergency measure to maintain supplies of gas from the works of the Manchester Corporation in the Bradford area of the city, when the night shift went on strike on Monday, the Government have taken the further action, through the minister of Labour and National Service, of ordering the strikers back to work.

The Minister of Labour is using his powers of direction in circumstances which are set out in the following announcement issued yesterday by the Ministry of Fuel. Men of the day shift also went on strike yesterday. For work-people employed by a public utility undertaking to break their contracts of service, with the probable effect of depriving the inhabitants of the area, either wholly or to a great extent of their supplies, is a criminal offence. The penalty may be a fine not exceeding £20 or imprisonment for a period not exceeding three months.

In the statement the Ministry of Fuel said:

"Some 10 days ago the workers employed at the Bradford Road gasworks notified the Corporation that unless their payments for night shift working were increased they would, as from Monday night, November 6, cease to do night shifts and confine themselves to day shifts."

"As the wages and conditions of employment of these workers are regulated by agreements of the Gas Joint Industrial Council, the Corporation, in agreement with the union, decided that the increases could not be granted. In view of the threat to withhold labour from the night shift, arrangements were made for the military to be available to maintain essential supplies."

"When the night shift was due to start on Monday night a number of the men

concerned refused to work and military were put on. At 6 o'clock this morning, when the first of the two day shifts was due to start, the men presented themselves for duty, the military left in their lorries, but the men then intimated their refusal to undertake the work.

SUPPLIES IN DANGER

"In consequence, essential supplies have been in danger, and alternative arrangements have had to be made at short notice. The men on the 2 pm shift have followed suit."

"In view of the emergency created by their action, the men who refused the night shift on Monday night have now received a direction from the national service officer of the Ministry of Labour and National Service to perform the night shift to-night. Failure to obey this direction will render them liable to proceedings."

"The position of the men who refused to perform the day shifts today is being considered by the Director of Public Prosecutions under the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act, 1875, which makes special provision designed to safeguard the public in certain circumstances against acts likely to deprive the public of their supply."

Supplies of gas in Manchester will be curtailed from 8.30 this morning. A few of the men who stayed out on Monday night checked in for duty last night.

The strike spread yesterday to Stockport Corporation gasworks. Mr Gordon MacDonald, Northern Fuel Chief, assured factories and homes that they would get their gas. Men of the Pioneer Corps took over last night./

Mr MacDonald said that Ministry of Labour directions would be served on the men at Stockport who withdrew their labour.

Hansard 12 Dec 44 YOUTHS (TRAINING)

Mr. Thorne asked the Secretary of State for War how long a man has to be in the Army before he is sent overseas; whether a man is medically examined before being sent abroad; if he is aware that Private J. Lott, No. 14817533, had only been in the Army 10 weeks when he was sent overseas; and what action he intends taking about this case.

Sir J. Grigg On the general question would refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Lipson) on 11th July.

In accordance with the usual practice Private Lott was medically examined before he went abroad. He had completed his training and was considered fit for overseas service in the Pioneer Corps.

The Times 18 Dec 44 NEWS IN BRIEF

William Joseph Stewart, of the Pioneer Corps, who was sentenced to death at Staffordshire Assizes for the murder in a Banbury lane of Miss Laurie Grimsley, his fiancée, has been reprieved. ■

History of the Pioneer CEG

It is our intention to produce a History of the Pioneer CEG within the RLC. We are looking for anecdotes and memories of service to assist in the compilation of the records.

Please send any memories, photographs etc to the RPC Association in Bicester. If sending photos please name any personnel on the photo and

date the item. Photos will be returned after digital copying. Records may also be sent electronically.

Email: royalpioneer corps@gmail.com

The more records received the better the record of our time in the RLC.

We wish to personalise the record rather than just copy entries from the Sustainer.

The Expendables

FIRSTLY May I say a HUGE thank you from some of the old School 187 Coy we all had a real blast! I have attached some pictures of the 1992 March – September tour of south Armagh. Northern Ireland as 3 Platoon adjoining the 2nd Battalion of Light Infantry carrying out " Operations A Coy"

One of the pioneers hardest tours ever!

Comprising in technical field craft, air reaction force and quick reaction force with the use of the Lynx, Puma, Wessex and Chinook helicopters, tactical vehicle check points whilst working very closely with the Royal Ulster Constabulary! Close operations post, Intel and Special Air Services.

Offering ground and air support to maintain the presents of the security forces during the troubling and volatile Northern Ireland.

After R & R the platoon was split up and re-deployed over a few weeks so the lads didn't get the opportunity to say BYE!

Contacts were lost and 22 years went by.

Earlier this year I (Mark Ritchie) teamed up with Thomas Graham and Carl Edwards and agreed to run our own reunion but found this wasn't viable but it made perfect sense to have our reunion at the main RPC reunion as it was the perfect venue! It was the last place we were altogether just after Simpson barracks.

The reunion was a complete success, the brothers in arms now nicknamed "The Expendables" have reunited and have made a pact to continue yearly!

And will continue to seek out the rest of 3 Platoon to bring them all back together so a massive thanks to Facebook, the RPC Association and Norman we salute you and your team! It's been emotional!

I think the lads would like their story published in the next issue of the magazine! Very kind regards

Mark Ritchie.



New plaques at Simpson Grange



■ The new plaque at Simpson Grange, Northampton

Pictures: Kevin Young

IT IS with great thanks to members of the RPC Nostalgia Group and members of the Royal Pioneer Association that the new plaques are now in place on the plinths outside the site of the old Simpson Barracks, Northampton.

The temporary ones were taken down, one was given away as promised and the other was auctioned off, the winner of the auction was Kevin Kittle who is now the proud owner. We would like to thank all the members who raised the money for the new plaques which are on Black granite and gold leaf. But we would like to thank David and Lisa De Souza who on their own in just a few days raised the money for one of them on their own.

We heard that Lisa worked very hard on this, so a very big thank you. Also thank you also to Richard Smith of WT Drage & Sons, Old, Northampton for the very good work they did in making the plaques, and making myself and Allan Sooty Sutcliffe very welcome when we visited them.

We did not hold a parade as you all know we had one a few years ago with the old plaques of which we had a good turnout at the time.

And we and our members felt that one parade was enough of which our members agreed with us.

So thank you all again from the Owners and Moderators of the Nostalgia Group, we hope you will all enjoy seeing them.

Kevin (Digger) Young

THE PIONEER

■ A BIG congratulations to you and your son in putting this great collecting of photo's together, i have just gone through the unknown album, and found at least 3 photo's that brings back memories of my time at 522 coy Kineton. Keep up the good work.

David Malcolmson

■ WELL Norman it was my first reunion the only regret I have is missing all past reunions well done for all the hard work you and your team put in respect to you.

Phil Harratt

■ THANKS for a great weekend it certainly won't be my last looking forward to Coventry next year.

Paul Boardman

■ THANKS Norman for a great weekend.

Michael Mulvey

■ A truly great reunion if not a little sad that it's the last one at our pioneer home see you next year.

Glyn Evans

■ CHEERS for a totally brilliant weekend Norman, I just wish I'd have come years ago see you in November at the cenotaph.

Steven Young

■ WHAT an amazing group of men! The end of an era but the Pioneer ethos will never die. Massive thanks to Reg Lane and Norman Brown. Brilliant set up! Billy Dilkes I second that!

Andy Parr

■ I would like to thank Norman and the rest of the 23 Pioneer Regiment for an excellent weekend, it was good to see old friends and new, remembering the good old days, hope to see you all next year.

Tony Cursons

■ GOD bless and thanks for a fantastic day yesterday, a proud SQUADDIE mom.

Kate Clarke

■ THANKS Norman and Reg for an awesome reunion, it was great to see my Red & Green family, see you soon.

James Upfield



Write in or email us...

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



Remembered in our hearts

MANY THANKS for our Newsletter received yesterday. We were shocked and saddened to hear that Bill Goode had passed away on 30th Dec 13. It was only Christmas time when we sent each other a Christmas card. Bill was a great sport and would help anyone out, it is such a shame he will not be there for our last reunion in Bicester but I think he will be in spirit, don't you Norman? Would you please pass on our

condolence to his family.

Lastly we would like to thank you and your son Paul for all your hard work in making the Pioneer reunions most memorable, not forgetting the Commanding Officer and 23 Regiment personnel. The Pioneers will always be remembered in our hearts. Wishing you all the very best for the future,

Christine & Louis Powell.

Relative's Service

THE ASSOCIATION often provide details of a relative's service in the Pioneers Corps and the Labour Corps. The following are a few of the replies that we have received:

I am enclosing a small donation as thanks for your assistance in recently providing to me information concerning my late father's WW2 involvement with the RPC. As I said in my email to you – if only it was as easy in obtaining the same information concerning his Royal Engineers service.

Once again many thanks for your assistance.

Keith Layton

Hi Norman, very many thanks for your reply. I never expected to receive such a fulsome reply, let alone at 22:20 on a Sunday evening! I will certainly apply for a copy of his record of service and will duly forward it on to you on receipt.

Richard Tate

THANK YOU for your letter dated 7 Apr, the information you sent has filled in a few gaps. I was amazed to see that my father went over to France just 2 days after the 6th June 1944 and that he was posted to Belgium, Holland and Germany. Yours sincerely,
TGJ Russell

WELL Norman, this is more than I could ever have wished for - I will love you forever!!!!

I will send a donation to the RPC Association at the Bicester address and I will also let Harry Robinson Budge's son (also Harry Budge) have a copy of the remarkable information you have supplied, he has his father's medals, but knew very little about the man who was a soldier.

My mother was Harry Robinson Budge's step-daughter.

She and my father both served in the Royal Air Force in WW2.

Harry Jnr joined the Air Force when he was old enough and made it a life long career, similarly his younger brother (now deceased) joined the Oxford & Bucks although for not such a long period.

I also did a few years in the WRAF. I have every admiration for the Pioneers and I am more than grateful for the trouble you have gone to. Warmest wishes,

Sandra Tyrrell x

THANK YOU so much for the information. My nan said it confirmed some things she already knew about my great grandfather's service during WW2.
Nyssa Mlaoui

Sadly missed

SIR, I would like to enter the following information into your next magazine: Unfortunately my husband Stephen Lawford Horne passed away in February after suffering many years with cancer.

He achieved the rank of Sgt and served in many places, Belize, Gibraltar, Cyprus (9 Sigs), Germany and finished his 22 years in Worthy Down.

He was only 64 years old and is sadly missed by his widow Carol and son Louis.

Carol Horne

Wonderful day

THANKS for a wonderful day (26 Jul) to remember. I have just watched the video and my wife was in tears.

It was great to see Col Dick McDonald, Stuart Woodward, Bob Popkin, John Doble, Dennis McKeown and no old comrades meet would be right without Pat Fleming.

I will be turning out in September and when you have them to hand can you let me have details of the Remembrance Parade dates.

You and Paul must have spent hours upon hours scanning and indexing all those photos much appreciated and will try and remember a few names for you.

Thanks again for a well organised function. See you in September
John Robertson

Smart and professional

BEYOND a shadow of a doubt this year's Corps weekend was the best one yet. We both know the effort needed to organise an event of this size, they do not happen without a lot of hard work from yourself and many other sources, you are to be congratulated on both the turn out and organisation.

Also when you get the opportunity from one ex RSM to the real one, the parade was first class, getting on parade is not the easiest of drill manoeuvres hoping everyone can count, it was one of the best I have seen. The whole parade was very smart and professional.

The food at both the lunch and dinner in the mess was first class, it was obvious to all who attended that the regular soldiers had put a lot of time and effort into making our day a big success.

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you and everyone involved in making our last Corps weekend at Bicester a fantastic success, the Friday was buzzing and vibrant.

There was a lot of new faces attending which was great, the total numbers on the book come as somewhat of a surprise, which, is down to your efforts

I do not think I would be too far out when I say without you we would not have an association in its present form.

Once again thanks Norman.

Tom Appleyard

Wonder of the internet

I RECENTLY visited the grave of my grandfather Pioneer J H Warham in Belmullet, Republic of Ireland, with my mother who lost her father when she was 3 years old.

I have been trying to find out some more information about my grandfather and, thanks to the wonder of the internet and your marvellous RPC Association magazine I discovered your letters page (page 61 of Oct 13) showing a photo of the grave and the information you kindly provided on the

circumstances of his death. It's strange the way a simple encounter like this can bring comfort to family so many years after the event. I shall waste no time in passing the link to your magazine article to my mum so she can at last know why her father came to be buried in Southern Ireland. Thank you. Kind Regards

Steven Mack

Ed note: thanks to John Killeen for submitting the letter – we omitted his name in the Newsletter.

23 Pioneer Regiment will forever have a special place in my heart

REST ASSURED I will be thinking of you all on this special weekend? My short 2 ½ years with 23 Pioneer Regiment will remain my most memorable.

The dedication, professionalism, bravery and team spirit amongst this small but unique part of the RLC was quite simply the best I have had the privilege to serve with. 23 Pioneer Regiment will forever have a special place in my heart.

I wish you all the very best for your disbandment parade. "Labor Omnia Vincit"
Dom Fletcher

It was great to see so many

WELL WHAT a emotional weekend it has been, thank you to Norman Brown and everybody who made it a success.

It was great to see so many I have served with, all stood side by side one last time and I'm sure the ones that didn't make it were thinking about the good old days over the weekend, and reminiscing of what a pleasure it was, thank you all for being part of my life and taking me on a journey that I will always remember as I was a young boy back then.

You all contributed to making me a very proud respectful man that I am today, but we all know that a pioneer soldier wouldn't have wanted that any other way.

God bless you all and those watching over us as we miss you all so very much.

Mike Watson

We will rise again

FIRSTLY I would like to thank Norman Brown, W01 RSM Lane and of course the member of 23 Pioneer Regiment for an outstanding and very memorable weekend of which I and others will never forget.

The Disbandment Parade was gut wrenching to say the least as the Flag was lowered for the final time I had a tear in my eye as I and others have fought for it and some have died for it.

Then to add insult to injury the handing over of the Pioneer Axes to the RLC, they had better look after them and return them to their rightful owners when the government see sense and rises the Pioneers from the ashes to be a once more professional fighting unit as it once was as history has shown before.

Meeting great friends that I have not seen for years some fighting their own battles with personal loss and illness was something I will never forget, I hope you all recover but for some it will be a long battle, but you should all know it's not a battle that you will be on your own with as every

member of 23 Pioneer Regiment is with you.

As we say in Northern Ireland "The Crack was Great" and thanks to all who bought me a birthday drink and "yes" I'm still suffering and thanks for the pink bag with shandy and a card indication that I'm part Welsh (its only hearsay) you know who you are I will get my own back later.

The final days party, well what can I say? the best I have ever been too I still bear the scars in the form of a tattoo on my left arm but it's one worth having, my head is still banging mind you that's from travelling back to NI in a vehicle with Ricky McCracken, Martin Thomas and Taff Jones

And finally Steve Barron and his lovely wife bought me a very nice bottle of port which I will put aside and drink at 00.01 hours on the 1st January when I sneak off from my party to toast my absent friends and to all my Red and Green brothers and their families. I will not forget you stay safe and we will rise again.

Dougie Durrant

No ramps for chair

NORMAN please take me off your mailing list I won't be coming to another reunion anywhere after the shambles on how the disabled was treated all were sent to St George's Barracks no ramps for my chair the transport would not take wheelchairs there was no ramps to get to the accommodation but there was at St David's cars parked at the rear car park camper vans and cars were parked on the square provo would not allow cars in to camp unless you was a senior rank a lot of the disabled who wanted to come to the party was unable to due to the distance to travel this was un excepted by those who could not come the fair was a rip off can of coke £1 candy floss again £1 I met people I knew from the old corps they also never turned up due to the way the association treated the disabled badly.

Chris Wintour

Ed Note: I am sorry to hear that you do not wish to be associated with the Association any longer. I understand that you were accommodated on the ground floor at St George's Barracks - even the ground floor accommodation at St David's Barracks had nine steps down to it. The booking form that you submitted did not show that you were disabled. As to the car parking that was the decision of 23 Pnr Regt, the decision was made to allow caravans onto the camp on the Friday afternoon as there were no toilet facilities on the rear square. We did have a mini-bus shuttling between the square and the camp for those who found walking the 300 yards difficult. The fair was free. As for the candy floss at £1, the first 500 portions were free. As for the coke no one else has complained about it being £1. I have tried my best to help the disabled in any way possible.

Mouse taking salute

IT LOOKS if the Cuneo Mouse is taking the salute of the Old Comrades on parade being led by Brig H G L Prynne as he, (the Mouse) is stood on the litter bin on Page 39.

I was saddened to learn of the death of Capt Don Belgium, he was at Det A, 5 PCLU at Hannover whilst I was there.

He had some very good stories about when he was in the RMP prior to becoming a member of our wonderful Corps.

Also when he was not available for the Scouts meeting as you mentioned, he used to get me to take over as I was able to show the Scouts knots and splices that I

had learnt about when I was in the Shaftesbury Homes (as an Arethusa Boy).

Both Paul and yourself must be congratulated on the excellent work on behalf of former members of the Corps and also keeping in touch with 23 Regt RLC which most of us are very disappointed that the powers that be have decided to disband.

Who is going to fulfill the role that the Pioneers have played within the Army since its (the Labour Corps) formation in 1917 and reformation in 1939. Regards

**Frank Berry
Ex Sergeant**

THE PIONEER

■ HI Norman, as you know I have retired from the TA, I would like to thank all who have supported me during my 34 years' service.
Cpl Tom Stewart

■ THANKS for another great weekend Norman Brown we had a fantastic time. See you in September.
Jayne Parker

■ HI Norman. Thanks to you and Paul for all the photos that keep coming. Only 1 complaint, they are much more interesting than the work I should be doing. Guess which wins. All the best.
Patrick Baird

■ THANKS for last weekend, the March through Bicester was awesome and I was chuffed to bits to be part of it.
Dave Ravenscroft

■ ON behalf of me and Sharon I would like to say a massive thank you for once again laying on a spectacular weekend. Thank you! Obviously a big shout out to the RSM and the Regt personnel whose hard work and due diligence made for an emotional parade. Well done all involved.
John Langridge

■ THANK you Norman Brown and all helpers of this grand event! We laughed, we drunk, and laughed some more but a feeling of sadness too! So we drank some more!! Thank you all again.
Mark Ritchie

■ JUST got home from an awesome weekend with the R&G Family. Far too many people to mention, but it was great catching up with everyone. Sad Friday for 23 Pnr Regt but they performed a fantastic disbandment parade and Reunion weekend. 2 people deserve a special mention Reg Lane and Norman Brown.
John Frame

■ AS the saying goes 'All good things come to an end' & tomorrow it comes to an end for 23 PNR Regt, good memories always outweigh the bad, & I've got some really good memories, no doubt we all have, wherever you are, raise a glass for 23, hip hip hurrah
Andy Lewis

■ 23 Pnr Regt - Thanks to all that pulled off yesterday's event. Awesome turn out by all and Bicester Town. Thank you. I hope you all had a cracking dinner night in the evening too especially Reg Lane and Norman Brown R&G.
Allen Batchelor

■ WELL this old soldier eyes are filled with tears and happy memories, had a great day At Bicester where I met mates I had not seen for donkey's years. So now this old soldier is going to lay down his head to sleep and I hope to wake in a better place
Dave Parris

Poignant and outstanding Weekend

28th September 2014

I have just got home from the poignant disbandment of the Pioneers and the exhaustive but outstanding Reunion Weekend. I thought it was about time that I write my first ever letter for the newsletter, particularly when the occasion was still fresh in my memory. Also since 23 Pioneer Regiment will shortly no longer be with us. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank a few people. However before I personally reflect on the weekend, I would like to add that I have not served with The Pioneers (I have done a few assault Pioneer courses with the Anglians but that is as far as it goes). However I have grown up with a Pioneer mad father who lives, breathes and literally ***** Pioneers! Hence for all the right reasons I feel like I have been indoctrinated into the Pioneers!

It was sometime in 2001 that I set up the Pioneer website for him. At the time he also wanted me to do his Northampton Branch newsletter. He couldn't do it as at the time as he was rather computer illiterate (he still is). Later (I think in 2004) he somehow roped me into doing the Association newsletter. If you have ever seen Norman's desk and his office you can imagine how difficult a task it was to find things for the newsletter. The material was scattered here, there and everywhere (little has changed!).

The plan was to set the first newsletter up and then train Norman in the relevant software programs so he can do it all himself (alas this was not to be!). Later I remember saying to him that if we are going to do this let's try and make each issue better than the last. I think we have achieved this (up to now). Sometime during this period the newsletter was getting better, however the photography being sent in was mostly dire and unusable. I was already practising and learning photography so I started to take more and more photos (more on this in a moment).

My time during the above period enabled me to attend various events and functions. I still remember going to my first Generation Dinner Night (and suffering the next morning). I should have called it a day after that night! It was a privilege last year to be able to take my son to the Dinner (he suffered the next morning as well). My thanks go to the serving Pioneers that night who made his night one to remember!

Over the above period of time I have gained an amazing amount of information and understanding about the work and the versatility of The Pioneer Soldier from the many stories that go into the newsletter. I have met an amazing amount of people, so many that it is a struggle to remember all their names. During this period I would like to say I have gained a few friends along the way. I hope you understand that I do not have enough space here to thank each and every one of them - you know who you are. However I would like to say thank you to:

23 Pioneer Regiment – Thank you for inviting me to the various functions and in particular thank you for inviting the old man and myself to join you in Cyprus. Some of the photos that I took in Cyprus helped me to achieve a 93% score on an Open University course that I was studying at the time. I am putting together a collection of some of the ones I took in the Buffer Zone that have not been published (some look amazing in black and white).

RSM's - Thanks go to all and in particular Reg, Wayne and Will. Words cannot describe.

Mess Members – Thank you to you all for your warm hospitality and many stories.

The Mrs – Thank you for being so understanding and letting me experience the spirit and the esprit de corps that distinguishes The Pioneer. Also thanks for also taking photographs this weekend. She has taken some good photos when I was tied up elsewhere (quite a few of them have made it into this issue).

Bar/Catering Staff - The unsung heroes. I would like in particular to mention a couple of people who over the years have poured thousands of pints of beer, served the food, tidied up, cleaned everyone's rooms and done countless other tasks. These are Annie, Julie, Rosie and Wendy.

I mentioned earlier that I would come back to photos... I am going to do a set of what I consider to be the best Pioneer Photographs that I have taken. Each one will include a story of what the photo is about. There will be 10-12 very large prints per set. All proceeds will go to buying the mess staff a present and to replace the cake that was stolen! If anything is left over it will go to my chosen charity, Combat Stress.

Unfortunately at the Weekend I was in earshot of a couple of people moaning about Norman and Dusty. I am not going to name them on here but I shall just say that you normally find it is the people who are moaning who are really the ones that do very little. It is all too easy to bitch and moan and there will always be a small minority out there that like to grumble and spoil it for everybody else. It can be worse on Facebook where the instant form of modern day communications can have its disadvantages. People should think before they write a public message in a group, hiding behind social networking, rather than face to face or in a letter. The term for these individuals is 'Keyboard Warriors'.

Before you bitch and moan at Norman think about the amount of people he has helped over the years. He has helped with the benevolence cases of many Pioneers. He has helped to reunite hundreds of people. He has helped many people out on a personal level too, which I am not going to go into here. He has tirelessly scanned and digitised vast amounts of historical photographs and stories (one thing he does well on a computer!). He has answered hundreds if not thousands of requests from the relatives of Pioneers, asking about what their Pioneer relative did who served in WW2 and other conflicts. He has helped the authors of many books, he makes sure that every year the Pioneers get a mention at the Cenotaph and you may think I am biased in saying this, but he has the best newsletter of any Army Association. I can go on and on but I think you get the message. Also I will take this opportunity to mention Dusty – he has carried the Pioneer standard through Bicester and at this year's reunion parade and led the Band, not bad for a 72 year old! Someone stole Dusty's beret out of the Sgt's mess, something that he was going to leave to his Great Grandson, whoever took it please do the honourable thing and return it.

I think 23 Pioneer Regt and the old man have pulled off an incredible and very well organised weekend. Norman sent me an

email today, it said "I had 281 emails when I put the computer on, I am now totally knackered!".

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who actually helped the old man out at the Weekend - you know who you are. Also I would like to say thank you to a few people who I bumped into on my travels this weekend who took time out to help the old man. He was suffering quite badly with his knee and for someone who is 67 this year he doesn't do too badly.

Norrie Taylor - There was a massive queue of people outside Norman's office and I drove up with a car completely full of Norman's boxes. Most of them quite heavy and they all needed to be unloaded. Only one person helped me to bring these boxes in, he also assisted with the allocation of accommodation. Thank you Norrie.

Martin Lewis - Everywhere I drove to he had already moved, or arranged the move of Norman's stuff or he was already there. Thank you Louey.

Billy Dilkes - Instrumental in sorting out the accommodation for people at St George's. No doubt resolved a lot of issues which took a lot of pressure away from the old man.

John Starling - for sorting out the Auction and working late at night sorting out the bids and also for his work as historian of the Association. Also Taff Thomas and others whom I saw helping out with the Auction items.

Corps of Drums - Norman has given the Corps of Drums every support and I know he was pleased to see them form up and play at the last reunion at Bicester. They sounded very good indeed and I have heard nothing but praise for their performance.

Taff Teague - Stood all day in that hot tent discussing the new painting. I understand he was instrumental in getting the painting to where it is, particularly the significant historical details. It looks brilliant!

Cudgie Smilie - Cudgie organised a massive cake and presented the cake to Norman (photo on page 54) and for which Norman was hoping to auction later. It pains me to say this but unfortunately the cake was stolen from the mess.

Michael Burling - He went out of his way to get that lovely mirrored engraved badge done for the old man (photo p54).

There will be many others that deserve thanks but I am also cream cracked and cannot remember so apologies to those I have missed off.

I don't know about you but I always find that when you leave an Army Base to go home after an event, the base can be a desolate, quiet and soulless place.

This feeling was exasperated further when walking out to drive home and seeing how sad the place looked without many of the Pioneer pictures and objects left.

My memory of this period will be in the many thousands of photographs that I and many others have taken over the years.

It has been an honour. The spirit of the Pioneer will live on.

Labor omnia vincit. Red and Green.

Paul Brown

p.s. if you can, please bid on the auction (going on facebook shortly), please show your gratitude to the mess staff, let's buy them a present and let's get Norman his cake so he can eat it and no doubt share a slice with you!

Inside

Report: Norman Brown
Pictures: Supplied

GLOUCESTERSHIRE was home to a wealth of prisoner-of-war camps and hostels, and many Italian and German prisoners spent the war years here.

"Inside the Wire" explores the role of the camps, their captives and workers, together with their impact on the local community. The book draws on Ministry of Defence, Red Cross and US Army records, and is richly illustrated with original images. It also features the compelling first-hand account of Joachim Schulze, a German POW who spent the war near Tewkesbury. This is a fascinating but forgotten aspect of the Second World War.

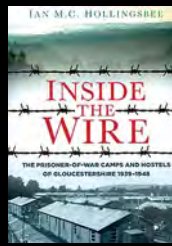
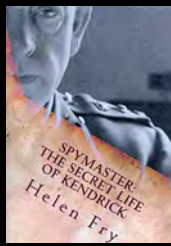
The Association historian, Lt Col John Starling is named in the acknowledgements after supplying a large amount of information which is contained in the book. Most of these camps were controlled and guarded by members of the Pioneer Corps.

INSIDE THE WIRE – THE POW CAMPS AND HOSTELS OF GLOUCESTER 1939-1948
by Ian MC Hollingsbee
ISBN 978-0-7509-5646-2

resourceful Pioneer Corps have found some water barrels in the disused barn, and now we have a special water tent. All drinking water must be boiled of course."

"The Pioneer Corps are our Armed Guards, rifles at the ready, standing on the edge of our compound. They are delightfully unmilitary, rather untidy, soldiers. Many are basically conscientious objectors. They are multi-nations from all walks of life, some very well educated and with useful specialist skills. There is an officer with an unpronounceable name whom I call 'Chezzy'. He has told me a little of the background of some of these men. Many are refugees from Germany before the war. Chezzy speaks fluent English and German, also Polish and Russian. I think he is a Polish Jew, loves music and is a professional pianist in civilian life."

A VERY PRIVATE DIARY – A NURSE IN WARTIME
by Mary Morris
(Edited by Carol Acton)
ISBN 9780297871552



A nurse in wartime

Report: Norman Brown
Pictures: Supplied

MARY Mulry was eighteen years old when she arrived in London from Ireland to begin training as a nurse. The year was 1939.

In this extraordinary diary Mary recorded in intimate detail her experiences as a nurse on the Home Front and later working on the frontline in Europe. In London, she nursed critically ill children during bombing raids and narrowly escaped with her life in one of the worst nights of the Blitz. In Normandy, arriving on the heels of the D-Day invasion, she tended to Allied soldiers and German prisoners of war. In war-torn Belgium, she witnessed harrowing casualties from the Battle of Arnhem.

Yet romance, glamour and adventure were never far away for Mary, even if her relationships often had to be cut short. "I always seem to be saying food-bye to men whom I might have loved had there been enough time," she wrote.

Nurses were not allowed to keep diaries on action service, but Mary – fortunately for us – was not one for following rules. Her rebellious spirit, sharp wit and irrepressible personality shine through the pages of her 'very private diary', published now for the first time.

Mary Morris (Nee Mulry) was born in County Galway in 1921. After completing her nursing training in London from 1939, she joined the Queen Alexandra Imperial Nursing Service Reserve in 1944. She married Captain Malcolm Morris in London in 1946, and they settled in Britain after the war. Mary later returned to nursing and never stopped writing. She died in 1997, and is survived by four children and eight grandchildren.

The Pioneer Corps supplied men to both Field Hospitals and Casualty Clearing Stations and receive numerous mentions in the book, the following are some examples:

"We met up with our Pioneer Corps escort at Bayeux"

"The water supply is nearly two kilometres away. The

Secret life

Report: Norman Brown
Pictures: Supplied

SPYMASTER charts the extraordinary life of Thomas Joseph Kendrick, one of Britain's most senior spymasters in Europe in the 1930s.

Placed at the heart of Europe's espionage hub, Vienna, he crossed paths with Kim Philby and Edith Tudor-Hart, figures that would rock the core of MI6.

After Hitler overran Austria in 1938, Kendrick was swamped by a human catastrophe in which he and his staff worked long hours to save over 200

Jews a day. But another dangerous game was afoot. Dubbed "the elusive Englishman", Kendrick's real name was eluded the Abwehr until a double agent denounced him. His arrest by the Gestapo caused panic in Whitehall and MI6 circles.

After his release, he disappeared from public view but not from the ranks of the British Secret Service.

In WW2, Kendrick re-emerged as the spymaster chief against Nazi Germany.

This story of betrayal, steely nerve and daring honours a gentleman who bore the secrets of his nation with total loyalty.

Out of the shadows of MI6 secrecy his full story emerges for the very first time.

Historian Helen Fry has written widely on WW2 including 'The M Room, Secret Listeners who Bugged the Nazis', "'Churchill's Secret Soldiers', 'Inside Nuremberg Prison', and 'From Dachau to D-Day'.

Helen has appeared on TV documentaries on Channel 4, Channel 5, ITV and BBC live interviews for the 70th anniversary of D-Day in Normandy.

SPYMASTER: THE SECRET LIFE OF KENDRICK
by Helen Fry
ISBN:9781 5004 18830



The Last Post

Since the last newsletter it is with great sadness to report the following deaths

THOMAS PETER PTE 23354006 13 APR 14
(Aged 76) **Aberdare**
Served 1956-1958 in 196 Coy.

JACKSON ALBERT GEORGE CPL 14393518
4 APR 14
(Aged 89) **Uxbridge**
Served 1943 - 1946 in 260 Coy, 102 Coy
(landed in Normandy on D Day), 129 Coy
and 103 Coy.

MARSDEN AS (TONY) PTE 24577071 22 MAY 14
Hyde, Manchester (Aged 50)
Served 1981-84

SUCKLING DAVID GEORGE PTE 23174177
24 MAY 14
(Aged 77) **Coventry**
Served 1st Sept 55 - 29th Aug 1957

WILDGOOSE RL MAJ 481601/19035655 22 MAY
(Aged 87) **14 Kennilworth, Warks**
Ex WO1 Queens Regt, commissioned into
RPC 1 Jan 70 and retired on 15 Feb 78

TIPPING HR CPL (23505899) 22 MAY 14
(Aged 76) **Steeple Claydon, Bucks**
Served 1957-1972

PLESTED WILLIAM (BILL) (23920666) 28 JUN 14
(Aged 69) **Higher Brackley, Manchester**
Served 1963-1971 in 522 & 518 Coys
(including 2 tours of Aden)

KEMP WILLIAM RATTRAY (14620896) 4 JUL 14
(Aged 89) **Perth**
Served from 3 Jun 43 to 19 Apr 46. Joined
RPCA on 18 May 50.

SPRIGGS AJ (23846172) 22 NOV 13
Leicester
Served in 518 & 522 Coys (Dog Section)

HAWKSWORTH CYRIL (21447420) 5 AUG 14
(Aged 76) **Hamsworth, Pontefract.**
Served 1958-1960 in 251 Coy RPC.

HORNE STEPHEN LAWFOORD (24285257)
Sgt 9 Feb 14 (aged 64)
Mablethorpe, Lincs.
Served from 1972 to 1994.

NEW DAVID (24551789) 1 SEP 14
Long Melford, Sudbury
Served 1980 - 1985.

O'DONOVAN BTP (BRIAN) (24078460)
LCpl 27 Sep 14 Huntingdon
Served 1960 - 1982.

KENT AT (ALAN) (24175893)
Sgt 11 Oct 14 Bicester.
Served 1970 - 1992

MITTON HAROLD ARTHUR (23389746)
Pte 11 Oct 14 Northampton.
Served 1959-1962.
Appeared in many TV Programmes and was
also a clown.

BIGGS ARTHUR LT COL (327977) 1 AUG 14
(Aged 92) **Datchworth, Hants.**
Retired in Jun 1976.

A Service of Thanksgiving was held at
Trinity Church, Knebworth on 14 Aug 14
and Brig CB Telfer, Col RF McDonald
together with Lt Col RJ Bennett who served
with him in the Cyprus (Turkish Invasion) 51
years ago.

Lt Col RF McDonald writes:
Arthur Biggs was born on 17 Aug 21 at
Malton Norton, Yorkshire into a devout
Methodist family.

He was a passionate Christian and
continued to lay preach into his 90th
year.

There were, at times, some inner
conflicts given his forty-eight years'
service with the military but as a Christian
soldier he achieved the balance he needed.

Arthur was called up in May 1941 to
Lancashire Regiment and was
commissioned into that Regiment in
September 1944, the same year he
married Rhona then serving in the ATS.

He was seconded to the King's African
Rifles in East Africa and learned to speak
Swahili.

He left the Army after the end of the war
but re-joined into the Corps in 1951. At
various times he served in the Canal Zone,
Cyprus, Malaya, Germany, UK and the
MOD.

I first met him in 1960 when he was the
OC521 Company then at Didcot. In 1963
he had an emergency tour to Cyprus (with
Ross Bennett as his CSM).

Promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in 1968
he commanded 45 Group in BAOR followed
by a tour at HQ FARELF, Singapore where I
met him again.

He returned in 1971 to the MOD and
after this completed his last tour as a
serving officer as the SSO Hohnhe.

Full retirement was not for Arthur and he
became an RO as the SSO Mulheim, an
appointment he greatly enjoyed.

As a fluent German speaker he did much
to encourage and embrace Anglo/German
relations in the Mulheim area and was never
happier than when he exercised his
linguistic skills.

He finally retired from military life in 1989
moving to Norfolk where he quickly
engaged with his church and his passion for
choral music – he had an excellent voice
and a hidden talent for playing the
harmonica!

He subsequently moved to Datchworth
near Hitchin and remained in the area until
his death on 1 Aug 2014,

I had the great pleasure to attend his
90th birthday and saw him several times
later, always as bright as a button, with
endless stories and memories.

He was without question as genuine a
man as it is possible to be, considerate and
kind.

But above all, a devoted family man and
true Christian.

To his family we extend our sincere
condolences.



■ Sgt Horne

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Arthur Biggs at his 90th birthday
Picture: RPCA Archive

**RUDGE HGT (HENRY) (44731)
10 Jun 14, Cleveland, Australia (Aged 79)**

Served in 524 Coy from 1955 to 1958 before emigrating to Rhodesia. The following letter was published in The Pioneer in June 1979:

"Thank you for your reminder that my subscription to the magazine had expired. I have prevailed on the Rhodesian government to let me have a little foreign currency, and enclose a bank draft for £5, being five years subscription. No doubt with inflation, it will not last the full five years, but tell me when the money runs out.

I look forward each quarter to my Royal Pioneer to hear about many friends and colleagues in the Corps. I am encouraged to hear of the continuing success of the TAVR in the face of government economies. Here in Rhodesia, the war is as the Americans say, "for real".

Gone are the days of pleasant summer TA camps "playing soldiers". Instead, just about every able-bodied man is being called up for periods of a month at a time, sometimes three or four times a year. Next month I am off to do my latest stint as a fill in staff captain at Brigade HQ. Unfortunately they do not have Pioneers in the Rhodesian Army, despite my constant recommendations.

Officially I am on strength of the Rhodesian Corps of Engineers and I keep telling them how much better they could function with a good Pioneer troop - so far my pleas have fallen on deaf ears.

I would ask you and all friends in the Corps not to believe everything you read in the newspapers about Rhodesia. We are fighting a war of survival on three fronts, but the opposition is pretty pathetic, and we are winning.

Our biggest enemy is not the communist terrorist but the rest of the world who will not let us settle our affairs in peace. Even with the security situation, Rhodesia is still a beautiful place in which to live. Most

people here, white and black just want to earn a living and bring up their children in peace and not have the country's future used as a political football.

One thing which is gratifying is the spirit of the Rhodesian security forces, it is a great little army and I consider myself fortunate to have the privilege to serve with them.

Accept my congratulations for a splendid job keeping the magazine to such a high standard and for providing all ex Pioneers with a means of keeping in touch with the Corps.

My regards to all former friends in the Corps and particularly in the TAVR." On his return to UK he was Deputy Administrator of Lamport Hall, a large and magnificent Stately Home only a few miles from Northampton. He then emigrated to Australia.

**PERRY GEOFFREY HOWARD (295150)
Maj 15 Sep 14 London (NW6)**

Geoffrey Perry broadcasting from the same mic from which Lord Haw Haw did his last broadcast 2 days earlier, Radio Hamburg.

The capture of William Joyce – the most notorious British traitor of the Second World War more usually known as Lord Haw Haw – was nothing more than a fortuitous accident. By extraordinary serendipity the man who completed the arrest was a German Jew serving with the British forces in the Pioneer Corps.

Formerly known as Horst Pinchewer he enlisted into the Pioneer Corps at Liverpool and joined 3 Centre Pioneer Corps for training on 19 Nov 40, he was discharged to a commission on 8 Sep 43 and then changed his name to Geoffrey Howard Perry.

On the evening of 28 May 1945, Geoffrey was scavenging for firewood with a colleague near Flensburg, close to the border with Denmark, when they were approached by a man who appeared to be a German civilian. Speaking exceptionally

good English, the man asked whether they would like him to show them where more wood could be found. Knowing that Joyce had gone into hiding Perry was suspicious as soon as he heard the stranger's voice and challenged him "You wouldn't be William Joyce by any chance, would you?" he asked.

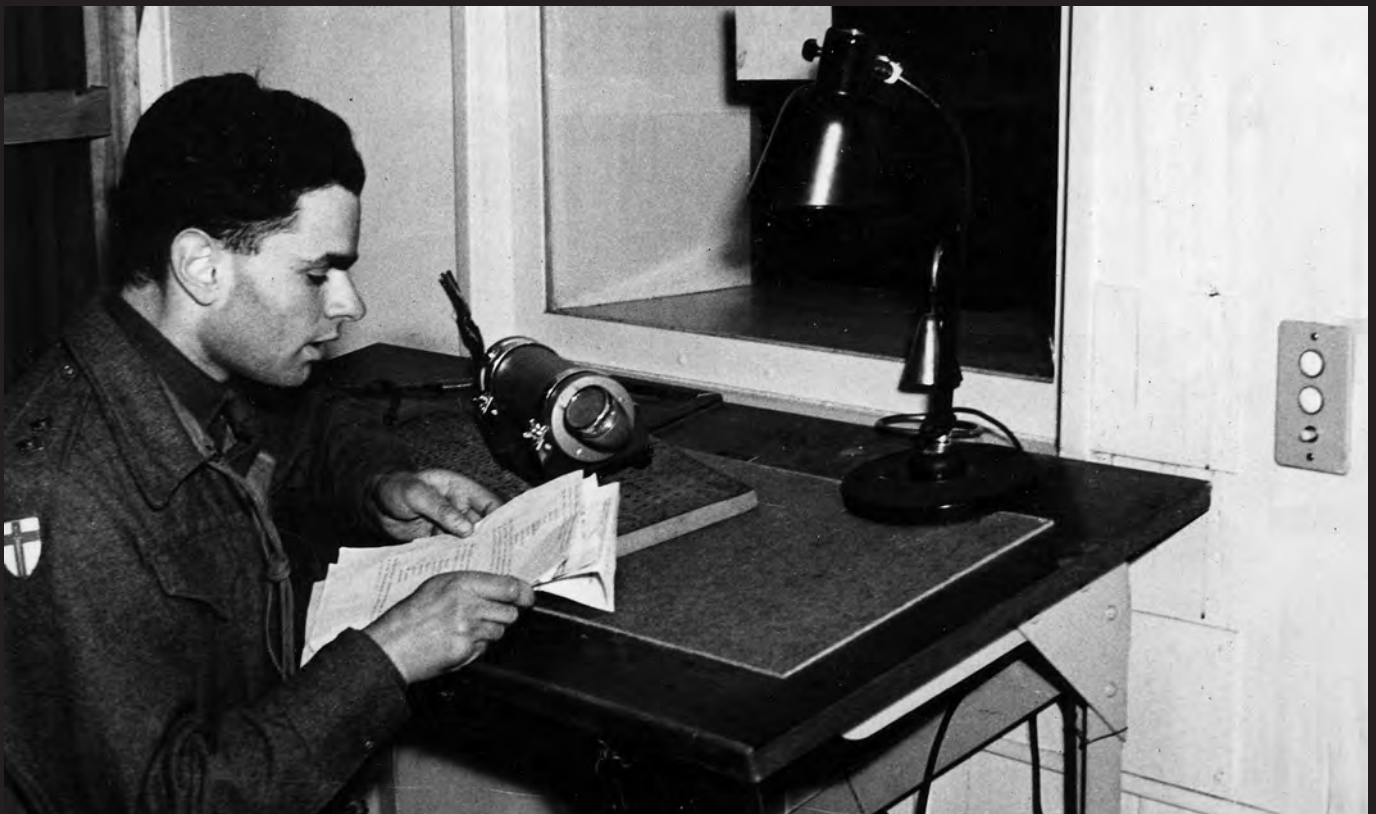
Joyce responded by reaching quickly into his pocket. Geoffrey produced his own automatic and without waiting to be certain whether the man had a gun, shot him, aiming low. No serious harm was done, Geoffrey's shot went through the man's buttocks.

(Ed note: Speaking to Geoffrey a few years ago when he attended a Past & Present Officers Dinner, he explained that the one shot had made four wounds in Joyce's buttocks where the bullet and gone in, out, in again and out again! He said that they only had 1 field dressing for four wounds). Although Joyce had one German military card in the name of Fritz Hansen, he had a second that identified him as William Joyce. Geoffrey was relieved to discover that he had wounded and apprehended the wanted traitor rather than an unarmed German civilian.

After his capture Joyce was flown back to Britain and tried and sentenced to death. He was hanged at Wandsworth prison in early January 1946, the last person in Britain to be executed for treason.

Geoffrey had a very successful business career after the war, launching Perry Press Publications, a contract publishing company. He sold it to the Thompson organisation in 1963 and became managing director of Thompson magazines in 1964. He launched Family Circle magazine, the first British publication to be sold exclusively at supermarket checkouts in the mid-1960s.

His wife who had retained all his wartime papers and memorabilia, urged him to write a memoir, his book, When Life Becomes History was published in 2002.



■ Geoffrey Perry broadcast from Radio Hamburg

Picture: RPCA Archive

And finally...

Report: Norman Brown
Cartoon: MAC

IN THE military there are always "Urban legends." One I heard from a bunch of RAF Aerial Riggers in Singapore, I wasn't there so I cannot confirm the story, but knowing Aerial Riggers it's the sort of thing they would do. Anyway, this is the story I heard.

During a show at the Royal Tournament at Earls Court in London many years ago, one of the displays was a no command drill display by the Queens Colour Squadron of the Royal Air Force.

As they march into the arena all the lights are out, the airmen with L1A1's are at port arms, as they enter the arena they fire blanks into the air, then the lights come on and commence the display.

Apparently one of the aerial riggers was in the rafters with a dead duck (bought from some butchers in London still clothed in its feathers), when the lights came on, the dead duck was dropped into the arena.

The sight of the duck and howls of laughter from the audience threw the colour Squadron completely off their display.

From what I heard the Officer I/C the Queens Colour Squadron had to be physically restrained from attacking the riggers.

THE FOLLOWING is a minute from a meeting of the 51st Meeting of the Benevolent Fund Meeting held on 11 Dec 52: A sum of £75 0 0 has been donated by Col G L J Tuck (ex CO 11 Group BEF) to the funds.

These are the funds brought back from France during the Dunkirk Evacuation and represent the profits for the sale of Beer to 11 Group BEF.

They were only recently discovered, in Francs, in the Bank of England.

IN THE during Operation Desert Storm, I found myself in a world that had changed little since Biblical times. With so few creature comforts available, packages from home containing cookies and canned goods were received with great anticipation.

When I got a box from my sister, I happily tore into it, only to discover just how far from home I really was. She had filled it with packages of microwave popcorn.

THE ANNUAL inspection at our unit was a gruelling affair. After my roommate Bill and I scrubbed, polished and straightened everything in sight, we stood at attention as the inspecting general entered our room. He looked for dust over the window frame and inspected our lockers. As he turned to leave, he placed his hand on a laundry bag tied to the end of our bunk beds. There was a crackling sound. "What is in that laundry bag?" he demanded.

"Love letters, sir," answered Bill.

"What are love letters doing in your laundry bag?" the officer barked.

Bill's response was loud and clear.

"They're dirty, sir!"

TWO SOLDIERS were in the road in Afghanistan discussing whether the animal they were looking at was a dead donkey or a dead mule. They just couldn't come to an agreement. Along came the Sgt and they asked him what it was. He says in a stern manner, "that's an ass, bury it!" As they were digging the hole another soldier came along and asked if they were digging a fox hole? No they replied.. "an A**Hole!"

THE HARD bitten troop commander was frustrated in his efforts to make a soldier out of one particular Pte. The young man lagged behind on patrols, feigned illness and managed to spend most of his time at headquarters. One day, though, he changed his ways, and we asked the troopy why. "Threats and punishment didn't work," he admitted, "so I had to use the ultimate weapon. I wrote his mother."

PADDY MOORE now an instructor in chemical warfare at the Apprentices Harrogate asked soldiers in his class: Anyone knows the formula for water? Sure. That's easy, said one recruit. What is it? H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O. What, what? asked Paddy. H to O, explained the recruit. You are officer material son!

AT THE beginning of the Army-Navy rugby game, the coin toss is made. The Navy captain shouts, HEADS followed by the Army captain shouting LATRINES. ■



'...and now the good news. When you're finished all this we're sending you back to Afghanistan for a well-earned rest.'

Coming up in the next newsletter ...

- News ■ Forthcoming events ■ Your stories ■ Your Letters ■ Cenotaph 2014
- 'The Record' Labour Corps Magazine - first published in 1917
- Photo Gallery ■ Reviews ■ Press Cuttings ■ And much more!



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Last but not least...



Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

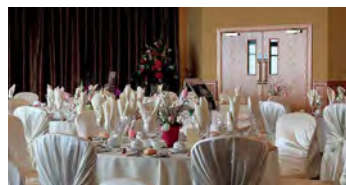
THE Pioneer Reunion Weekend in 2015 is to be held at the Royal Court Hotel from 3rd to 5th July 2015. The Hotel is in Coventry, hence relatively centrally located.

It is home to many Army Reunions and I was invited to attend a Reunion at the Hotel earlier this year. I must say the organisation, food, beer and room was excellent (i did not go swimming!)

RPC Association members will receive a £10 a night subsidy e.g. prices will be £50 for 1 night, £100 for 2 nights and £100 for 3 nights. This subsidy does not include wives or partners. For example, an Association member and partner would pay £250 for a three night stay. This includes:

- Overnight accommodation and breakfast
- Carvery Dinner on Friday night
- Carvery Dinner on Sunday night
- Gala Dinner on Saturday night
- Happy Hours prices in selected bars over the weekend
- Gymnasium and Swimming Pool

It is intended to run a coach to the National Arboretum on the Saturday at a charge of £5 per head. We have so far had a very favourable response. See you there. ■



THE PIONEER



■ Group photograph took at this years Reunion Weekend

Picture: Paul Brown



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