

THE PIONEER



POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

DID YOU KNOW THAT ON
AVERAGE IT TAKES AROUND
13 YEARS FOR SOLDIERS
TO **SEEK HELP** FOR MENTAL
HEALTH ISSUES. REMEMBER
SUPPORT IS THERE...



Front Cover

Depiction of both the causes and cure of veteran suicide

Picture: Adam Bettcher
www.bettcherphoto.com



Back Cover

Corps War Memorial,
National Arboretum

Picture: Paul Brown

EDITORIAL

THERE ARE three essential requirements for the successful production of a Newsletter, namely plenty of material, a long list of readers, and ability on the part of the Editor. (I will apologise immediately for the third!)

The work of an Editor could be compared in some respects to that of a Chef, a Chef cannot produce a menu without the ingredients. My aim is to please you, the readers, but I can only do so if you will help by sending us articles, news and any other matter which would be of interest. Do not worry about spelling or grammar we will 'polish' your articles.

On my return from the Nostalgia Group's Reunion at Redcar in May a letter was waiting for me from the Lord Chancellor's office asking if I was willing to accept the award of the BEM. Of course I immediately replied in the affirmative and subsequently it was published in the Birthday Honours List in June. May I take this opportunity to thank so many of you for your wonderful letters and messages sending congratulations. For the record the reason for the award was "For services to 23 Pioneer Regiment".

You may be surprised with the choice of photograph for the front cover, although it

shows American personnel, the percentage of UK personnel who suffer from PTSD is nearly the same as the US personnel. PTSD is often described as a silent killer and the subject needed highlighting.

With this Newsletter you will find a booking form for next year's Pioneer Reunion, as can be seen from the many letters this year's was a great success. For the gala dinner this year we had 154 seated and we expect many more attenders next year so it is advisable to book early (especially if you want membership discount as shown on the form). This discount is only available for bookings made before 1 May 2016.

As reported in the last Newsletter we had record attendance of 86 marching at the Cenotaph, at the time of writing we have already had 75 applications to attend. If you have not applied yet please let me know asap. Tickets are also required for the Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey, again if you wish to attend please telephone.

Also attached are the Christmas Draw tickets (unless you have already stated that you are unable to sell them), please give the Draw your fullest support. If you can sell more tickets please let us know, we will quickly send more to

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Closure with a little humour

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STOP PRESS

■ It is with sadness to report the death of W02 Ron Morris, who died on 10th September 2015.

STOP PRESS

■ A few Spare tickets are available for the Cenotaph Parade and the Field of Remembrance.

STOP PRESS

■ It is with sadness to report the death of Ray Wicken, who died on 5th October 2015.



you. This is one of the few opportunities for the Association to raise funds to help the costs of running the Association. Each Newsletter costs nearly £1 to print and over £1.50 to post in the UK.

The posting of the last Newsletter again resulted in over 50 returned marked "Gone Away" or "No longer at this address". Please advise us when you move, because of costs we are unable to send a second copy to your new address. A quick and cheap way for us to keep in touch with you, the members, is by email.

If you are currently not receiving updates by this means it is probably because we do not have your email address.

Please send this to: royalpioneer corps@gmail.com Also if you change your email address it would be appreciated if you would inform us.

Once again it is my sad duty to report the deaths of members in the Last Post section on page 64. You will see that this list includes a former Director of the Corps, Brig John Hickman CBE.

He started in the Corps as a Private, was quickly promoted to Sergeant and then commissioned. He is, I believe, only one of two who made it from the bottom to the top of the

tree. Even after his retirement from the Army he served the Association as a Council Member, then Chairman and finally President of the Association. In all nearly 60 years of service to the Corps - this must be a record.

We still have a few copies of the Pioneer painting 'The Working Pioneer', if you would like one please send a cheque or Postal Order to the value of £20 (this includes postage) to the Association, or alternatively pay by Paypal, our account is: royalpioneer corps@gmail.com

The Association holds, in my opinion, the best records of any Regimental Association. We hold the nominal rolls of about 99% of those who served in our Corps, the war diaries of nearly all our units and the citations for most medals issued to the Corps.

This is primarily due to the endeavours of Lt Col (Retd) John Starling, the Association's historian. He spent many hours in finding and collating this information.

Finally, on behalf of the President, Chairman and Council of the Association can I send best wishes for a Happy Christmas and a very good New Year.

Norman Brown



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Can you spot the mouse?



No one spotted the mouse in the last edition, we must of made it to hard!

It was on page 43. Look at the left of the photograph, second bloke down, the mouse is standing on the persons hand.

Can you spot the Cuneo Mouse in this edition?

Terence Cuneo painted 'Sword Beach' which shows the activities of the pioneers who were among the first British troops to land on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day.

Sword Beach was the codename of one of the five main landing beaches in Operation Neptune, the initial assault phase of Operation Overlord, the Allied invasion of Normandy on 6 June 1944.

Pioneers played an essential role on D-Day and suffered many casualties. 26 Pioneer Companies went ashore on 6th June 1944.

By 1st August 1944 there were over 35,500 pioneers in Normandy. D-Day + 79 there were 231 Coys and over 68,000 men.

PLEASE SUPPORT THE CHRISTMAS DRAW
Tickets are enclosed with this newsletter

In most of his paintings Cuneo hid a small mouse (sometimes lifelike, sometimes cartoon-like) which was his trademark and somewhere in this newsletter we have hid a Cuneo mouse and it's not the one on this page!

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

They can be difficult to detect, and many people enjoy scouring his paintings to find one.

Entries should be submitted (by letter, email or telephone) by 17th December 2015.

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

Good luck.



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LABOR OMNIA VINCIT



ROYAL PIONEERS

END OF AN ERA 1939-2014



Pictures: Pages 4-13 Paul Brown, Pages 14-15 Pictures: Patrick 'Scouse' Bradley

For the first time in over 50 years the Pioneer Reunion and Annual General Meeting was held in a hotel

It was sad to say goodbye to our reunions at Bicester. Previous locations for the Reunion Weekend were Wrexham, Northampton and since 1993 Bicester. They all had looked after us well but times are changing.

For those that did not attend but are considering attending next year the following is a brief description of the hotel: it is set in eleven acres of landscaped gardens and parkland and offers peaceful and tranquil surroundings only two miles from the bustle of Coventry City Centre. Part of the hotel 'The Manor House', was built in 1894 as a private residence for

William Hillman, the motor manufacturer. The hotel has 210 bedrooms all tastefully furnished, each room has en-suite bathroom, colour TV, direct dial telephone, trouser press, hair dryer and complimentary tray – all the facilities expected in a modern hotel.

Members started to arrive at the hotel at 0900 hrs and during the day a steady stream were going to the reception to book in, all were pleasantly surprised not only at the size of the hotel but also the quality of the rooms. In total 168 members stayed at the hotel, some for one night, some for two and for 75 the whole three

nights.

Friday night started with the Annual General Meeting where it was unanimously agreed that the hotel was booked again for 2016 (17/19 June has been booked). Following this a carvery meal was held and this was followed by the usual swapping of war stories over a few beers.

Saturday morning, after breakfast, two coaches left for the National Memorial Arboretum where members were free to wander around, or take refreshment, before we formed up on "The Beat" to march down to the Logistic Grove for a short service of remembrance.

REUNION WEEKEND

3rd-5th July 2015

We were ably led, once again, by Dusty Bryant and the RPC Corps of Drums. All members agreed that the Corps of Drums are improving each year – all members give up their free time to practise once a month.

Following the service we all made our way to the steps of the National Memorial where a group photograph was taken. Members then did a tour of the site, many taking the train which enabled them to hear a wonderful commentary about the main memorials around the site. Following our return to the hotel members had a chance to freshen up or visit the bar (or both!) before the Gala Dinner that evening. 151 members sat down to a wonderful meal which was followed by 3 girl singers "The Dreamettes" followed by a disco which was ably conducted by ex Cpl Les Ball who is an ex chef from 23 Pnr Regt RLC. The host for the evening was Mr Peter Thomas who also organised a raffle the first prize being a free stay at the hotel for next year; this was won by Mr D Rumble. Also during the evening an auction of the numbered prints of the Pioneer Painting which were either Company or Squadron numbers, this raised the sum of £1,200!

During the evening over 16,000 photographs were projected onto the screen and old Association scrapbooks and photo albums were available for members to browse.

On Sunday members were free to visit Coventry and the surrounding area or stay at the hotel where they had the opportunity to use the hotel pool and gym. In the evening after another carvery meal the disco was again in full swing and two quizzes were held.

Monday morning was departure.

The following are some of the comments made on Facebook regarding the weekend:

Gala Dinner 2015 Pioneer Corps Association. BRILLIANT location. Norman Brown has yet again excelled himself.
Steve Baron

Smashing evening at The Royal Court, so well organised by Norman !!
June Taylor

Had a fantastic evening great company great food thank you Norman Brown for all your organisation.
Robert Locking

Pioneers are those who live into a vision of new possibilities, who see a need and fulfil it or who seek remedies in times of hardship or change. All these kind of people can be proudly called Pioneers for they are Not bound only to what has been known in the past. The above was clearly evident at the Royal Pioneer Corps 2015 Reunion Gala Dinner held for the first time outside the walls of 23 Pioneer Regiment. Change although sad was embraced and for those who didn't manage to attend I urge you all to make a point to put a few quid away in a jam jar so that you don't miss out on what I can only describe as a emotional, joyful and spectacular annual occasion. The Regiment may be disbanded but the Pioneers live on within the Association. I now understand why so many other Regiments hold their reunions at The Royal Court Hotel. It is a large regal venue with organised staff, clean, well stocked, good food and facilities, good transport links and very close to the Arboretum.

Norman Brown couldn't have picked a more fitting location if he tried under the disbandment circumstances.

I just hope those who didn't attend >



this year because it wasn't at 'Bicester' come along in 2016 and realise it's what you make it and want it to be.
Steve Baron

Well said! Was a great weekend can't wait to do it all again next year.
Jennifer Bone

Well Norman Brown you have out done yourself again it has be a great weekend the food , entertainment, location are outstanding and as all ways the company was great. Oh and the beer is cheaper than the pubs in Bicester. Many thanks for it all from us both.
Paul Parkinson

That was a good start to the new order everyone happy roll on next year
Paddy McPhillips

Fabulous weekend, great to see everyone. Big thank you to all who travelled near and far to make it a success in true Pioneer spirit and esprit de Corps.
Bob Fox

Hi Norman can I just say thank you for fantastic reunion I thoroughly enjoyed it looking forward to the next one always thought the Pioneers was about the people within the group and the comradeship that comes from them.....where the reunion is held

shouldn't make a difference, it's about the guys being together. It's a shame St David's had to go as it was your ancestral home so to speak but from the pictures, vireos etc posted on here everyone had a great time.....and a mahoosive pat on the back to Norman for organising it....
Val Gilbert

Back home, sadly missing the last evening with everyone but had an absolutely brilliant time from Friday evening until we left this morning.

Thanks to Norman for organising what i can only describe as a phenomenal weekend, great venue, great organisation, great food, and fabulous friends, roll >



on next year. See you all in 2016
best wishes from
Paul and Sue Boardman

Many thanks for a great weekend, the hotel was good the food great and the company as always warm and welcoming. Once the word gets out we should have more next year, we should all aim to bring two more ex Pioneers with us.

This was an excellent start to our new association they may have got rid of the Regiment but not the Pioneer ethos.
John Coast

Wot a great weekend great food great company roll on next year same place again but in June.
Martin Smith

Just got back from Coventry and would like to thank Norman brown and everyone else who was involved for a great reunion me and my wife Linda could fault nothing the rooms the food and

the atmosphere were brilliant and so much mingling think i got to talk to so many pioneers i have not spoken to before and everything under one roof nice cheap bar for pioneers only open to the last person left yes a bit more expensive but a lot more quality in the rooms once again thank you and see you next year.
Steve Kohut

What a weekend at Coventry Pioneer Reunion. We had so much fun, laughter and beer. For those sceptic's, I say you need to give it a go.

Norman, thank you so much for putting on a great weekend. We are now looking forward to next year's event in June.
Eddie Butler

Thank you sir Norman for a fantastic weekend could not fault anything and I didn't hear anybody complain about anything lol roll on next year.
Theresa Perkins >

Norman, thank you for a great weekend so well organised, so nice to meet up with so many comrades whose names I never seem to remember, fantastic weekend shall look forward to the next.
Tony Bloor

Had an awesome weekend Norman Brown thank you. Martin Beasley Just arrived home after a great weekend with the RPCA. Many thanks to Norman & Son. Looking forward to next years' reunion.
Christine Powell

Have just got back from the Reunion what a weekend it was, the hotel was great and also the food. I got to know so many Pioneers it does not bare thinking about but they were great my wife also enjoyed herself and we both hope to be

there next year. A very big thank you goes to Norman and the team for organising such a great Venue and weekend well done all of you. I would also like to thank all Pioneers for making our weekend memorable.
Archie Goode

Norman thanks for a great weekend very well organised looking forward to next year's reunion. Mel Stanley Awesome weekend Norman thank you can't wait for next year xxx
Katherine Moore

Thanks to everyone for an amazing weekend, can't wait for the next one and many more to come.... And if possible get the word out to the younger generation; it would be great to see some new faces.
Tracy O'Neil

Home now. Fantastic weekend thanks to Norman Brown and his helpers.
John Kear

Thanks again Norman for a great weekend as they say here in Northern Ireland the crack was outstanding and for those of you sitting back waiting for our feedback read the reports you missed one hell of a weekend Bob Fox even bought me a beer.
Dougie Durrant

I would like to thank you for a fantastic weekend, you played a blinder picking that Hotel, good on ya.
Ike Easingwood

Thanks Norman for a brilliant weekend, Irene and I loved it.
Bob Popkin



REUNION WEEKEND









REUNION WEEKEND







An enjoyable weekend with £1100 raised over the weekend to support a fabulous local charity in Redcar

FRIDAY evening started with a fancy dress competition, a raffle and a race night (something for everyone!). Liz Sutcliffe and Anne-Marie Young helped local man David Williams who ran the race night, he did this free of charge to help out chosen charity.

In attendance we had a King and Queen, namely David Fender and Joyce

Trimblings the official Pearly King and Queen of Bow.

We had a few new faces to join us this year and between us all we had a great night raising money for a local homeless charity in Redcar.

The organisers of the event (Allan, Mick and myself) kept one surprise from the Group, we did not tell them that Norman and Paul Brown would be attending for

the weekend. Every year when I submit this report together with photographs for publication in the Association Newsletter Paul tells me that my photos are useless so he had decided to come and take some good ones himself!

We would also like to thank Norman and the RPC Association for their support, this will help the Group going forward.

Saturday night was the main right, with

Pictures: Paul Brown



tombola and auction.

Many Group members donated prizes and with the help of Lynne and Steve from the Coastal Review putting Allan and Liz in touch with Joe Parker from Tesco's who also helped.

The emotional bit of the night was when I auctioned a gift donated by Archie and Sheila Goode and their daughter, it was a door knocker of the 2nd badge he had made for his brother Bill. However, Bill passed away before Archie could give it to him so the family decided to auction it.

Part of the auction were two posters which had been donated by Saltire Radio, however there was only one cardboard

tube to protect them, so to make more money I auctioned the empty tube! This started a chain reaction, the next item was a Kareoke mug in a box, people started bidding one price for the mug and another price for the box.

The total raised between the 57 members who attended over the two nights was £1,050 (this was raised to £1,100 by Dave Parris who had been unable to attend his first reunion in 9 years).

The money raised goes to Coatham House which offers supported accommodation to local young people in housing need. It also offers ongoing advice and support to former residents.

They moved to Redcar in 2005 and their new premises was named Charles Jolly House in deference to the man who initiated all the work in 1984 which led to Coatham House being established today.

Once again Kelsey Sutcliffe sang for us again and she was picked to present the money on the night to Bridget Collins from Coatham house.

Following the presentation a buffet and disco kept members busy and gave the Group Moderators a chance to chat and have a beer with everyone.

This was a very successful Reunion. We hope to see you all next year for our 10th anniversary of the RPC Nostalgia Group at Bridlington (29 Apr/1 May).



NOSTALGIA GROUP REUNION

1st-3rd May 2015





PAST EVENTS



■ THE NORTHAMPTON Branch of the Association held at BBQ at the Casuals Rugby Club (President: Mr Bob Barfield) on 25 July 2015 where approx 60 Association members attended.

Some of these travelled from London, Nottingham and Luton. During the evening a raffle followed by an auction were held, both organised by James Upfield and Kelvin Smith. They are to be congratulated on making both a great success and raising funds for the Branch.

The Northampton Branch holds meetings quarterly in the Abington Park Hotel, the next meeting is to take place on 14 November 2015 and all are welcome to attend for a chat over a few beers. Further details can be obtained from Mr Bob Fox, Chairman of the Branch c/o RPC Association.

■ ON 29 June 2015 Association members marched through Northampton Town Centre to mark Armed Forces Day where the salute was taken on the market square by the Lord Lieutenant of Northamptonshire Mr David E Laing.

This was following by a meal and a chat in one of Northampton's many pubs. In the afternoon members of the Northampton Branch did a round of pubs which were used when they were stationed at Simpson Barracks.

■ THE 39/93 Club held a function at the Commodore Hotel, Bournemouth on 2-4 Oct 16 where 14 members attended.

Most arrived on the Friday afternoon and we able to sun-bathe (and have a few beers) whilst having a chat. On Saturday they travelled to nearby Poole for a day of sight-seeing and shopping, in the evening they had their formal dinner and once again war stories were re-told (they seem to get better every year!).

The Club hold two gatherings a year, the next one is scheduled for 11/12 March 2016, if you are interested in attending please contact the Club Secretary Mr Les Rowley tel no: 07884 060307 the cost is £40 per room per night.

Personnel living in the Bournemouth area are invited to attend the meal on the Saturday evening.

■ ON SATURDAY 3 October 2015 the RPC Corps of Drums played at a boxing competition which was held at Northamptonshire County Cricket ground, Wantage Road, Northampton.

The match was organised by Kings Heath Boxing Club and was that Club's boxers against a Scotland select. The band opened ceremonies on the night and were well received receiving great applause.

The programme for the evening contained a brief history of the band which is now known as The Veterans Corps of Drums.

■ A NEW Branch of the Association (Northern Branch) held their first meeting on Saturday 3 Oct 16 at The Full House Pub, Monk Bretton, Barnsley.

Mr J Hatfield was elected Chairman, Mr G Dyson as Secretary and Mr D Burton as Treasurer. The Branch intend to hold meetings every month, the next one scheduled for Sat 14 Nov 16 from 1300 – 1600 hrs at the same location.

Wartime Pioneer defrosts his fridge!

The RLC Association have carried out all benevolence for ex Pioneers since 2005, they also now do this for all the other forming Corps' of the RLC. The following is an extract from a recent case which was forwarded to them:

THIS elderly WW2 veteran is seeking financial assistance for white goods which were destroyed in a fire in the kitchen of his small flat which is in a sheltered housing complex. He had decided to defrost his fridge and put a lighted candle into it which he thought would speed up the process.

The candle ignited some gas from the compressor, there was an explosion which blew out the window and consequently spread through the kitchen destroying the white goods and kitchen items.

Because he was in his sitting room at the time he wasn't injured and is currently living with a relative but has been temporarily allocated another flat in the complex which his family are kitting out with loaned items while the other is repaired and cleaned.

It is likely to be some time before he can move back in but he says he is happy to 'camp' there until he can get back.

Unfortunately he had no insurance to cover his personal loss of household items. He did wartime service in the Pioneer Corps and although he worked as a painter in civilian life he has no occupational pension and lives on his state pension and benefits.

He suffers from Macular Degeneration so is registered as blind but at 89 years he still maintains his independence with paid care help. He is keen to get back into his 'own' flat as soon as possible and would appreciate help in funding items he needs.

I have estimated that £800 would cover the white goods, but of course the firemen threw household items out the window i.e. pots and pans etc, which will also need to be replaced at an estimate of £200.

He has modest savings and has made arrangements for funeral costs. I recommend this case for your consideration as it is of some urgency due to the fire damage.

Armistice Day Cover

For the first time, BFPS will issue a special commemorative cover on the 11 November 2015 to mark this poignant event

ARMISTICE DAY, held on 11 November every year, commemorates the signing of the armistice between the Allies and Germany at 11am on 11 November 1918 - the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. After the end of World War I, Armistice Day was marked each year by a two-minute silence at 11am, a chance for people to stop and remember the 20 million who died during the conflict.

Now the two-minute silence is more often held on Remembrance Sunday, the Sunday closest to Armistice Day, which is a day of remembrance for all those killed in war.

For the first time, BFPS will issue a special commemorative cover on the 11 November 2015 to mark this poignant event.

The main image of this thought-provoking cover is from an original oil painting by Army artist Richard Salter. The Royal Mail issued stamp 'Poppy' has been used and will be cancelled by the exclusive

'We Will Remember Them' special handstamp, designed especially for the occasion. The postmark also bears the unique serial number 'British Forces Postal Service 3195'.

Brigadier Tweedie Brown CBE said, "A unique combination of insightful art, powerful sentiment and sympathetic philately makes the 2015 Armistice Day Cover in Remembrance very special; a must for the collector and a lasting memento for those who appreciate the sacrifices made on their behalf."

The standard and signed covers will be available to order from the 6th October 2015 on a strictly first-come-first-served basis from the BFPS online shop (www.bfps.org.uk/shop).

They cost just £6 for the unsigned versions and £12 for the signed versions (UK/BFPO p&p free).

These are also available to order by post by sending a cheque (payable to 'BFPS CIC') to BFPS The Old Post Office Links Place Elie Fife KY9 1AX.



Hold it up higher Dusty

Picture: Tracy O'Neill

Pat Morley demonstrates how high his mace should be held

Pat is now looking forward to working more closely with the Corps of Drums in the future.

FUTURE EVENTS



■ **THE PAST and Present Officers' Dinner** is to be held in the Bicester Garrison Officers' Mess, Ambrosden on Fri 16 October 2015.

The principal guest is to be Col D Fielden, Regimental Secretary RHQ The RLC who is due to retire in early 2016.

■ **THE FIELD** of Remembrance will be held at Westminster Abbey on Thu 5 November 2015.

Tickets are required for this event and these can be obtained from the Secretary RPC Association.

■ **ONCE AGAIN, following the Field of Remembrance we will be holding a London Lunch.**

This will immediately follow the service at Westminster and will be in The Lord Moon of the Mall in Whitehall.

■ **THE CENOTAPH** Parade is to be held at Whitehall on Sunday 8 November 2015, tickets can be obtained from the Secretary RPC Association.

Personnel must be on Horse Guards Parade by 1010 hrs – full details will be distributed with tickets.

The Northampton Branch of the Association will, once again, be hiring a mini-bus from Northampton Town Centre. If you wish to travel on this please inform the Secretary.

■ **THE NORTHAMPTON** Branch of the Association under its Chairman, Mr Bob Fox, the Nostalgia Group under the two main moderators Mr Sooty Sutcliffe and Mr Kev Young and the 39/93 Club under its Secretary Mr Les Rowley hold various functions during the year.

If you are interested in attending contact the Secretary RPC Association who will forward you details to them.

■ **AS REPORTED** on page 5 this year's reunion at Coventry was a great success, a booking form for next year's reunion (17/19 June 2016) is attached to this Newsletter.

If you wish to take advantage of the members subsidy please return application by 1 May 2016.

As shown on the booking form the cost includes bed and breakfast, evening meal, group and disco on Fri and Sat nights and a disco and quiz on the Sunday evening.

■ **ARE YOU tough enough to take on the CATERAN YOMP in 2016?**

22, 36.5 or the challenging 54 miles in just 24 hours? Sign up now! Register at: <http://tinyurl.com/ofekf4d>

Spend an unforgettable weekend with your friends and colleagues, sharing the exhilarating experience of participating in the CATERAN YOMP.

Throughout the route, you will have the opportunity to participate in clay pigeon shooting, archery and be treated to a breath taking fireworks display during the evening.

There will be tasty hot food and drinks, cakes, fruit and quality refreshments at all the right locations to ensure we keep your energy levels and spirits high to keep you going to that next checkpoint!

They also have the highest quality medical and marshal support across the event to ensure the only thing you need to think about is the next mile.

Founders Day

20 members of the Association attended the Royal Hospital Chelsea on 4 June 2015 to watch the Founders Day Parade

MEMBERS of the Association attended the Royal Hospital Chelsea on 4 June 2015 to watch the Founders Day Parade, the reviewing officer was His Royal Highness The Duke of Yorks KG.

There was a slight addition to the proceedings this year as Her Excellency the French Ambassador awarded The Legion d'honneur to 19 In Pensioners. To mark the 70th anniversary of D Day in Normandy last year, the French government in agreement with the British authorities, decided to award the medal to all the British veterans who took part in the Liberation of France during the Second World War. The medal was created by Napoleon in 1802, is France's highest distinction and honours exceptional acts of bravery and devotion by

all those who have served France, whether they be "French by blood received" or "by blood spilled".

Through this gesture, France wants to thank them for their total commitment to freedom. As the French President recalled in Normandy on the 70th anniversary of D Day, "If today we can live in peace, if we can live in security, if we can enjoy sovereignty, protected by the laws we've chosen, it's thanks to those men. Every moment compels the living to remember those who were killed. Today, as we enjoy this Europe of peace, we must think every moment about moment about the heroes of June 1944 and beyond, about those men who came from across the Atlantic, across the Channel, across the Mediterranean and the Pacific to begin the liberation of Europe by liberating France."

Command Citation

Award of GOC Force Troops Command Certificate of Meritorious service to 25009295, SSgt Perry, RLC

STAFF SGT Perry was assigned as the Regimental Welfare SNCO to 23 Pnr Regt in Nov 2012. Since then he has contributed an enormous amount to the effective delivery of welfare support to the Regt by maintaining a positive, calm and mature attitude – even when faced with the most difficult of situations. He has provided first class support to all during an extremely challenging time as the Regt draws down and disbands. Dealing with redundees, families, wounded personnel and the widows, children, and relatives of those killed in action, is becoming a daily event as the end draws near.

He has been a critical element to the welfare of the Foreign & Commonwealth soldiers and their families in particular. With English as a second language, they struggle with the rules and regulations surrounding immigration issues. He has gained an excellent reputation amongst them with his firm, fair and friendly manner as he guides them through the process. He has also provided professional advice and guidance within UKBA rules, civil law and service policy to the chain of command.

His enthusiasm, drive and insight has ensured maximum success in all events with which he is involved. The Regimental Football team has also benefited from his input as a coach and mentor and he contributed significantly to their success on the pitch; coaching them to win the 4

Division First Division league in the 2012/13 season.

Outside of his normal duties he performs valuable community service as part of the Oxfordshire Hospital Trust Visiting Committee. Having completed 2 years on the team, he has set himself the target of earning a place on the Board of Governors for a local hospital. He is also a volunteer for Oxford Youth Offenders' Services and provides support to anyone who finds themselves arrested and placed in custody by the Police. He is trained to mentor young offenders and young people who struggle to access education, training and employment.

He does all of this while he studies for a Youth Justice Effective Practitioner Degree, which will involve a period of distance learning. He has the same easy going but firm manner whether conversing with his staff, liaising with other welfare organisations or briefing the chain of command. In particular he mentors and motivates those junior to him extremely well and, through his logical and well thought out advice, can very quickly earn their trust. He has boundless energy and it is remarkable how he manages to sustain his work rate and enthusiasm in all that he does, whilst maintaining the values and high standards that he holds dear.

SSgt Perry fully deserves to be recognised for his outstanding contribution and commitment in so many areas.

Burns Night Reunion

The Northampton Branch of the Association held a Burns Night event in January for the second year running. It is hoped that we will make this into a regular annual event.



■ Kelvin and James showing off their new Simon Cowell teeth at the Burns Night

Picture: Paul Brown

IN THE last newsletter we omitted the Northampton Branch of the Association Burns Night, which was held on Saturday 24 Jan 2015 at the Eastgate Public House in Northampton.

There was a special boiled Haggis with neeps, tatties and whisky sauce.

There was a terrific turnout and it is hoped that we will make this into a regular annual event.

This poem entitled 'My Heart's in the Highlands', was supplied by Kevin Digger Young.

Farewell to the Highlands, farewell to the North, The birth-place of Valour, the country of Worth; Wherever I wander, wherever I rove, The hills of the Highlands for ever I

love.

My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here; My heart's in the Highlands a-chasing the deer; A-chasing the wild-deer, and following the roe,

My heart's in the Highlands wherever I go.

Farewell to the mountains high covered with snow; Farewell to the straths and green valleys below; Farewell to the forests and wild-hanging woods; Farewell to the torrents and loud-pouring floods.

My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here; My heart's in the Highlands a-chasing the deer; A-chasing the wild-deer, and following the roe, My heart's in the Highlands wherever I go.



NEWS IN BRIEF



■ FOR ALL those who have left the Armed Forces and had administration action taken against them as a result of a police caution between December 2008 and September 2011, it may be that there are grounds for a complaint.

The MOD has written to serving and former serving personnel because of changes to the law which took effect in December 2008 that meant such cautions should not have been taken into account after that date.

However, whilst action has been taken to contact those affected directly, it is apparent that the MOD have not managed to reach some people and they will be unaware of efforts to contact them about this issue.

The letters sent out on 10 March 2015 informed personnel that they may wish to consider a service complaint if they believe they have been wronged in a matter relating to their Service.

Information about service complaints is contained in the Joint Service Publication 831 which can be found on the Gov.UK website see:

<http://tinyurl.com/qzm5und>

Under the relevant legislation, service complaints generally need to be submitted within three months of the act that is being complained about.

However, this time limit may be extended at the discretion of the prescribed officer dealing with the complaint if, in all the circumstances of the case, he or she considers it just and equitable to do so.

Any complaints received in connection with this issue will be considered entirely on their own merits, but the date on which personnel received a letter or were first made aware of this issue may be one of the factors taken into account when considering whether to allow a complaint to proceed.

Should you wish to find out more information then please contact the following: Email: ArmyPersSvc-PS2-SC-Helpline@mod.uk or phone 01263 382746

■ MILITARY MATTERS is a specialist project within Housing Options Scotland providing an independent housing brokerage service to veterans and their family members in Scotland.

With financial support from the Scottish Government and Poppyscotland, Military Matters provide detailed housing information and advice to dozens of serving personnel and veterans.

If you think that Military Matters could help you or know someone who could be helped then please contact the voicemail service on 0131 247 1400 or by emailing: militarymatters@housingoptions.scotland.org.uk

■ THANKS TO all members who supported the derby draw. The following are the winners.

1st Prize £1,000 Mr E Sanders. Ticket No 14269, London, W12

2nd Prize £500 Mr W Law, Ticket No 30333, Walsall

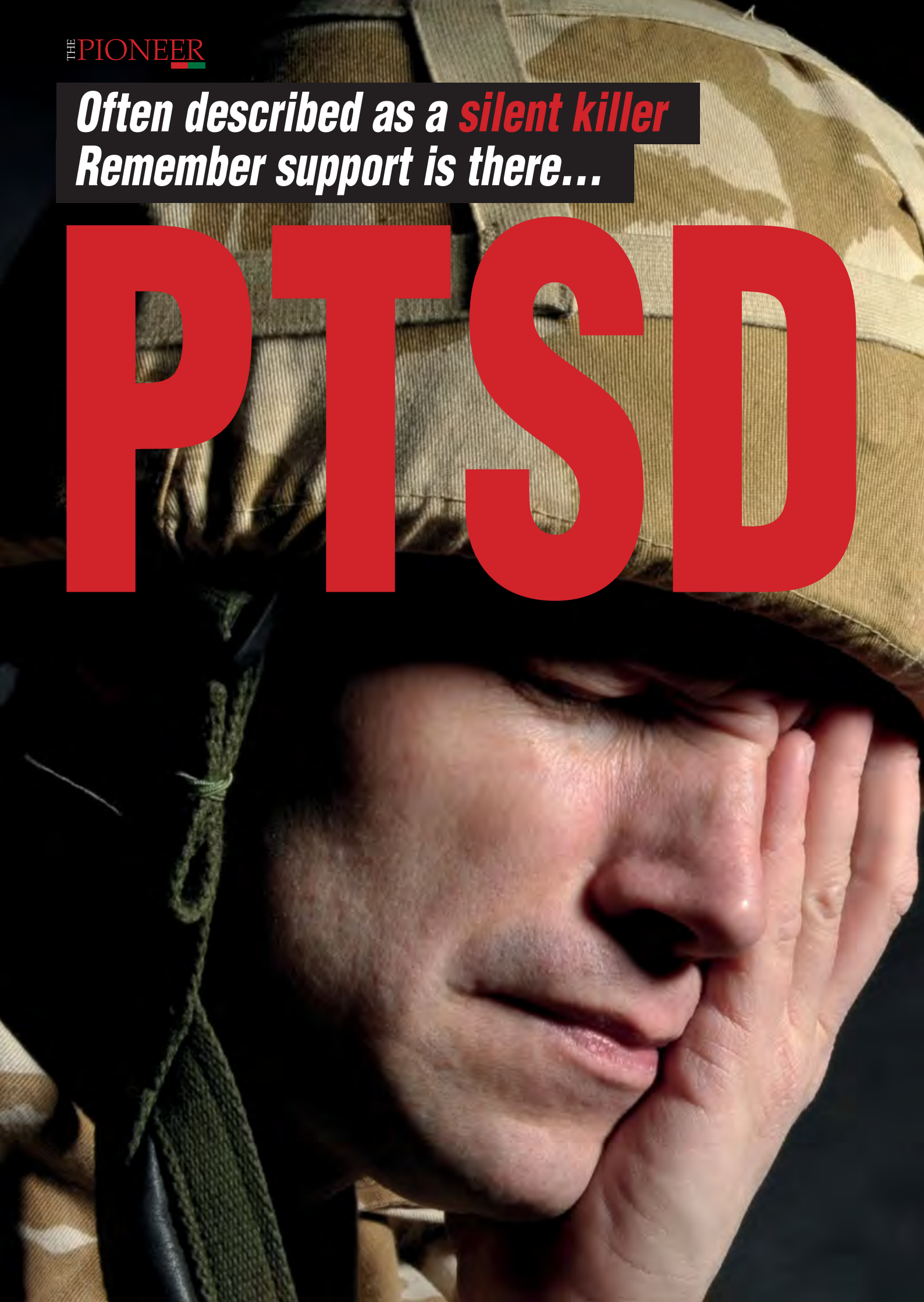
3rd Prize £200 Mr TF Horton. Ticket No 26962, Darlington

4th Prize £100 Mrs J Saunders, Ticket No 14336, Kirkcaldy

5th Prize £50 Mr N Evans Ticket No 04858, Lincoln

*Often described as a **silent killer**
Remember support is there...*

PTSD



following a life-threatening event like military combat, natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents, or violent personal assaults like rape. Most survivors of trauma return to normal given a little time.

However, some people have stress reactions that don't go away on their own, or may even get worse over time. These individuals may develop PTSD.

People who suffer from PTSD often suffer from nightmares, flashbacks, difficulty sleeping, and feeling emotionally numb. These symptoms can significantly impair a person's daily life.

PTSD is marked by clear physical and psychological symptoms. It often has symptoms like depression, substance

abuse, problems of memory and cognition, and other physical and mental health problems. The disorder is also associated with difficulties in social or family life, including occupational instability, marital problems, family discord, and difficulties in parenting.

Who is most likely to develop PTSD

Although most people who go through trauma will not get PTSD, you are more likely to develop PTSD if you:

- Were directly exposed to the trauma as a victim or a witness
- Were seriously hurt during the event
- Went through a trauma that was long-lasting or very severe
- Believed that you were in danger

- Had a severe reaction during the event, such as crying, shaking, vomiting or feeling apart from your surroundings

- Felt helpless during the trauma and were not able to help yourself or a loved one.

You are also more likely to develop PTSD if you

- Had an earlier life-threatening event or trauma, such as being abused as a child
- Have another mental health problem
- Have family members who have had mental health problems
- Have little support from family and friends
- Have recently lost a loved one, especially if it was not expected

- Have had recent, stressful life changes
- Drink a lot of alcohol
- Are poorly educated
- Are younger

When you are in the military, you may see combat.

You may have been on operations that exposed you to horrible and life-threatening experiences.

You may have been shot at, seen a friend or colleague get shot, or seen death. These types of events can lead to PTSD.

The number of veterans with PTSD varies by service era

1st Gulf War – About 12 out of every 100 veterans (or 12%) have PTSD in a given year

2nd Gulf War – About 11-20 out of every 100 veterans (or between 11-20%) have PTSD in a given year

PTSD can be successfully treated, even when it develops many years after a traumatic event.

Any treatment depends on the severity of symptoms and how soon they occur

after the traumatic event. Any of the following treatment options may be recommended:

- Watchful Waiting – monitoring your symptoms to see whether they improve or get worse without treatment.
- Psychotherapy – such as trauma focused cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) or eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR)
- Anti-Depressants – such as paroxetine or mirtazapine.

If you are suffering from PTSD, or know

someone who is, the following list of resources and information will help you find help in dealing with PTSD and related conditions:

www.combatstress.org.uk
www.britishlegion.org.uk
www.ssafa.org.uk
www.samaritans.org

If you are thinking about taking your own life, seek help immediately or call the suicide helpline: 08457 909090

SELF HELP FOR PTSD IN VETERANS

While it's common for veterans with PTSD to have to endure long waits for treatment on the NHS, there are plenty of things you can do for yourself to start feeling better.

The job of recovery is to transition out of the mental and emotional war zone you're still living in and help your nervous system return to its pre-war state of balance. The best way to regulate your nervous system is through social engagement – interacting with another human being, be it a loved one, a family member or a professional therapist. However, as a veteran with PTSD, you need to first become "unstuck" and move out of the immobilization stress response.

With these recovery steps, you'll learn how to deal with your combat stress and also learn skills that can benefit the rest of your post-war life. You'll learn how to feel calm again, reconnect with others, deal with nightmares and flashbacks, cope

with feelings of depression, anxiety, or guilt and restore your sense of control. And when you do get to see a doctor or therapist in the NHS you'll be in a better position to benefit from professional treatment as well.

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

STEP 1 – GET MOVING

Getting regular exercise has always been important for veterans with PTSD as well as helping to burn off adrenaline it makes you feel better.

STEP 2 – CONNECT WITH OTHERS

Social interaction with someone who cares about you is an effective way to calm your nervous system, it's important

to find someone you can connect with face to face.

STEP 3 – WAYS TO CALM YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

Just as loud noises, certain smells, or the feel of sand in your clothes can instantly transport you back to the trauma of a combat zone, so too can sights, sounds, smells and other sensory input quickly calm you down. The key is to find the sensory input that works for you.

STEP 4 – TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY

The symptoms of PTSD can be hard on your body or it's important to put a priority on sleep, exercise, healthy food and relaxing activities.

STEP 5 – DEAL WITH FLASHBACKS, NIGHTMARES AND INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS

Flashbacks usually involve visual and auditory memories of combat or other trauma you experienced.

It feels as if it's happening all over again so it's vital for you to accept and reassure yourself that your traumatic experience is not occurring in the present.

Here's a simple script you can use when you awaken from a nightmare or start to experience a flashback or intrusive thought:

"I am feeling (panicked, overwhelmed etc) because I am remembering (event), but as I look around I can see that the event isn't happening right now and I'm not actually in danger".

HEALING HIDDEN WOUNDS – HELP FOR HEROES SUPPORT FOR OUR WOUNDED

When people think of wounded or sick Servicemen and women they often think of those recovering from severe physical and psychological issues caused by IED-blasts and fire-fights, but this isn't the full story.

Help for Heroes beneficiaries have long been stating that there is another internal battle faced by countless veterans and Armed Forces families on the home front, which has now been backed up by recognised research.

Stress, worry and low mood can affect anyone in a variety of ways – it can be a sudden lack of motivation or interest in

everyday activities; an uncontrollable sense of worry or fear; it could be physical tension in the head or shoulders, or any number of other symptoms.

Help for Heroes' new psychological wellbeing Service, H4H Hidden Wounds, can help veterans and service families with many of these common mental health issues by teaching skills to help understand and manage their emotions.

Free and confidential support is delivered by Psychological Wellbeing Practitioners (PWPs) by phone, Skype or

face-to-face (in Wiltshire and Yorkshire), so that help can be easily accessed from around the country.

Support is available to veterans, their families and the families of those currently serving and can be accessed either by self-referral or third party referral. The team also works closely with other organisations and charities to make sure that anyone in need of mental health support receives the right help.

To chat to someone about whether H4H Hidden Wounds can help you or

someone you know, please get in touch with the team between 0900 and 1700 hrs Monday to Friday: Tel: 01980 844 300 Email:

hidden.wounds@lhelpforheroes.org.uk
Web: www.helpforheroes.org.uk/hidden-wounds

We recently featured an article on the Pioneer Facebook page titled "Landmark Success for Australia's Nuclear Veterans" whereby a legal ruling in Australia, may be a landmark for Gulf War Syndrome sufferers. The Doctor who brought about

the successful ruling was Dr Chris Busby. His first veteran in which he gave evidence and won was actually a L/Cpl in The Royal Pioneer Corps. This article can be read at <http://tinyurl.com/nmbr5pd>

Figures show that 10,000 out of the 38,000 ground troops in the Iraq invasion show symptoms related to Gulf War Syndrome.

Approximately 250,000 of the 697,000 US veterans who served in the Gulf War are afflicted with the chronic multi symptom illness.

Figures also show that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) tends to be much greater in veterans and show that veterans who serve multiple tours are

more at risk of developing PTSD several years after leaving the Military. On average it takes around 13 years for Soldiers to seek help for mental health issues.

Ex-service personnel also account for one in 10 rough sleepers across the UK. Many are having to cope with the devastating affects of PTSD, which has led to a cycle of family break-up, addictions to drugs or alcohol and homelessness.

These are often subjects where people just don't come forward for help before it gets too bad. It is often described as a 'silent killer'.

Remember support is there. For confidential support remember the Samaritans are always there.

A very sad article published this year, titled "War veteran with PTSD after serving three tours of Afghanistan killed himself after 'six of his Army friends also ended their lives' highlights this.

Article:
<http://tinyurl.com/qh27lw8>

One of our veterans, Dave Edwards did come forward. Dave was featured in the excellent Channel 4 series "Our Soldiers: Return to Civvy Street".

These can be watched here:
<http://tinyurl.com/oz73oaj>
<http://tinyurl.com/ow6752t>
<http://tinyurl.com/ob2fotx>

It was great seeing Dave in the film and also joining us all at the Cenotaph last year. ■

Sgt Butler's War

Ed note: 13061722 Sgt Charles Norman Butler (DOB 22 Apr 15) enlisted at Leeds and joined 5 Centre Pioneer Corps (Huyton) for training on 8 August 1940 and served until 12 April 1946, the latter part of his service was with 98 Coy PC)



Report: Sgt Butler
Picture: Sgt Butler

MY WAR started with the formation of the local Defence Volunteer Force, known as the LDV and later to become the Home Guard. My small section of the LDV was formed to protect a section of railway track against possible attack from German paratroops.

Walking sticks against paratroops!
Eventually we were issued with Ross rifles
and at a still later date we were even issued
with ammunition.

Most of our duties were during the dark hours so we worked during the day and patrolled the line at night.

My war proper started on the 8th August 1940 when I was called up for Army service to join the Pioneer Corps training camp at Huyton near Liverpool. In due course I was posted a 'Pals' Company which had been formed by Mr Robert Tarran, a civil engineer in Hull and which consisted of Trawlermen, Dockers, Builders, Labourers, Teachers, a Barrister and a Librarian too I remember. In fact a large cross section of the people of Hull. Mr Tarran also provided instruments for the formation of a drum and fife band. The reason why all these people had been brought together in the Pioneer Corps was that we all suffered from the same affliction – poor eyesight. In due course however that was all to be changed by two strokes of a pen for in November 1942 we were all regarded A4 and in June 1943 we were all graded A1 and formed into a Beach Landing Company.

Back to Huyton – I cannot recollect just how long we were training but I think it was about ten weeks and at the end of the training we marched out of Huyton and on our way to Norton Fitzwarren, a village some four miles out of Taunton in Somerset where in due course we took over a brand new purpose built camp. This camp had been built as part of a huge complex of very large store houses railway connected to the passing main Great Western Railway line. Our job was to be involved with the stocking up of these warehouses with all manner of foodstuffs and many other commodities and despatching large orders to Forces in many parts of the world and to replenish stocks at smaller depots in this country. Because of my railway experience I was enlisted to assist the RTO (Railway Transportation Officer), Capt Cox who in civilian life was a railway worker like myself at Swindon. We were also involved with guard duties at the depot and various

petrol dumps in the area.

During this time I had been sent on various course and been promoted to the rank of Corporal and then to Sergeant.

I had also been on an assault course and must have done too well because I was given the job of setting up such a course in Norton Fitzwarren and putting the Company over it. This meant that I had to go over it about every three days, it also meant that I must have been very fit in those days.

About this time volunteers were requested from Sergeants for transfer to a new Glider Regiment which was to be formed. Three of us "volunteered", Sgts Appleyard, Rider and Butler. Two were rejected because of their eyesight and Sgt Rider was accepted.

The first American troops to come to this country were the equivalent of our RASC and RAOC (Service Corps and Ordnance Corps) and they arrived at Avonmouth Docks, Bristol and from there they were brought to Norton Fitzwarren to take over No 3 SRD i.e. the Stores Depot where we worked and ultimately to take over our camp. For a short period I was seconded to them to help with the takeover of the depot, in the meantime they occupied a tented camp in the village – but not for long.

One evening on my return from the SRD I was ordered to report to the CO and was informed that I must detail a Corporal and eight men who, together with myself, were to report in full marching order at 0700 hours the following morning and to organise rations for two days. The matter was secret and I could not be told at that time the purpose or destination. So began a most bizarre journey the secrecy for which still eludes me.

Day dawned and we were taken to Taunton railway station accompanied by the CO who changed the travel warrant. The only thing I new then was the direction we were to travel. The train arrived and we got aboard and as the train began to pull out of the station the CO thrust a sealed envelope into my hand and wished me good luck – I was to need it.

I quickly opened the envelope and my orders were simply "Proceed to Double Bois and take over a camp adjacent to the station, prepare for Company arrival in two days". I had always prided myself on my knowledge of railway geography but Double Bois defeated me. However, a quick enquiry at Plymouth revealed it to be the next station beyond Liskeard and that was not all my enquiry revealed, for I was also

informed the train was to make a special stop at Double Bois that day to drop off some soldiers – me and my gang.

We soon arrived at Double Bois a very small wayside station almost on the edge of Bodmin Moor and there beside the station was a large mansion in large grounds with Nissen Huts scattered around and which I found to be occupied by an Ordnance Corps unit. To find it occupied was somewhat of a surprise. However, I sought out the Adjutant and informed him who I was and the purpose of my being there. He was highly amused but when he explained that he had no orders to move out and neither did he expect to receive any I was anything but amused. He was very helpful however and fixed me up with some transport to enable me to get to Liskeard and consult the Barrack Warden for the area who the Adjutant told he had an office in that town. In the meantime he would attend to the needs of my men. Now a Barrack Warden is a civilian employee of the Ministry of Defence who is in charge with controlling Army accommodation and in normal circumstances he would have been at Double Bois to hand over the camp to me. I duly located the gentleman at Liskeard and he was as surprised as the Adjutant had been. He was not expecting my Company and therefore he had not allocated any accommodation and there was certainly none available at Double Bois. The telephone! Today that is precisely what you would do but in those days it wasn't such a simple matter. Right Mr Barrack Warden my Company will be arriving within two days, all 280 of them were are we doing to put them? He didn't know but he had ideas. I was to meet him the following morning so away I went to spend the night at Double Bois with my men – courtesy of the Ordnance Corps.

The following day was hectic. We went to Looe, to Bodmin, to Plymouth but to no avail. It might have helped had I known what we were going to do, I mean what work we were to do when we were all here but I didn't. Success, late in the day we arrived in the small town of Lostwithiel and after much negotiation on the part of the Barrack Warden he was at last able to take over some property sufficient for our needs. So far so good. It was too late for me to draw rations for the Company that day or to go to the Barracks Wardens Store for cooking equipment, palliasse covers and straw to fill them. That would all have to be done tomorrow, the day the Company was to arrive and I didn't even know what time

they were due to arrive. Due to arrive? Unless I did something about it they wouldn't be arriving at Lostwithiel, they were expecting to be at Double Bois. How to make sure their destination was changed? The Barrack Warden told me the nearest RTO was at Plymouth, I still had transport which the Adjutant had loaned me so I chased off to Plymouth where the RTO assured me that he would divert the Company to Lostwithiel and this he duly did. As for me, well by the time I had completed the jobs I had to do the Company had been waiting at Lostwithiel station some thirty minutes not knowing where to go and the CO was not amused. When it finally registered with him he mellowed and realised that he was lucky to have a roof over his head that night.

We stayed in Lostwithiel some weeks doing Ordnance work in the surrounding countryside and also some forestry work in nearby woodland. Our stay in Lostwithiel had been very pleasant and we were given a civic send off when we left. We didn't go very far though. Of all places we moved to the camp at Double Bois which had now been vacated by the Ordnance Corps. Our sole purpose now was to train, train and train. I was eventually posted from here to another Company based at Castle Donnington near Derby. This Company did ordnance work, laid ducks for telephone cable on airfields and erected wireless masts. The latter work was most interesting and whilst so employed I was housed in a large house in Lubenham which is near Market Harborough. The house was most unusual as it had been built in the shape of a Butterfly. The name of the house I cannot remember but it was Spanish for butterfly.

From Castle Donnington we were rushed off to Epping where we arrived after midnight and by 0400 hrs I was on my way to Surrey Docks where dockers who should have been unloading meat from ships had gone on strike and we took over the job.

After Surrey Docks the order of my movements is not clear but the locations are quite clear.

Most of my time in the Army was spent on detachment that means being away from the Company. The Company moved to Edwinstowe in Sherwood Forest and after a short time there I was moved on to Staunton Harold Hall near Ashby-de-la-Zouche doing Ordnance work. From there it was to Cottingham near Hull. This was quite a different job. Some bombs had been found in cargoes of oranges from Spain and as a result the dockers had refused to handle any more cargoes of oranges and this was the job we had to do. We also unloaded a cargo of Blacklead – this was a very dirty job indeed.

From Hull to Barton Fleming a village in the Yorkshire Wolds and from here I took two detachments. One to the Free French Forces based at Sleadmere, the other to the 2nd Battalion of the Coldstream Guards based at Butterwick. This battalion was part of the Guards Armoured Division and in their training they drove their tanks all over that part of the Wolds damaging roads, fences, walks and in some instances, low buildings as well. My job was to try and placate people by cleaning up the mess and doing what repairs were possible. The highlight of my stay with the Guards was to be invited to mount guard. This I did, and we did it with great precision and received the congratulations of their CO. Oh yes – they did have one complaint – they didn't like the tune my bugler played for reveille.

From Burton Fleming to Driffild but only for a short time as we quickly moved on to Jaywick Sands, little more than a holiday shanty area with no civilians in sight. A desolate area indeed and the reason for being here became very obvious when our English money was taken from us and we were issued with paper invasion money – 'D' Day was upon us.

Here I must try to quickly tell you a story which later involved me in something of a grilling.

Whilst at Jaywick it was my duty one day to parade the Company and give them a bit of drill then take them for a march and in general do anything to relax them. During this period far from being relaxed I had been asked if I thought we would go all the way in a Landing Craft. I suspected the reason for the question was a fear of being seasick. I said there was no need to worry on that account, we would be going part of the way on a ship like the Ben-my-chree. I said this because it was a boat well known to Isle of Man passengers and likely to be known to many in the Company. It was also the only name of a boat which came to mind at the time.

We left Jaywick Sands overnight and travelled to a transit camp at Haywards Heath. Early the following morning we departed from Newhaven where we board ship and landed in France on D+5. But I go too quickly. The ship we boarded was none other than the Ben-my-chree and word was not slow to travel that this was the ship on which I had said that we would travel, although what I had said was "A ship like the Ben-my-Chree." It wasn't long before I was ordered to the Captain's cabin, there to be questioned by Security Officers. They were some time before they were convinced that there was nothing sinister about the event. For my trouble I was made Ships Orderly Officer which job kept me busy until it was time to board the landing craft at the davits. During the night we had stopped in mid-channel and taken an American General aboard from a tender. It was believed he was the commander of the American invasion, General Omar Bradley. Apart from our Company the only other people on board were some twenty French nurses.

Our landing went slightly awry and near disaster. The CO was supposed to be away in the first landing craft but there was some temporary hic-cup with his davit so my craft hit the water first but as we pulled the CO's craft came down and it seemed a miracle it didn't hit us. Because of that hic-cup me and my men jumped ashore first and I was directed by the Beachmaster to a field up a track from the beach. We were soon joined by the CO and the rest of the Company – but no, we were not, a quick roll call revealed we were an officer and a whole section short. Now we had landed on what was code-named "Gold" beach and the missing people had been landed on "Juno" beach, we of course were unaware of this until they joined us many days later.

We moved on up the track until we reached an area of such devastation reminiscent of films of World War 1. Huge shell craters, trees blown to pieces, hedgerows scarred by fire. A very bleak sight and all around was the sound of gun-fire and shells screaming overhead. We took what shelter we could in shell holes and hedge bottoms until we again moved forward until we came to some woodland, which, for some reason, had been untouched and our first night in France was

spent in the shelter of this wood. We were all in possession of rations which were to keep us going for the next three days. It was not food like you eat every day but highly concentrated cubes which we dissolved in water in our Billy Cans heated over a small spirit stove which was part of each soldier's kit. The spirit was in solid blocks not unlike a night light. Even tea and milk were together in one cube.

We moved about in this area for some days keeping shell damaged roads open so that ambulances in particular were not impeded in their movements to and from the front. Much of this work took place during the night hours when we were more difficult to be seen. It was hard graft as it was almost a case of having to be an instant repair, I used to work the men in relays of about six at a time, working flat out for about fifteen minutes then to be replaced by another six and so on. Smoking was strictly out whilst working because of the possibility of lights being seen. This was a problem for some as we were out for long hours. We got round it though and everyone had his smoke.

We were also involved for a short time moving stores from ships and the newly placed Mulberry Harbour. Cargoes were brought ashore in DUKWs which were amphibious craft moving on land and water.

As the front moved so did we and we became more involved with the supply of petrol and derv to the front. This became an increasing requirement after we had passed Bayeux for a battle then ensued at a point known as Jerusalem Crossroads which culminated in the taking of Tilly. A hard fought battle indeed but worse was to come. The next target was Carpiquet Aerodrome which was to be taken by the Canadians, they almost didn't do so. There was a terrific tank battle here before it was eventually taken. What we next saw was overhead. We couldn't count what we saw but we cheered at what turned out to be a 1,000 bomber raid on Caen which was to be the next place to fall and after that bombing raid it was a complete shambles.

During the early stages of these events a pip-line had been laid across the Channel and it came ashore near Cherbourg, continued down the Peninsular South and later East supplying the Americans and there was a lead off south of Cherbourg going East to Port en Bessin then South again round Bayeux and on towards Jerusalem Crossroads and it was to eventually follow the front across France. At one time German paratroops were reported to have been dropped in the vicinity of this pip-line, code-named PLUTO, in the area between Jerusalem Crossroads and Bayeux and I was despatched with a body of good men to deal with the situation. At one stage we came under fire, took evasive action, pin-pointed the source, got behind it convinced we were going to have a field day with some German paratroops and what did we find? Only some American soldiers duck shooting, what I said to them is not fit for young ears!

After Caen we moved back to a place called Riviera where we set up a POW camp temporarily looking after SS prisoners until they were shipped off to Canada out of the way as they were a troublesome lot. It was whilst we were guarding these Prisoners that the Germans almost broke through the American lines in the Ardennes and there is no doubt the prisoners were aware of what was happening. They were

very restless.

The next move was a long and tiring one. We boarded a train load of railway wagons at Reviere and travelled across France and Belgium finally coming to rest at s'Hertogenbosch in Holland. The journey took days. The train made many and prolonged stops which was as well it did because the only time we could warm anything to eat or drink was when we could get out on to the line-side fill an old tin with ballast from the line pour petrol over it set it alight and that was our cooking stove. The journey was a Cook's tour in itself – however, we survived.

From s'Hertogenbosch we proceeded to a village as I recollect if, called OOSTERBEEK, with this place as a base we moved about the area repairing roads which would be needed should there be another debacle at Arnhem which at this time had not yet been taken. It was most unlikely that there would be any problem but Montgomery always careful, didn't take chances so roads had to be made ready and pontoons put across rivers just in case. Nijmegen had already fallen, so much work was one on what was in effect an island, Elste. It was surrounded by two rivers and was a likely escape route. Whilst I was doing this work I left one day with a convoy of 12 lorry loads of ballast to repair a road near Arnhem and although the map references had been checked before I left I ended up in "no mans land" and lost eight lorries in the process. The map reference was OK for where I went but that was not where I was supposed to go.

Arnhem was taken and we moved into one of the suburbs which had been badly

smashed about. There was hardly a house intact and those that were had been booby trapped. However, we managed to make some watertight and we were there when VE Day arrived. On that day I was despatched with my section to nominally take Haarlem a town to the north which was still occupied by Germans. The people of Haarlem were near starvation point. Many had been existing on flower bulbs. There had been an arrangement whereby the Germans agreed to the RAF dropping food there which they did but it had been the Germans who got it. The people of Haarlem were very excited to see us and whilst I was there I must have signed more autographs than Stanley Matthews in his hey day. Such was the fear of the Powers that be of what the population of Haarlem might do to the Germans if given the chance that I was under orders not to disarm them. Eventually they were picked up and marched off to a POW camp and I was set off to Dordrecht which is to the South of Rotterdam. There I took over a large mansion in acres of ground in the suburbs. On the outskirts of Dordrecht was a large heath as I remember it and this was being used as a concentration point for POWs and it was from this place that I collected some 200 prisoners, mostly German Engineers, and escorted them to the mansion.

I was responsible for their security at night and very much so during the day. The purpose of this exercise was to dismantle mines which had been laid by the Germans on the Walcheren Islands. They were going to do it and they didn't like the idea at all. When a minefield is laid it is done so to a

plan and so were these, but the Germans had to be different. They also laid shoe mines round the edges, not to any plan, but indiscriminately so now no one knew just where they were. There were many accidents whilst this job was being done and I was glad when it was finished as were the local residents because the Germans in their eagerness to get the job done used to connect several mines together and blow them and this didn't do nearby windows any good at all.

From here I re-joined the Company which had now moved to Bussum a town near Hilversso but not for long. I was sent off to Amsterdam to help sort some German Ordnance Stores and whilst there I was house in the Orange Nassau Barracks which, of course, had been occupied by the Germans. I was later teamed up with a Canadian Army Sergeant, Andy Webster by name, and we moved into more sumptuous quarters in the Kosmopoliski hotel in the Dam Square opposite the palace.

The day came when I was to be posted back to England there to join another Company, a Beach Landing Company bound for Japan. The Company was formed at a camp near Chippenham and on the 16th August 1945 we were sent home on leave prior to being shipped out East. However, something happened which was to stop all that – THE BOMB was dropped on Japan and there was no longer any need for an assault force to go. I returned to Chippenham on 29th August 1945 and remained in that area until being demobbed at York on the 11th April 1946.

Lots more could be told but enough is enough. ■

Long Lost Trails...

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

BRIAN HALSEY (221172250)

His son is trying to find a photo of his father who was a National Serviceman in our Corps, have you got one. Please contact: Ian Halsey dirtdigler.ian7@gmail.com

JOHN GARROCH, PETE WHITE AND WAYNE PRESCOT

Will Hind is trying to locate these Pioneers who served with him in JHQ. Please contact: William Hind will.hind@hotmail.co.uk

MARK HEATH AND JOHN PRITCHARD

Good Morning Norman, hope all is well in sunny Bicester, it's

nearly 0900 over here in the UAE and already getting hot. Norman I am trying to track down two friends of mine but not had much luck. One is called Mark Heath he was married and lived on the married quarters to a lady called Michelle, they came from the Derbyshire area, the other person is John Pritchard also married and I think he came from around the Warrington area.. Carl Edwards (Facebook).

206 COMPANY (1967-1974)

Dear Norman, just to let you know I will not be able to attend the reunion this year due to unforeseen doctor

appointments. I would like to meet up with anyone who served in 206 Coy from 1967-1074. Contact Mr B Jones, c/o RPC Association.

CHAMBERS Dave (ex W01)

Daughter of Dave Chambers is trying to contact him. Contact samanthafranklin1986@gmail.com. David Elson is also trying to contact Dave Chambers. Contact davidelson59@gmail.com

WANTED

1. Has anyone got a 1 (BR) Corps plaque they could donate to a member who wishes to complete his collection of

plaques for every unit he served with. Contact RPCA

2. Group photograph of honour guard taken at Longtown following the Queen's visit to Carlisle in October 1958, Contact RPCA

251 COMPANY

I am pictured in the centre of the photo above (taken at Gressford N Wales in Jun 52 when I was 18) and wish to contact anyone who served with me in 251 Coy at Kineton. Alex (Jock) Faulds *22680896. Contact A Faulds, c/o RPC Association.



PERSONNEL WHO SERVED WITH ALF REDFORD

Hi Norman, I did my 2 years National Service from 1950 – 1952 and then 3 years on Army Reserve which involved a 2 week camp at Rauabon, North Wales in 1953/54/ 55. I am third from the right in the second row, I wonder how many are still alive? Alf Redford.

Card from France

I recently purchased this card on EBay. The card was written on 24 April 1940 whilst he was serving with the BEF in France with 8 Coy AMPC, which was part of No 2 Sub Division.

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Norman Brown

THE CARD reads: "Dear Mother, I hope you are keeping well and as happy as it is possible to be, same as myself, are you having the beautiful weather the same as we have been having this last fortnight. It is lovely out here getting a little tanned with the sun now, I think we have finished with the cold weather altogether are you ready for a Holiday or don't you ever think about them, if the opportunity comes along take it Dear will you. I hope everyone is keeping well, how is Grandma, let me know. Love, Arnold"

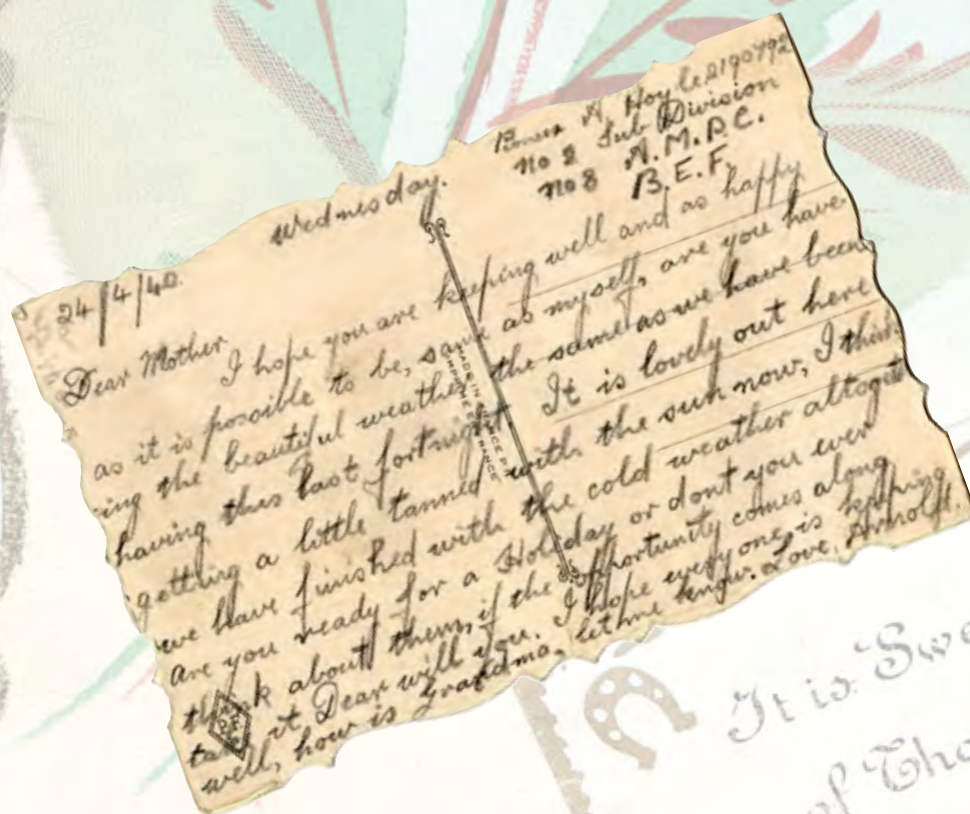
The following is an extract from the war diary of 8 Coy:

3 Nov 39 Formed LYMPPE, Kent
Men were recruited between 18 – 26 Oct 39
6 Nov 39 Arrived ST NAZAIRE Maj
G Matthews MC – serving OC
23 Nov 39 177 rifles returned to stores depot
1 Dec 39 Coy now describes itself at 8 Coy AMPC
31 Dec 39 Coy moved to SAVERNAY, UK on miscellaneous duties
21 Jan 40 Arrival of 249 Spanish labourers and 17 French Guards
8 Feb 40 48% of Coy are under

25, 25% under 30 & 27% over 30
Medical Categories:- A – 62%, B1 – 23%, B2 – 12%, B3 – 1% & C – 2%
1 Mar 40 Capt Vestry Jones – serving as 2IC
6 Mar 40 Lt L J Humbey – tos
Lt Hills – serving
14 Mar 40 2Lt E M Cantrell – tos (and appointed 2IC?)
Coy back at ST NAZAIRE as part of 4 Group
19 Mar 40 Lt Rogers – tos
21 Jun 40 Disembarked
SOUTHAMPTON not having been involved in action with the enemy, nor suffering from air raids.
8 Jul 40 Coy moved from LONDON to GALASHIELDS

Unfortunately 2190792 Pte Hoyle was killed on 1 Dec 42 whilst serving with 132 Coy in North Africa, the following is an extract from the war diary of 132 Coy:
8 Nov 42 Off ALGERIA
1215 hours – First Capt W Lewis and 67 ORs landed on beach opposite AINE TAYA 3 kms East of JEAN BART near SURCOUF, pushed on to MAISON BLANCHE and arrived at 1745 hours
1430 hours – second party under OC landed at SURCOUF, delayed owing to strong winds, unloading stores and materials from barges as they arrived.
1730 hours – received orders to march to

ROUIBA and bivouacked. Marched to MAISON BLANCHE Aerodrome arriving on morning of 9th.
9 Nov 42 Working at MAISON BLANCHE aerodrome – enemy air attacks – no casualties
11 Nov 42 British Airborne Commandos arrive.
Coy loading petrol and bombs all day
12 Nov 42 Lt H Blackburn and 77 ORs left for BLIDA Aerodrome
12 Nov 42 Capt W Lewis and Lt E Harrel with 3 sections moved to SETIF
22 Nov 42 OC and Lts D G Hamlin & C P G Harris and 4 sections – moved to SOUK AHRAS
24 Nov 42 Arrived SOUK AHRAS
25 Nov 42 Capt W Lewis and SETIF party rejoined HQ at SOUK AHRAS
26 Nov 42 2 officers & 190 ORs – repairing mountain road from SOUK AHRAS to TUNIS
Lt H Blackburn and party rejoined HQ
27 Nov 42 240 ORs working on road
1 Dec 42 Ptes Kelly & Hoyle killed and Pte Lovatt wounded by Delayed Action Bomb
The Commonwealth War Graves Commission give the following information: "Son of James and Florence Hoyle of Rochdale, Lancs.
He is buried at Bone War Cemetery, Annala, Algeria. Grave Reg IV.I.II ■



Ernest Stanley Robins (date of birth 26 Sep 40) enlisted into the Border Regiment on 12 Dec 40 and was given the service number 3605977. He transferred to the Pioneer Corps on 3 Feb 41 and joined 820 (Smoke) Company. He wrote the following book as fiction but his family are convinced it is a story based on himself and have kindly granted us permission to publish it.



A Conscript's Tale

Report: E S Robins
Picture: RPCA Archive

A CHANCE to watch his favourite sport of football was a rare occurrence for Robson Brown. Saturdays were the busiest days of the week in the draper's shop where he worked.

Only by proxy could he relive the exploits of his local team through the eyes of the hacks who reported it in the Sporting Pink. Many times he regretted drifting into a job that involved weekend work, but there was little choice when he left school at fourteen years of age, the family coffers had to be supplemented.

Keen though he was of others' achievements, it must have been a quirk of fate that ensured he would never make it as a footballer himself. Of course he tried. Hopefully he'd wait when scratch sides were being picked at playtime. He was always the last man standing, nobody wanted him on their side. 'Rob the Knob' became his nickname.

Despite this, there were occasions when

he was allowed to play a role. When jumpers weren't available he was quite happy to volunteer as one of the goalposts. This kept him in touch with the game he loved and eventually 'The Knob' was dropped. His pals appreciated the fact that when shots were fired at goal he discretely moved to one side. When the opposition were on the attack he moved to the other.

Today was his Wednesday afternoon off. It was fortunate that a football match on the recreation ground had been arranged for that very day. This was no ordinary game, it was the final of the annual Inter-Estate Cup, much prized by rival neighbourhoods around town. Rob's own estate was one of the teams and he knew some of the men playing. Reflected glory was almost as good as being a part of it himself. Whilst the sublime skills of Tom Finney or Stanley Matthews were not to be expected, grit and determination certainly were. This was why in other years the burliest and most aggressive of lads made up the team. Recognising these attributes as useful to their cause all had now been rounded up by the government to sort out

a fellow called Hitler who was making a nuisance of himself. As a result, this year was make do and mend. Forty plus was the average age, anyone willing and with a modicum of skill was drafted in. The fixture had to be fulfilled. Armed with a packet of nuts, Rob sought out a good viewing spot. It was drizzling and his patent leathers were sinking into the soft ground. He wished he'd had time to change them for more appropriate footwear, but too late, the players were already emerging from the changing room. In the absence of proper strips a semblance of uniformity had been made, jackets disregarded and trousers rolled up to the knees. Rob gave them a clap as they limbered up on the touchline. Spotting the captain, a near neighbour that he knew, he ambled over to wish him good luck. The captain was looking worried.

"Anyone seen Josh?" he enquired.
"Yeah, he's here," was the centre half's reply. "He's behind the shed getting rid of some ale."

The captain snorted, "I told you not to get him that last pint, you know he has a weak bladder. It's bad enough playing a



man short without any more handicaps, I couldn't believe it when the lad came round this morning to say his dad had gout and couldn't play. Said it would slow him down on the wing and he wouldn't do himself justice. I reckon he's got a hangover, or their lass has got a big wash and needs him to turn the mangle." Just then Josh appeared from behind the shed, still fumbling with his buttons but a sigh of relief on his face. Spotting Rob approaching, the captain's eyes lit up.

"Good to see you, Rob. You could be the very man we're looking for, we're a man short. Do you fancy a game?"

"I'd be useless" protested Rob, "I can't play the game."

"Don't you worry about that, son, most of us can't play either, but we enjoy it and it's tradition."

Rob wasn't finished yet. Pointing down at his once shiny footwear he queried, "How can I play in these?"

"We'll fix you up," assured the captain. "There's some spare pit boots in the hut. Good hard toecaps and plenty of hobnails, they're a size ten but there are some socks as well that the women refuse to wash so those will do to fill them out."

Feeling that he was rapidly losing the battle, Rob reluctantly agreed. After all, he was at least twenty years younger than his teammates so he felt sure that he could keep up. Showing him how to roll up his trousers, the captain then vanished into the shed to fish out a couple of cardboard cornflake packets.

"Here, stuff these down your socks," he advised, "just in case you get a tap on the ankles."

Rob did as he was told, feeling more of a footballer with every passing minute. Joining the squad on the touchline in the warming-up exercises he thought to himself, this is going to be easy. Unlike the rest he had hardly begun to sweat and was still breathing freely. It was then that the referee made an appearance, a portly gent with a bushy moustache and a limp, he was full of his own importance, signified by being the only one to wear proper shorts instead of rollups. Giving a peremptory toot on his whistle was a signal that the floor was his.

"Right, lads, fags out and let's get started."

After taking a deep farewell drag, the cigarettes were nipped out and stored away for future enjoyment. Last to take the field was the inside left. Already he had gone through the ritual of tapping out the soggy dottle from an elegant walnut pipe and replenished it to his satisfaction. Now it required a safe haven for when it was needed again. Approaching a lady spectator he asked, "Will you look after this for me love? I'll need a couple of puffs at half time. Try and keep it dry."

Happy to oblige, she took it off him and tucked it safely down her ample cleavage. Satisfied that his best friend was being cared for, the inside left joined the rest of the team shivering at the line-up ready to get started, and the drizzle persisted.

As a novice, Rob had been given his instructions. Stay out on the wing and try not to get in the way. Just make yourself a bloody nuisance to the other lot, he was happy with that. He doubted whether he could even run in these heavy boots never mind kick a mud-caked ball. It was just as well as the football spent most of its time in the stratosphere, this being the easiest way of getting it from one goal to the other.

As a contest of pride, it was a pulsating game with no quarter given or asked, for the first five minutes. Thereafter for most of them the oxygen supply began to run out. Rob however felt surprisingly fresh, having had so little to do. He'd done as he'd been told and kept out of the way. Making a nuisance of himself he wasn't sure about, so he played safe and stayed motionless on the touchline, while the skills of the game passed him by. This he'd put to good use by chatting up an adolescent supporter in the hope of clicking later on. Only when her bulky boyfriend appeared did he decide those pit boots needed some action.

Moving further infield seemed a safer option given the circumstances. Consulting his wristwatch, Rob was relieved to see that there was only a minute or so to go. Even doing nothing was beginning to wear him out. And the boots were starting to hurt. Given the effort put in, the match had slowed to a crawl, the score stood at seven apiece and extra time was out of the question. It had been tried once before only for most of the players to be off work sick for a week. Either the trophy would have to be shared or a heads/tails decision would be made.

Daydreaming about a hot bath and a warm pork pie, Rob found the ball at his feet a few yards from goal. Feeble cries of 'Shoot!' could be heard in the background but before he could decide which foot to use, an enormous size eleven appeared from nowhere to absolve him of that decision. His howl of pain was quickly stifled as he landed face down in the mud, his cornflake packets shredded. The ref was quickly on the scene giving a miniature concerto on his whistle. The marking lines had now sunk under the mire, so it was a bold decision for the official to make his judgement; - penalty! Sat on their backsides in the slime, no one had the energy to protest or cheer. The real problem was who was willing to take it? The captain indicated to Rob. "You'll have to take it, laddie. The rest of us are done in."

Rob was flattered, a chance to score what could be the winning goal. He'd be a hero. Still fairly fit, kicking a ball twelve yards against a goalkeeper looking out on his feet would be a doddle. Picking up the ball he looked around for the penalty spot. It had also disappeared into the mud, so rough calculations were made to determine where it should be. Steeling himself against the nerves that were threatening to take over, he carefully placed the ball on the cigarette packet substituting as the penalty spot. This was his moment, the adrenalin was beginning to flow, people would look up to him. He would become a somebody on the estate.

With everything to his satisfaction there was a deathly hush as the referee prepared to signal for the kick to be taken. He placed the whistle between his lips the next sound to be heard was the mournful wail of the sirens starting up, accompanied by the drone of aircraft overhead. An air raid! Tiredness was forgotten in a mad race for the nearest shelter. Already anti-aircraft batteries were opening up in a futile bid to hit moving targets. It was just as well that their aim was poor, with nothing being dropped from the skies, the general consensus was that jittery defenders of the realm had been firing at one of ours.

In the shelter while waiting for the 'All Clear,' a lively debate was taking place on the merits of the game. Abandoned by the referee, nobody knew what to do next. They couldn't continue, dusk was drawing in and they all wanted to go home. The captain was trying to console Rob. "Never mind, son, we won that one, you know. You couldn't have missed."

Rob wasn't so sure. In frustration, before dashing for the shelter, he'd taken a flying kick at the mud-caked lump of leather. It moved barely five yards.

It was not a long wait before the joyful sound of the sirens signalled that all was safe. The guns had lapsed into an embarrassed silence, the crews probably hoping that their faux pas hadn't been noticed. Sorry would have sounded quite inadequate if they'd got unlucky and downed one of their own. Cold and wet Rob discarded his makeshift identity and headed back home. A warm bath and a change of clothes would feel like heaven.

In his absence, the postman had been to deliver 'The Letter.' Simple and polite it was to inform him that he now had seven days left to enjoy civilian life before embarking on a military career for the unforeseeable future. He had been expecting this ever since his medical, when the weeks had passed yet no word had come through that he'd be useless as a soldier. The die was

now cast for Robson Brown Esquire, to experience a new kind of existence.

Two weeks training in an infantry regiment quickly assimilated Rob into military procedure. Names were replaced by six figure numbers branded into the memory. Mercifully only the last three digits were deemed necessary when being mauled about by the instructors. Mapped out for Rob and his fellow conscripts was the task of protecting troop manoeuvres and installations vital to the Country's needs, by means of a scientific mobile smoke blanket. With drivers in short supply, an appeal for anyone with experience prompted Rob to put his name forward. Before the war started an older brother had treated himself to a second-hand motor to celebrate the completion of his trade apprenticeship. Getting a bit carried away he offered to teach Rob how to drive, being well up for it, Rob duly applied for the necessary documents.

Pre-war motor cars were a status symbol few could achieve. The fact that its owner was seen on his back underneath tinkering did not dispel the belief that 'they must be rich.' The whole family basked in its glory. Twenty-five pounds was a lot of money, but all agreed it was worth at least half that. On most of its travels it was with the help of people, the engine was lazy, only working part-time, as it was suffering from old age. Inside it seated four although it would have been more comfortable if the springs hadn't been squashed flat!

On the plus side the roof had only a small leak and just one of the four tyres was slightly bald. Outings into the countryside were adventures, a reluctant engine was energetic enough to get there but inevitably too tired for the return. A few goes with the starting handle would quickly be abandoned as bruised knuckles became too painful and people power had to come to the rescue. Lots were drawn as to who got to steer while the rest pushed, sometimes for several miles. With frequent stints at the wheel, Rob soon picked up the basics.

Armed with this experience and the owner of a Provisional Driving Licence, Rob was readily accepted as a potential truck driver. But first he had to be put through his paces, the army did not want to be 'taken for a ride' by someone telling porkies. They had to prove it and Rob's tester was an officer called Basil, a rare breed with a valid driving licence.

In civil life he'd been chauffeur to some posh gent with plenty of petrol coupons and a little influence. All went well until his fondness for the bottle or, more accurately, its contents finally got him the sack, he then became a candidate for military service. Over the years however he had usurped the accent of his employer, which was an enormous aid to him acquiring the single pip he now sported on his shoulder.

Nervous at first it was a relief when the first instruction came. Pointing a finger at the 20 on the speedo he was told, 'don't go over that.' Assured now of their well being, the remainder of the test was a sedate saunter around the town. Simple manoeuvres were conducted and simpler questions asked. Half an hour later a halt was called and he was told that he'd passed. All that remained were forms to be filled in to make it legal, while an impressive piece of paper was handed to him to inform all and sundry that he was a fully fledged driver competent to handle motor vehicles throughout the British Isles

and Commonwealth. With no extra pay all it had achieved was that, as a skilled driver, he was expected to accompany the rawest of recruits who fancied sitting behind a steering wheel. In the event he soon discovered that this was not going to be easy. Supervising non-mechanically minded debutants in handling 14 tons of truck and trailer was not only difficult but also downright dangerous. Although stop-starts, kangaroo clutch play and the inevitable stalling were not in the instruction book, many achieved these of their own accord, despite Rob pointing out that they were bad habits. His main concern was keeping a fixed eye on the road ahead to make sure that there was nothing in the way and explaining the function of the controls, one quivering wreck had to be reassured that choke and throttle had nothing to do with homicide. Then there were the jokers, an amiable dim-wit, Kevin, the butt of platoon wags, was anxious to know 'if the battery got flat how do we pump it up again?' Finally a standard was reached that satisfied the none-too-fussy higher-ups ('we have a war to win, you know'). It was now common knowledge that they were bound for overseas, normal activities had stopped to prepare the equipment for a salty passage on the ocean. Vital parts were waxed and oiled for protection and all vehicles decorated with the white star in a circle that was the allied logo. Confirmation came when embarkation leave was announced, forty-eight hours to say their last goodbyes.

For those living in the vicinity it was time for partying and a rapturous send-off. Others faced a bleak tortuous journey on cold, blacked-out trains with little time left to spend with their loved ones. When Rob's turn came it was with a confused mixture of emotions, from enquiries he calculated that he should have at least twelve hours with his family. The rest would be taken up by the long trip there and back but this was made bearable by the pleasant thoughts that besieged his mind. He had fallen in love.

For many the Mecca for troops seeking a night out was the NAAFI in Cardiff, with a convivial atmosphere and friendly staff it provided a haven for those wanting to escape military life. Feeling in the need of cheering up Rob agreed to accompany a colleague. Considerably older than him, his pal wasted no time in eyeing up the talent and after catching the attention of a girl in her twenties he was soon in conversation with her. With her sister she helped out there part time and this gave them more time and freedom of movement. Rob's pal suggested that she get her sister to join them so as to make a foursome. This she did to reappear with a youngster of about sixteen years old, one look and Rob was smitten, she was gorgeous. The older two were also getting on well together but it was noticeable that the elder girl was keeping a protective eye on her younger sister. From then on Rob and his pal were constant visitors to Cardiff, quickly his friendship with the girl grew. He was falling in love and already making plans for what they would do together after the war. He was encouraged by her affectionate nature, demonstrated by the extra sugar lump when she served him his tea.

Gradually their relationship developed to the status of girlfriend and boyfriend. Rob had never had a proper girlfriend to call his own, there had been a few friends who were girls but never one who was special.

All their time was spent in and around the canteen until the boys had to catch the last bus back to camp while the girls made their own way home. Only once did Rob miss that last bus when he lingered too long, but the five-mile walk back was worth it for the extra time he had with his love. Then came the news that they were leaving.

Both were distraught at having to part and pledged to be loyal to one another. On the night before his embarkation she would introduce him to her parents and they would all discuss what would happen when the war was over.

Leave over, he prepared himself for their final night together. Needing to create a good impression on her parents he dressed meticulously after a good shower. Catching an earlier bus alone he arrived in good time, settling for a small table in what looked like a romantic alcove. She was not there yet, time passed and he started to get restless. This was their last night together and it shouldn't be wasted, she should have been here by now. Now worried he asked one of her colleagues if she'd seen her.

"Sorry, love, she hasn't been in today."

Frantically he sought out the manageress. Did she know what had happened? The news was not good, it had been discovered that the elder sister's friend, Rob's pal, was a married man. Appaled at this, both girls decided there and then that the soldiers could not be trusted, Rob included, and wanted nothing more to do with them. A small consolation was that while the elder sister was furious Rob's girl had shed a tear or two. Protesting his innocence in all of this, to no avail, Rob demanded to know where they lived. The manageress wouldn't tell him, it was confidential. Giving up he vowed to have nothing more to do with women. They were capricious, fickle, and faithless and a lot of other words he couldn't think of at the moment. From now on they would play no further part in his life while he was doing his part in winning the war. Such thoughts dominated his being as he boarded the train the following morning for the long journey to some Scottish dockside.

Rob had never been on a liner before. Up until then his only seafaring experience had been a pedal boat on the lake of his local park and a ferry trip across the Mersey to visit a soap factory at Port Sunlight. It was also a matter of pride that on the trip there and back not once had he been seasick. His only other nautical connections had been rare excursions to the seaside and trips to the local chip shop to get family suppers, with scraps. The smell of the fish reminded him of the sea.

From his carriage window Rob quickly realised that this might not stand him in good stead. The vessel moored alongside the quay was enormous, it towered over everything in sight. Around it the screams of scavenging gulls filled the air as they searched for tit-bits. A small hole in the ship's side was devouring a steady stream of heavily burdened troops like a string of spaghetti being slowly sucked into the mouth.

Shepherded by an efficient-looking ship's crew, Rob's unit did not have long to wait before being ushered into the bowels of the liner, to join the seething mass that was already there. The first thing to hit them was the heat, it was stifling from the thousand or so bodies packed in, making it difficult to breathe. The area they had been allotted was totally inadequate, with most having just enough space on the floor to

get a decent night's rest. The few bunks were quickly snatched up, but a number of hammocks were available for those bold enough to try them out. Tricky to master, there was always the comforting thought that anyone falling out could be assured of a comfortable landing on the crowded floor below. Finding a few familiar faces Rob joined them and marked out his territory.

Inevitably rumours were rife as to where they were bound. A cocktail of Bombay, Tobruk and Gibraltar was thrown in the mix. Nor could any clues be gathered from the ship's crew, who had obviously been sworn to secrecy. Despite the discomfort and cramped conditions, Rob slept soundly that first night.

Dawn was signalled with a bell loud enough to wake the dead. Already some were feeling near that state, with the pitching and rolling of the ship. The thunderous noise from the engine room below was confirmation enough that they were now underway. Steadily the queue for the sick bay grew longer. Now that they were on the move surely they wouldn't keep us down here any longer was the reasoning, their hopes were fulfilled. The hatches were unbattened and a welcome stream of light and fresh air was greeted with a rousing cheer.

On deck the crew were still being tight-lipped. Rob wondered whether they still had to walk the plank for disobeying orders. They were alone in a wilderness of water, from brief glimpses of the sun the clever ones had already worked out that they were heading in a southerly direction. Australia and New Zealand were south, so was one of the Poles. Sightseeing however was not on the agenda, first and foremost was a roll call to ensure no one had slipped overboard. From then on it was drills and exercise to while away the hours and keep up morale. Then the weather turned bad, once again the hatches were closed as the ship battled its way through savage seas.

That night was Rob's turn to do a spell of watch duty, it was never explained what this entailed. All he was told was to go onto the heaving front deck and watch. Groundsheet around his shoulders for protection against the driving rain, he did just that, and watched. All that was visible were huge mountains of fluorescent waves as high as a house into which the vessel plunged at regular intervals. Far more satisfying than that Mersey ferry, and he wasn't even seasick! Relieved at last of his duties Rob headed down below to hopefully get some sleep from what was left of the night.

Waking from his fitful and aching few hours it was noticeable that the ship no longer pitched and groaned, they were in still waters. Around him a mess of humanity was reluctantly crawling from beneath blankets, many looking the worse for wear. Speculation as to what was to happen next was quickly dispelled as their CSM appeared before them. Spic and span in his blanched webbing and polished boots he revelled in the importance of the occasion in front of other units. "Right, you lot!" he barked, "Muster on deck in thirty minutes for inspection. We're here."

Little time was wasted in getting ready for the mad scramble to be the first outside. Cold crisp air greeted them as they emerged to a cloudless sky and a sun just risen over the horizon. Already the warmth from it could be felt, from near the waterline came a babble of noise as merchants in tiny crafts scrambled to sell off

their wares. By then everyone knew where they were docked, a major city in North Africa, the harbour of Algiers was bustling with activity on the arrival of the troopship. Taking it all in, Rob was fascinated to realise that for the first time in his life he was going to tread on foreign soil.

Disembarking was swift and efficient. Paraded on the quayside a roll call was taken to make sure that no one had stowed away in the hope of a swift return to Blighty. Heavier personal equipment was put onto a truck to give relief to what lay ahead, a long route march. It also provided transport for the sick and disabled, plus anybody who could spin a good tale. For the rest it was a gruelling twenty-mile march to a staging point at Sidi Mousa, a pleasant area within orange groves.

Once settled in, work was quickly allocated. The first and most important was to retrieve their heavy mechanical equipment. For reasons unknown these had been shipped to the port of Oran two hundred miles away and along with other experienced drivers Rob was ordered to bring them back. What turned out to be a thirty-six hour railway journey was a unique adventure for him. A freight train with only one carriage reserved for officers, the other ranks endured the comforts of a flat wagon, it provided a perfect opportunity to absorb the ambience of the country.

Progress was slow. Anyone with urgent bodily functions could nip off, do their duty behind a sand dune and catch up further down the line. It was common practice to jog alongside just for the exercise. Arriving at their destination there was relief that they would not have to hang about too long. Assembled on the dockside, undamaged and ready to go, was what they had come for. Watered, fed and refreshed little time was wasted in preparing to take their possessions back to where they belonged. With only the one major road there was little danger of wandering off the track and it was a good opportunity to hone their skills driving on the wrong side of the road. In half the time it had taken by rail they arrived back in camp, safe and sound, to prepare for the real work to begin.

Chapter 2

On the whole duty in Algiers was pretty quiet as the battle had moved on, Guarding the docks at night was more of a gesture than an accomplishment, with most time spent dozing in the back of the vehicles. At daybreak, time to go home was signalled by a gigantic alarm clock. One moment a graveyard silence of the early hours, disturbed only by the clip-clop of the wooden flip-flops of the ladies finishing their night shift that echoed amongst the deserted streets, the next an explosion of noise, a cacophony of trams leaving the depot and vehicles with hooters springing to life. This was no place to be after a hard night's work and little time was wasted as the bags were packed and tracks made back to billets for the rest of the day off. This was an advantage of night shift. Sleep could be sacrificed for time to visit the city; a chance to take in the ambience of a different culture on its own doorstep. Maybe even to converse with the locals, French being their second language, Rob was sure he could call upon his boyhood skills and 'bonjour' with the best of them. There was also an incentive for a trip out - the ultimate in a soldier's career - ribbons had been issued. After feverish activity with

needle and thread, it was decided that this should not go unnoticed. Photographs must be taken to assure those back home that now they were truly veterans.

Rob and a few pals set out to see the sights, none of them having been abroad before, they were at first impressed with the strangeness of it all, but soon tired with what was, in essence, no different from any other city. As it was, their attention was attracted to a hive of activity in the older part of the town, near the Casbah. A large crowd had gathered for what appeared to be some sort of ceremony, approaching closer, it became obvious that this indeed was a ceremony, a ritual for tomorrow's dinner. Fascinated, Rob and his pals watched as a man in the centre held a lamb by its head, a second man tied three of its legs together and a dagger was then plunged into its throat, to send blood spurting into a bowl held by one of the men. The thrashing of the free leg ensured that every last drop was shed. At the same time, a rubber tube was inserted beneath the skin and attached to what appeared to be a foot pump. Presumably, it must have been to remove the hide more easily, they would never know. Having seen enough, they turned away, Rob had developed a whiter shade of pallor, Harry was throwing up in the gutter and Taff observed that they didn't squeal like that in the valleys.

Deciding that they had had enough of Arab culture, it was agreed to seek out a photographer and call it a day, but not for the fourth member of their group. Paddy had no interest in a ribbon or a photograph, tagging along with the rest gave him the opportunity to familiarise himself with the interesting things going on in the city. From past experience, he had learned that these were usually found in the older part of any town, especially the exotic pass-time he had in mind.

A grizzled old sweat with a face that looked as if it had been squatted in, Paddy was a good-hearted soul, willing to help anyone. Of indeterminate age it was guessed he was in his late thirties, yet didn't look a day under fifty. From somewhere he had acquired an amazing repertoire of card tricks that provided light entertainment when things were quiet. Strangely enough, it never seemed to benefit him whenever he was in a card school with the lads, that was why he was always skint. It became a ritual that every week he'd borrow half-a-crown from Rob and each payday he would pay it back. After a while it was difficult to know to whom the money belonged.

As amongst any large body of men, there was always speculation about the merits of wherever they happened to be. Being Algiers, well to the forefront was that exotic, eastern promise sounding name - the Casbah. Not just the Casbah, but number twenty-two in particular. How it came to have such significance, no one could explain, but such was its importance to the troops, the authorities decided it was out of bounds - officially!

This, then, was the destination for Paddy as he parted from his friends; a chance to inspect the fabled delights of number twenty-two. Making his way into the labyrinth of alleyways and alcoves, he was soon surrounded by ragamuffin urchins extolling the virtues of their sisters. Long experience had taught him that succumbing to these overtures would eventually result in an urgent visit to the sick bay. A properly run house, he reckoned, usually had a

certain standard of hygiene. Ignoring their demands, he scattered a few worthless coins around and was directed to where he wanted to be, a modest building with a double two prominently displayed. Without ceremony he marched in, plonked his money on what served as a desk, behind which sat a plump and heavily made up madame. “Any virgins missus?” he growled. An olive, bejewelled hand indicated expressively towards the ‘goods’, “But they are all virgins, Monsieur.”

In the gloom it was difficult to confirm this as only the eyes could be seen. Undeterred, he began the ritual of selection, lifting each veil to reveal what charms were being hidden. It was soon apparent why the veils were necessary. Unabashed, he worked his way along the line until the choice was made. Again he had his own technique for this protocol, instead of the least ill favoured, he always went for the most ugly. His theory was that she would be the least used, would not be worn out and therefore, give the most pleasure. His selection amply fulfilled those qualifications.

Parting a bead curtain, Paddy’s makeshift amour beckoned him seductively into a dingy back room. Looking around approvingly, he noted that not only were the essentials there, the bed and the oil lamps, but a tap and a basin had been installed as refinements. Little light was shed by the small lamp on the table, either as deference to the wild life that no doubt infested the mattress or, possibly, as a gesture of romance to the surroundings. This was lost on Paddy as he prepared for the task in hand. Forward planning in situations like this was a must, the first being to check out an escape route. Sporadic raids were not unknown where some enthusiastic zealot would take great delight in catching customers with their pants down. Despite this, redcaps really are human beings. Many were on speaking terms with the madame and her ‘goods,’ enjoying freebies in return for a less strict enforcement of their duties. The method was a noisy approach to the establishment with delaying tactics at the desk, giving any customer time for a composed exit with his dignity in tact. Paddy also had his own additional aid in the event of a hasty departure - trouser buttons - or rather, the lack of them. It is the bane of personnel that the metal buttons, sewn tightly, seldom have an affinity with the buttonholes. Not for Paddy the buttons came off. Rarely did he have more than two in a functional capacity, one dangly bits of thread occupied the vacant spaces. To him, the advantages were obvious, there was less delay when the urge to spring into action was overpowering and equally so when a swift exit became necessary.

With everything now in place, Paddy wasted no more time in sampling the mysterious offerings of the maiden he had chosen. Satisfied and well sated, next payday would see his return, courtesy of the oscillating half-crown he shared with Rob. To his sorrow, that formality would have to be delayed returning to camp he found it buzzing with rumours that, once again, they would soon be on the move. All most of them knew was that it could only get worse!

Chapter 3

A three-day railway journey away, Boujie turned out to be an insignificant little town, blessed only with a port. Upper ‘braid’ had

decided this was of vital importance and must be defended at all costs, Herr Hitler evidently disagreed. The Luftwaffe paid little attention to it and the time there was comparatively quiet, what was of more concern were the quarters. The previous occupants may have been ejected for more urgent duties at the front, but this had not prevented them from removing everything with a semblance of home comfort, for their own future use. Four stone walls, a timbered roof and a dusty floor were all that remained to house this finely tuned company. And the rats! Whether it was army regulations or not, the previous tenants had abandoned their pets, leaving then to be cared for by those following on. Most had become plump and content on a diet of leftover bully beef and spam, the few that were lean and hungry through not getting their share were the ones to be wary of. Although it was a bit nerve wracking at first watching them scamper up the walls when disturbed, they soon became a familiar sight that everyone tried to ignore. Night time was the worst, with outbreaks of wittering amongst themselves, presumably in French, disturbing the peace and waking the sleepers from erotic dreams of Betty Grable. However, equilibrium was soon restored after a few days, with both parties respecting their own space, humans and rodents alike. One chap even adopted one of the little creatures after it deposited a handful of wriggly look-alikes in his battle bonnet one evening. He called it Wendy as a tribute to his mother-in-law.

Work, as such, was tiresome and humdrum, endless parades and fatigues during the day, long boring nights on the streets waiting for the raids that never came. Only occasionally were there incidents to lift the gloom, the eerie lightning yet thunder-less storm that raged one night, or the time when victory was assured in the western desert. Generous to a fault, the authorities awarded to the victors the freedom of the towns they happened to be in. A blind eye was turned to any misdemeanour for forty-eight hours. Not being a part of it, Rob and his mates could only watch glumly, envious of the revelry as they sat in their vehicles doing their watch. Bars and wine dens were open until the last man standing. Every shape of badge was holding court on the merits of their own unit. How many tanks they’d crippled; how many guns had been spiked and inevitably, these boasts got a little out of hand, but were usually settled amicably out of court, with bare knuckles. This provided some light relief for those on duty and not involved.

There was one aspect of the nightshift Rob did enjoy, the sun coming up as it spelt the end of work and instead of heading straight back to billets, it became ritual to first make for the shore to have a dip in the sea. Rob had never learned to swim, he had a horror of his head submerging, choking, and being unable to breathe. Despite this, he was envious of those who could, watching them effortlessly ploughing their way through the water. Only one rule was imposed, everyone must take part and without a stitch of clothing. Trailing behind, Rob waded in up to his waist. It was a very gradually sloping beach and, to his surprise, he found himself fifty yards from dry land and still not out of his depth. He got angry with himself, a perfect setting and he couldn’t enjoy it. Bending down he placed a hand on the seabed, that was a start. Placing both hands on the seabed his head

was still above the water. What next? Lift the feet and support the body on both hands. He could actually feel his legs floating. Now the difficult part; he reasoned that should he remove his hands and start to drown, he could quickly replace them and shove himself back up. Taking a deep breath, he lifted his hands from the bottom and promptly sank. Panicking, he thrust himself skywards and took in a gulp of air. There’s something wrong here, he thought, why aren’t those chaps out there sinking? Answer - movement of the limbs. Now recovered from his fright, Rob studied their movements and decided to try again. Hands supporting him, body floating, remove hands and this time make swimming strokes. Bingo! He didn’t sink. Excited, he tried again and again and again, self-confidence oozed from him. No longer was he afraid of going under, it was from then on that at last he could enjoy that wonderful pastime of being able to swim. Wading through the flotsam and jetsam, ie effluent discharged from ships moored in the harbour he soon learned to ignore, until he was further out at swimming depth where the water was much more palatable and, with his new-found skills and confidence.

From the beginning they’d had the beach almost to themselves, with only the odd nomad drifting by. As the days progressed, more and more locals began taking an interest in that area, with a high proportion of them female. With true decorum as they passed, heads were pointed straight ahead. As Rob stood shivering trying to dry off, it couldn’t help but be noticed the eyes swivelling 90o sideways to take it all in. Natural curiosity, he thought, bound to be comparing them with their own men folk - colour; physique; dimensions! Fortunately, the freezing cold ensured there was no physical response to the glances of approval and no cause for embarrassment.

Returning to their billets, the usual practice was to have a bite of porridge, a few hours in the sack, then the rest of the time ‘til dusk was their own, the most stressful for a period. Roused from his afternoon nap on a request to round up volunteers for the cookhouse, the CSM was always in a foul mood, one who did take prisoners. Well used to this procedure, those in peril scattered far and wide, some to the bog, aware of this, the CSM headed straight there. Many a novice had been nobbled having a quiet fag and thinking he was safe, only to find the door being kicked open. To the more experienced, the trick was to drop the slacks and sit there with a strained expression on the face. Once calm had been restored after the unlucky ones had volunteered, the rest could pursue what servicemen do pursue in their spare time until it was time to go to work again.

At this time, part of the company had been sent up the road to a place called Bone. A top-secret mission, not a word about this was allowed to be uttered, careless talk and all that. They were away only a few days, by which time it was a secret no more. Even though it was still hush-hush, on their return great relish was taken recounting how they had played a part in manoeuvres for the invasion of Sicily. Word spread and excitement prevailed. Many had heard that Italian birds were a bit tasty. The trouble was nobody could speak the language until someone remembered Alfie or, to give him his full Christian names, Alonzo Puccini. Born and bred in Bethnel Green, there was no doubt he was

of mixed race, the product of an English mother and a friend of his father. One of his mother's boyfriends, a waiter, had been called Alonzo and the name had stuck in her mind, even though that of his father had not. When the time came she added Puccini, convinced that it gave a touch of class amongst the other lads on the estate. She'd seen it on a poster somewhere and thought it sounded nice, even with her own interpretation as 'Puckinny.' Mindful of his background, most were convinced he was half Italian and must know some of the language. True, he had worked as an assistant in a family-run parlour in Stepney but all he knew was how to say pizza and macaroni in their tongue. Grazie was also used a lot, but he was never quite sure what it meant as he hadn't stayed long in that job. Meeting resistance for a pay rise he thought he was entitled to, dark hints were threatened that his father could have connections with the Mafioso. Suspicious, his employers could find no connotation between his surname, Higginbottom, and any Italian family name they'd ever heard of, Cosa Nostra or not, consequently, he was booted out. It was with these dubious skills that on call-up he got the job of assistant slop jockey in the cookhouse. His forte was boiling the spaghetti, supervised, that was served as a treat on Thursdays. So it was that he was besieged by those wanting to learn a few friendly Italian phrases for when they got there. "How about it, darling?" "Does Mama have to come?" and, a sure fire winner, "Course I'll marry you if you just say yes." Needless-to-say, Alfie was of no help at all and so was eventually left in peace to get on with his spaghetti.

As a consequence of the forces invading Sicily, Rob and his unit were soon on the move again to a point further up the coast and nearer the action. A ponderous cavalcade of wheezing vehicles crawling slowly along for two days was not the best experience Rob had ever had. Dusty, cratered tracks to negotiate, flies in abundance, searing heat in the day and freezing cold at night, the mixture of sweat and sand irritating his skin, fumes from the convoy making his head spin and, all the time, they were being watched. Shadowy figures lurking, flitting from sand dune to sand dune, taking everything in as they progressed. It was a relief when dusk fell and bedding down for the night was off the road. For dinner, a tin of stew was handed out, to be hacked open and eaten cold as the recipient so desired. The ground sheet was used as a mattress, mainly to ward off the lice-strewn sand, and an army issue hairy blanket to ward off the cold. Officers had bagged the vehicles to sleep in and few bothered to disrobe. A token watch was set, although whether they did any watching was debatable, everyone was so weary that camp soon lapsed into slumber.

Stiff, cold and aching, Rob awoke. The sun had risen, but not enough for everyone to share its warmth.irate voices raised in anger could be heard, accusations were hurled in no uncertain terms, liberally interspersed with soldier speak. "They were here last night, you were the nearest," was one. "Mine were under me pilla," was another plaintive cry. It appeared that boots, soldiers for the use of, had been spirited away under cover of darkness. Nobody had seen or heard a thing, despite a restless night, not even the guards, who struggled manfully to appear as if they had

been alert. Fortunately, Rob had kept his on, hoping they'd prevent frostbite. There was much speculation as to how it had been done and a curious envy and admiration from those amongst them who had pursued a similar vocation in civil life. Replacements were issued to the victims, to be paid for out of their wages, the lucky ones being those whose new boots matched the size of their feet. It was clear now why they had been stalked, luckily, only boots had been taken. The excitement quickly died down and after a tin of breakfast and a splash of reviving water, the journey was resumed. No further robberies had been reported, but there was a growing suspicion amongst the authorities that the missing items had probably been flogged off to the Arabs anyway.

The cookhouse had been sent on ahead, with instructions to prepare a sumptuous hot meal for the weary travellers. So it was that, arriving at their destination, they were greeted with the enticing aroma of cooked food with singed undertones, slightly more appetizing than the odour from the harbour and leaky oil storage tanks. Evidently these were why their services were needed, the rest of this small town (El something or other), seemed to have nothing much else of importance. Modern looking structures around the quayside contrasted sharply with the olde worlde dwellings of the locals, dotted on the hillside overlooking the sea. All in all, it gave the impression that in normal times it would be a very nice place to retire - because of the beach. A beautiful sandy inlet, well away from the harbour and so unpolluted, it offered warm relaxing hours if ever the opportunity arose.

Allotted to their quarters, surprisingly habitable, most wasted no time in changing dirty, sweaty travelling denims for something more suitable for dining on the first hot meal they'd had for two days. The slop jockey and his staff had done their job well, not only was it piping hot, but also an extra sausage had been added to go with the beans. A decent night's rest followed and then there was work to be done. Owing to the terrain, only a small number of mobiles could be deployed around the harbour. Other personnel were sprinkled about the hillside using portables.

Rested and fully equipped, he set off the following evening on his tour of duty, to keep watch. What he was expected to watch was unclear. On enquiry, the technical term was used - anything suspicious. What he was to do in those circumstances was even more unclear, with a small pack, bivvy and rifle, he wasn't too burdened as he made his way up the hill. The night was hot and humid, making him sweat profusely. This loss of moisture soon produced a raging thirst, too much salt on the last meal, he thought. With only a water bottle to last the whole night, he resisted the urge to take a sip. Labouring on, it was with immense relief when he spotted a local filling a vessel from a standpipe near a clutch of dwellings. The usual warnings had, of course, been delivered about the dangers of drinking native water but, desperate as he was, Rob decided to reason it out. Town water obviously could be a bit dodgy, but on a mountain side it was probably fed by a fresh unpolluted mountain stream. Convincing himself, he upturned his mouth to take in huge gulps of the precious liquid, an additional splashing around his face and he was ready to resume his journey.

Arriving at the campsite, he

contemplated the situation but, first things first; he lit a Woodbine. A small plateau of barren scrub, rocks, dried grass and beetles, it didn't look too promising, but there was a small touch of greenery that looked a bit more comfortable for him to pitch his tent. Miniature bivouacs are designed to sling over two feet deep foxholes. Having neither the need nor the inclination to dig a hole, Rob decided to pitch it on the surface. Room enough to lie prostrate, but unworkable for anyone wanting to sit up to read a bedtime story, the tent would come off its pegs.

Dusk was falling so he completed this task quickly. Next in line was to prepare for a visit from the duty officer on his initial round, usually within the first hour. The general practice was to smarten up and appear to be alert and able to handle anything that came up. This is what officers liked, what they didn't like was having to monitor fools throughout the night. As their preference was to get their head down until the last inspection at dawn.

Tidying himself up, Rob practiced a few drill steps he remembered from his initial training, mainly to keep warm. It was getting chillier by the minute but it helped to pretend he was in a red coat and woolly hat outside the gate of Buck House guarding the King. Within the hour saw the arrival of a bored looking officer and an orderly. Springing smartly to attention, Rob presented arms then was told to stand easy. "Everything alright, soldier?" "Yes, sir." "Good show, carry on," and off they went.

Giving a good ten minutes in the event of a sudden and unexpected return, Rob relaxed and crawled into his bivvy. A ground sheet and a haversack for a pillow were all that a weary soldier needed. He knew he wouldn't oversleep, the cockcrows from the village would see to that. The same cockerels that would rouse the duty officer, way down the hill, for his final inspection. Plenty of time to smarten up and assume the alert stance. Safe with this knowledge, he closed his eyes to enjoy a few hours with Betty Grable, only it didn't work out like that!

It seemed only a few minutes before he was alert for real, aware of a rumbling noise, his first instinct was an air raid, but it didn't sound like aircraft. Gunfire? No. Maybe a thunderstorm? Peering outside, the sky was clear. Then it was that he realised the sound was much nearer. Not only in the tent but in himself, below the waist, something was desperately eager to get out. His normally tranquil innards were rebelling against the intruder foisted on them on the way uphill. Ejection was the only option, and as quickly as possible. Tugging frantically at the important buttons of his uniform, Rob managed ten paces from his camp before proceeding to fertilise a good square yard of African soil. One thought remained with him for many years; he would never trust a mountain stream again. After a sleepless night, dawn finally arrived and the cocks crowed to herald the final inspection. "Any problems, soldier?" Looking less than alert, Rob managed a "No, Sir." "Good, you can pack up now and get back to base." "Thank you, Sir," said Rob with a smart salute. Nudging Rob as they were leaving, the orderly muttered, "Bet you'll be glad to get away from this dump. Pongs a bit, dunnit?"

Packing his gear, Rob made his weary way back to camp. Passing the offending standpipe he gave it a baleful glare, considered giving it a good kicking, but

"this dump pongs a bit"

decided he didn't have the energy.

Hoping to scrounge a few days off, he reported sick, he was unlucky. The MO had been called away on an urgent case down at the beach, an ATS officer was in need of lotion massaged into her suntan. Left in charge of the sick bay was an orderly, appointed because in Civvy Street he worked in an abattoir and knew how to handle carcasses. Looking very professional in the doctor's white gown, he told Rob to open his mouth for his tonsils to be inspected. Next he was told to say 'Ah,' so Rob obliged. Taking a firm grasp of the situation, the orderly asked him to repeat the 'Ah,' which came out as a high falsetto. Satisfied, the MO (medical orderly, that is) put on a thoughtful expression, learned from his boss, and decided what was needed. From a large jar he took a number nine pill, the only medication he had the authority to prescribe, and handed it to Rob. "'Ere, 'ave one of these."

Clutching his pill, the last thing he needed, Rob made his way back to the billets. He had no intention of taking it, but it could always be traded in for a couple of smokes to some constipated bod later. All he could think of now was sleep, and plenty of it. Wasting little time on ablutions and sustenance, he was soon under the hairy blanket seeking oblivion. Half a dozen hours were usually the case before emerging refreshed and back to normal, for Rob, those hours were all too brief.

There was barely time to say "Hello" to Alice Faye before he was interrupted by the slamming open of a door, a thunderous stamping of feet and a barked order to, "Stand by your beds."

Thinking it was one of his mates having a laugh, Rob rolled over, pulled the blanket over his head and impolitely asked him to procreate and depart. Desperately trying to resume his liaison with Alice before she found someone else, he was further disturbed by an irritating poking in a sensitive part of his body. Now fully aroused and irate, he leapt up to be confronted by an outstretched arm bearing the symbol of His Majesty's crown, swagger stick at the ready. Attached was the forbidding figure of the CSM looking none too pleased. "On your feet, soldier. Hut inspection." Standing to attention in his long johns, Rob protested. "But I've just come off night shift, Sir! "That's no excuse. Your pit is a disgrace to the British Army. Tidy it up. Name and number?" Rob mumbled what he could remember. "Right, report to the cookhouse, thirteen hundred hours sharp."

Bewildered and aggrieved, he reflected on the unfairness of it all. A whole night defending the British Empire, two hours sleep, and this was how he was rewarded - jankers. It just wasn't his day - or night!

Chapter 4

The dawn of another day and the place was again buzzing with rumours and counter rumours. The truth came from an ATS girl in the CO's office; something let slip during pillow talk. Word had filtered through from GHQ that this was war and certain people were now ordered to buck their ideas up, pull their fingers out and get back to civilisation in the form of big city, Algiers, where new instructions awaited. Consternation abounded for most, throughout their travels this was the place they most wanted to remain. A steady 9 - 5 job bothering no one, peaceful, with nobody bothering them and a lovely beach to relax on. But it was not to be!

Soon they were on their way again, recalled to do their bit for King and Country. Lessons had been learned from their previous trip on the road, many had stocked up with disposable items for barter and a brisk trade was conducted en route. Night time was the best and volunteers for guard duty were so numerous that lots had to be drawn. Under starlight, anything could be handed over, it would be interesting to see the reaction when Mr Arab returned to show off his bargain headgear to Mrs Arab, only to find it was some squaddy's dirty underwear. No doubt his conjugal rights would be forfeited for some time, whether his conjugals would be safe was debateable. These people were known to be very handy with a knife!

So, the journey continued for another day until the big city eventually hove into sight. Hostilities had long passed it by, now it was a gathering place for temporarily unwanted troops, be-sporting themselves prior to the hazardous times ahead. The quarters were under canvass, a holding camp high on the hills overlooking the city, it offered only the essential necessities and little comfort. Few bothered to make the long trek into town for light relief, for entertainment, neighbours would be invited round to one of the tents to play cards and quaff a few beers in the gloom of an oil lamp. Playing for local currency, it didn't seem so bad if you lost all your wages. Winning, and the feeling was great to know you were one hundred francs to the good.

One who couldn't wait for that to happen was Paddy, four and nine pence up after one session, he decided to spend it wisely on a last embrace with the beguiling Fatima at Number 22. He was also hoping that the odd nine pence would be enough to pay for extras. Later it was learned that, since Paddy's interest, Fatima had been elevated to sixth best earner in the establishment. Prior to that, only the eighty-year-old maid and the dog had been below her in the pecking order.

It came at last, the day when gear was packed and they were herded aboard ship. By now, everyone knew the destination and it was with apprehension and mixed feelings that they approached Naples. Because of the blackout, little could be seen of it in the gathering gloom, but the wail of sirens could be heard echoing from the surrounding hills. Standing by the bow rail, Rob was joined by Kevin. "Think we'll see any fighting, Rob?" "Dunno." "Reckon there's an air raid cumin?" "Maybe." "That big hill over there, looks like they've started." "That big hill, Kevin, is a mountain." "That mountain then, they're clobbering it, look at the flames." "That mountain, Kev, is a volcano and it's looking pretty angry." "Oh!" Kevin was not the brightest spark in the campfire.

Disembarking was as quick as was humanly possible, typhus was rampant in most of the city and a swift departure to more congenial surroundings was a must. No one was keen to have troops hors-de-combat before even confronting the enemy, safely ensconced, well away from the affected area, it was soon obvious that this was a transit camp. Tomorrow would see them on their way once again but in the meantime, they were to enjoy a bird's-eye view of a violent thunderstorm, coupled with an air-raid on the town below.

Mustered on a troop train at dawn, great interest was taken in the surroundings as they crossed country. It was disappointing,

discounting the blasted buildings and general squalor of war devastation, little difference could be seen from what they'd left in Africa. Even the people seemed more Arab-like than European.

Journey's end was the arrival at the bustling town of Bari on the Adriatic side of Italy, virtually untouched by the conflict. It represented a feel of normality not experienced over the last year or more. It helped that they were installed in proper, nearly new barracks.

But first, training on new equipment had to be undertaken. Dirty vehicles and machines had to be traded in for modern American stuff that would see them through the rest of the campaign, the old gear being off-loaded to the French. Best place for it, all agreed. Training was given by a laconic Yank, whose thoughts on 'how to get this chick away from Mama' were more important than the job in hand. To him it was demeaning that these Limeys couldn't pick-up in a day what had taken him months to learn. As it was, his pupils listened intently, nodded sagely at what they hoped were the proper moments, and then promptly forgot everything. Fortunately, instruction manuals were available so they blundered through.

Teaching the drivers was a little more difficult, the vehicles were much bigger, which was daunting and the instruments were all on the wrong side from that to which they were used. Luckily, most of them knew their right from their left and after many bumps and shunts, a straight line was eventually achieved. By this time the pristine appearance of the hardware was looking a bit shabby, much to the dismay of the transport officer, with valuable time being wasted on repairing the damage. Fortunately no casualties were reported and soon it became second nature to drive on the wrong side of the road with instruments to match. Locals soon learned to scatter if they spotted any approaching but, inevitably, there were accidents. More than one horse and cart landed in the ditch when some dreamer forgot which side of the road he was supposed to be on. Another reason for mishaps was that the smaller driver could not see the nearside wing and had to guess where it was. It helped when eighteen-inch lollipops were fixed to the outer edge. An occasional glance indicated that if it was upright everything was OK. If bent, something had hit it. This was a great help in keeping the fleet in good order and once there were a few miles on the clock it was appreciated what good equipment this was.

The next few months were quiet, both on the hostile and domestic fronts, relief of boredom was the priority. Such it was when Rob discovered a new interest after palling up with Harry. An energetic, East London firebrand, Harry never tired of spouting off about the troubles of the world and the people causing them. The nobs cocooned in their own little world were his main targets, although any perceived injustice got the full benefit of his fury. Fortright and compelling, his rants sometimes made sense. At others it seemed to Rob that it was just an excuse to let off steam. 'Up the workers' and all that.' It was his view that if all politicians were dressed in khaki, handed a rifle and bayonet and were stuck in the front line, wars would be a thing of the past. Rob agreed on that one, but it was the other side of his nature that he admired, his ability on the piano.

Caressing the black and whites to

produce such wonderful music transported Rob to a world he'd never known. Harry Roy and Deanna Durban were one thing, but Harry's preference for the classics was something different. It was not long before Rob was hooked on Mozart and Verdi, not that Harry was a one-trick pony. He could belt out Irving Berlin and Glenn Miller with the best of them. It was just as well because he kept everybody happy. When the local opera house was presenting a touring version of *The Merry Widow*, with his new-found interest, Rob was looking forward to this, only to find he was on duty the night of its performance. Such is life.

As with others in the area, Rob's unit had to fulfil policing duties in the city. An onerous task, mainly to quell the most boisterous. There was also an uneasy feeling that although action had moved north, insurgents could have been left behind to harass those not involved, snipers to pick off the unwary. Rob wasn't too worried about this, what did trouble him was Kevin. Being paired with Kevin to do their stint was an opportunity for him to make a decision.

A great hulk of a man, wide enough to shelter behind when advancing on the enemy, Kevin seemed an amiable soul. Rob had seen him roused only once, when a disparaging remark had been made about his girlfriend, Bella, who he adored. The culprit was lucky that he had nimble feet at the time.

Before service he was employed by the council as an environmental officer, picking up litter with a pointed stick to put in a bag. His real ambition was to gain promotion to have his own brush and dustcart, but he was not sure if he could pass the exams. "What if they ask you to sweep up the leaves, Kev, wouldn't you fall out of the tree?" one joker asked. Kevin couldn't disguise the disdain in his voice. "Don't be daft. If all the leaves fall off there'll be none left to sweep up."

His doubts about the exams were well founded. He could neither read nor write, at least to a standard suitable for communication. On their first meeting, Rob had the unkind thought that evolution had gone into reverse. Knowing him better he realised how wrong he was, for a person not blessed with the best of attributes, Kevin had a sensitive nature, he had feelings. "Did anything show on the x-ray, Kev?" when he mentioned going to the hospital with a severe headache.

As a caring person with a sensitive nature, Kevin needed someone close to share his inner thoughts, a friend who would not take the mickey when reading his letters for him, especially those from Bella. He wouldn't stand for that, she was the only one who kept his spirits high. This was why he latched on to Rob in the early days, to read his mail and write a reply. He'd noticed Rob was a bit different from most; quiet, composed, read books and didn't get into coarse arguments like the rest of them. In his own mind this spelt intelligence, someone to look up to, someone of a higher stature. When approached, Rob was happy to oblige. Written in large, childish letters, they were the stereotype of thousands worldwide. 'Dear Kevin, Hope you are well, Love Bella.' Only once a month were they sent but they kept Kevin happy, especially when Rob embellished the bare bones. This he did with the dictated replies, which also gave him a warm feeling.

But then Rob sensed a change in the

letters coming in, a more buoyant tone when describing her activities. 'How smart the Americans looked in their uniforms with all their medals.' Passing this off in good spirits, Kevin thought nothing of it, being only too pleased to hear from her at all. The next time however, Rob had to seriously consider his position, Bella had acquired a friend. Bubbling with enthusiasm, she tried to convey the person he was, 'The elegant way he chewed his gum, the smell of those cigars, Heavenly! Clint could even get nylons. Much better than that black pencil mark down the back of your leg, and he's a real laugh, especially when he takes me to the local hop. A real gent, nothing funny mind, straight there and straight back.' With tact and diplomacy Rob managed to manoeuvre around this, no need to create unnecessary trouble. It would easily blow over.

It was the last letter he'd read a week or two ago that really got him thinking. "Me and Clint get on like a house on fire, almost every night he takes me dancing. He's teaching me how the Americans do it and telling me what a wonderful country America is. He's having trouble at his barracks, they're not as comfortable as what he's used to back home. Wants me to put him up as a lodger for a couple of nights a week, but I don't know. He must be alright, I guess, because his family own a ranch in California and his uncle has an oil well in Texas. And guess what, he even told me he was on speaking terms with some of the film stars in Hollywood. But don't worry. He's just a friend and I know you'd want me to enjoy myself."

This was going to be tricky. Kevin was bright enough to know that from a half page of platitude to nearly two pages of verbosity there must be something in there of interest of which he was not being told. Sooner or later the full story would have to come out. How it was to be done was the problem, this called for the highest degree of tact and discretion, something Rob had never been trained for, he was a worried man. He liked Kev, his naivety, his enthusiasm for the simple things in life, the sparkle in his eyes when talking about his girlfriend. How could he destroy a man's life by disclosing something of what he was not aware? Yet he had to be told sooner or later, or at least warned in as subtle a manner as possible. Maybe a hint at first to prepare the ground although Rob wasn't sure if that would be effective. Innuendo would probably go over his head. The alternative, of course, was a bull by the horns approach, spell it out as it was in the letters. One glimmer of hope was that things might not have developed, the Yanks may have moved on. The whole relationship could have fizzled out, reading between the lines it seemed to have become quite a cosy rapport between the two of them. Recalling the time when he had mentioned that in Italy Bella was the word for beautiful, Rob was astonished at the amazement on his face. For days afterwards he went around muttering to himself 'Bella beautiful' until someone threw a book at him with the plea, "Give it a rest, Kev."

Tonight Kev was in good spirits, he rummaged in his pocket producing a well-fingered open envelope. "Got another letter from her," he said, waving it under Rob's nose. "Will you read it for me?" "Can't do that - we're supposed to be on duty." "Aw, go on." "Look, it's too dark, better to wait 'til we get back and read it properly." "OK."

Rob decided he could put it off no longer. Kevin had to be told, not in a brutal way but as gently as he knew how. With just the two of them, whatever the reaction, he felt he could deal with it. Approaching a small square they paused to survey the surroundings. From nearby, sounds of revelry could be heard, with music of a steady beat. The music seemed to get louder by the minute. inwardly bracing himself, Rob decided the time had come. "Kevin. About Bella." Kevin's face lit up like a full moon that had emerged from behind the clouds, this was his domain, a subject he never tired of. "Yeah."

The music from nearby sounded soothing yet lively. What was it - Verdi? Rossini? He hadn't yet acquired the skills to distinguish, whatever it was, some were enjoying themselves. They'd even got fireworks as a loud crack was heard. Kevin's head was shattered before he went down, the letter still clutched in his hand. Even the hole in his face could not distort the smile on his lips. He died a happy man. Rob retrieved the envelope from Kev's fingers. It was open; he had to read it, he had to know.

Dear Kevin,

This might come as a shock but me and Clint have decided we want to be together all the time. After the war he is going to take me to America to live on his big ranch. I hope you will be happy for me and wish me luck.

Yours, Bella.

Rob was not ashamed of the moisture in his eyes as he replaced the letter in Kev's pocket. "At least you were spared this, mate," he muttered.

Chapter 5

Times were changing, events were rapidly moving on. No more the cushy number of the past, but a hands-on approach at the sharp end was what was in store. A move to the north was on the agenda. Romantic relationships were broken up; familiar drinking dens abandoned. Illicit scams with the natives also had to be shelved, with the odd exception. A gallon of fuel was always good value for a bucketful of vino, ownership never came into the equation. After all, it was only swapping one type of alcohol for another.

Travelling through battle-scarred towns and villages they arrived at the strangest location of their travels. Situated five miles inland on a country road, nothing looked less likely for a battle HQ than the tiny village of Cuccarano. Amenities were basic, but it was to be the focal point of all activities for the next few months.

Settling in was soon established as they were now our allies, the villagers were more approachable and many soon found their feet under the table at various family houses. Rob and his driving colleague George were no exception, a delightful family were the Guardinis, Mama, Papa and two grown-up daughters. Many an hour was spent savouring what was only a substitute for civilian life. As with all the population, especially the rurals, they had very little, but Rob and his pal managed to help out, for this they were invited to eat with them one evening. It was a proud moment when Mama produced the main course, what looked suspiciously like starlings cooked in a pasta sauce.

Yet jobs still had to be done, the first was a rude awakening in the early hours to fulfil orders that had come through. It was a quirk of military understanding that urgent messages will arrive quicker in the middle

of the night than if they were delivered in civilised daylight. What they didn't take into account was that the metabolism of the body didn't function one hundred per cent as it would with a proper lie-in until the normal reveille of 0700 hours. However, this was an order and must be obeyed, the job was to reinforce a platoon sent earlier on secret manoeuvres, deep in the Apennines.

A squad was swiftly selected and Rob was to drive them there, with no time for breakfast, a grumbling Alfie was roused to do his best to provide sustenance. He did them proud, a large box of spaghetti sandwiches and a canteen of recycled tea were provided to see them on their way. Getting to the general area was easy, the surroundings of a lake called Trasimeno.

Approaching the destination, it could be seen that the lads were doing an excellent job. A heavy smoke screen hung over the area, with two yards of visibility, Rob could only crawl along and hope that nothing was coming the other way. The fog lightened a little as they came to a junction, a road straight ahead and another almost parallel to that they'd come along. Two figures emerged from the gloom. Rob yelled at them, "You from B Company?" "Nah. We're sweeping for mines." "Know where it is?" "Straight ahead, we've done that bit. 'Ere, you just come down there?" "Yes." He turned to his pal, "OK Nobby, we won't bother with that one then. These geezers have just come down there and don't look like they've been blown up." "Suits me."

Continuing cautiously, Rob delivered his cargo to the site and was then told to immediately return to base. So far only one mishap had occurred, in the fog they'd run head-on into another vehicle coming away from the camp. After a suitable amount of curses, they both continued their journeys. Bigger and heavier, Rob's truck was undamaged, the other still able to limp along with minor injuries that could easily be repaired.

Rob was looking forward to the return journey as his own boss, To stop and admire the scenery as he liked with no deadline to keep. Reaching the crossroads was the first decision he had to make, return by the same route or take the other, longer one that had been swept for mines. Undecided he tossed a coin - heads for the old road, tails for the new, it came down tails. So he had to risk getting lost or even stranded, but what the hell! Emerging from the blanket of fog there was a tremendous explosion to his left. Rob wondered would that be the same lorry he'd exchanged bumps with on the road in. Picking up the coin resting on the dashboard, he gave it a smacker usually reserved for the most favoured of girlfriends. From then on it would be treasured as his lucky mascot.

Chapter 6

It was several miles before Rob stopped shaking, pulling to the side of the road gave him time to gather his thoughts. Was anybody injured in the blast? Could he have done anything to help? Probably not. Anyway, the camp would have heard the explosion and sent somebody out. Taking out his map he studied it to plan the best way back. First priority was to find a main route, these small country lanes could be a bit tricky; he could easily get lost. With time not of the essence, he reckoned it would be best to arrive at HQ in the early evening, just late enough to avoid any duties or

fatigues. Stocked up with bully beef sandwiches and a tomato, he could always stop on the way to have a snack and get the timing right.

Like clockwork he pulled into camp shortly after the dishes had been washed and duties for the evening had been allocated. Reporting his return, he discovered he was on standby the following day on the graveyard shift, as it was better known. He also learned that George had been hauled off the ferrying trip to take part in a 'special mission.' Whatever it was, it should be more interesting than the drudgery he himself would be experiencing over the next week. As joint carers for the same equipment, they'd been paired to share alternate duties on a weekly basis.

Tidying himself up, he headed for the recreation building. Originally the village hall, it had been commandeered as a part time NAAFI and rest room for the troops. An enthusiastic personnel officer had worked hard to provide activities to cater for the majority and a small bar was installed for those with only that inclination. A piano was available for Harry to pound on when necessary and groups had been organised to tax the brain.

In one corner a card school was in progress, a couple of guys were playing darts, near the bar a bunch of lumpy jumpers stood hopefully, clutching their pints. As rejects from the officers' mess, few lecherous looks were cast their way. Why did officers always get the cream wondered Rob? Mostly they kept to themselves unless challenged to an arm wrestling contest or some such physical exercise by one of the lads. One did have her hopes raised when a shortsighted drunk approached with the greeting "Hello, darling," but it was short lived. He'd mistaken her for the CO's batman, whom he fancied, they weren't a bad bunch though and with romance strictly limited, their interests were confined to discussions on the merits of sprockets, WD 40 and getting blathered.

Rob looked around to see what was going on, the only real sign of animation was the debating society. As in all good debates, everyone was yelling at the same time to put over their own point of view, a well-known ploy so that no individual could be accused of talking rubbish. It was chaired by the 'Oracle', this title was not because of his intellect but only because his name was Brain - Ted Brain. This was good enough for the rest of them but, to be fair, he did have qualifications, he'd passed his 11 plus. Trying to keep order was impossible, the only thing hard enough as a makeshift gavel was one of yesterday's rock buns, but repeated use was sending the currants flying.

Subject of the day was 'Why did the sun never set on the British Empire?' This was proving a tough one to crack, taking an interest, Rob couldn't see what was the problem. The British Empire was in the East, while everyone knows the sun sets in the West. Pointing this out of course would have brought the debate to a halt, so he decided not to get involved, after all, he wasn't a member. Tiring of this he looked around for a familiar face, eager to relate his experience of the day. Seeing none, he drank up and headed back to his quarters. Only Taff was there, busily writing letters, from him he learned that George had gone to pay a visit to their Italian friends so Rob decided to join him.

George and Rob were not bosom

buddies in the sense of being drawn together by personality or common interest. Two drivers were allocated to each unit and with admirable competence this was done in a strict and efficient manner. Personnel were lined up smartly while the adjutant, with military aplomb, strolled slowly up the line; "You and you, No. 1, you and you, No. 2," and so on. You and you, No. 3 turned out to be Rob and George.

Previously, from being merely acquaintances, they were from then on to become friends with a common objective. Although of different personalities, they got on well together, mutual leisure time was limited because of the differing shifts, but there were times when they overlapped when it was possible to go out together. That was how they made the acquaintance of the Guardianis.

More outgoing than Rob, George made friends easily, the older of the two, he was an ebullient character but he was reluctant to talk about his home life and Rob didn't pry. The impression he got was that there was a child in the background, whether with a wife or living 'over the brush' was never clear. George liked to think of himself as a jack-the-lad especially where drink was involved. In his own estimation, six pints of beer was only a lunchtime sip with serious drinking accounting for many more. Believing this at first, Rob soon discovered the exaggeration of it all, by careful observation he noticed that while two pints remained to give that warm, comfortable feeling, the other four were prematurely ejaculated down the bog hole. Alfie and his cooking usually got the blame, this never stopped George from attempting to maintain his reputation as a hard drinker.

When they first arrived he and Rob had taken a stroll through the village to get their bearings. Few people were about, mostly other lads doing the same. With little else of interest, their attention was drawn to a young girl struggling with a cart loaded with firewood, behind followed another carrying heavy bags. Seeing their efforts, George and Rob intervened, giving an airing to the few Italian words that he'd picked up, Rob addressed the cart girl: "Come state signorina. Dove andare?" he enquired. The girl's face lit up. "Mamma mia," she cried, "voi parla Italiano." Rob felt his face going red. He'd almost exhausted his entire vocabulary in one go and didn't know what to do next. Seeing his confusion, George stepped in. "Let me have a go," he suggested. "The secret is to speak slowly and clearly." He'd adopted this in the Casbah while negotiating a price and firmly believed it worked. He turned to the bewildered girl. "Signorina, we-would-like-to-help-o-with-your-cart-o. The-wood-is-wet-o-and-must-be-heavy-o. My-name-is-George-o-and-this-is-Rob-o."

By this time the other girl had caught them up, she seemed amused. She spoke, "Boungiorno, can I help? Mia sorella, my sister, does not speak the English good. I can tell her what you say." Spurred on by this, George continued, "For an Italian you speak our language pretty good," he conceded. "We just want to give her a hand." "But she has two already. Why would she need three hands?"

Changing tack, George turned to the other girl who'd been standing wide-eyed trying to take it all in. He reverted to Italian. "My-friend-and-I-would-like-to-help-o-with-this-heavy-wood-o. Where-do-you-live-o?"

"Here," said her sister. They stood outside a stone cottage, at the back was a

small plot with a few fig and olive trees. Rob remembered figs from when he was a lad, he thought they always came in packets and were produced at Christmas to save the expense on castor oil, olive oil he'd never tasted. All he knew was that she was friend of Popeye.

Eager to continue the friendship, the lads helped to stack the wet fuel in the appropriate manner to dry out. As a gesture of goodwill, George promised to produce some stuff to help make it burn. There was always a can lying around somewhere. Mamma and Papa put in an appearance, were introduced, gave their approval and invited them to visit whenever they could.

Arriving at his destination, Rob knocked politely in the open door before entering. A party of some sort seemed to be in progress, with all the family and George present. Clutching glasses, they all looked a bit squiffy, except George, he was well away. Dutifully accepting obligatory kisses on both cheeks from all except George, a glass was thrust in his hand to salute some obscure saint he'd never heard of.

Although not on an early start no one knew what his mysterious mission entailed. It was only a small party of about half a dozen or so, but obviously a clear head would be needed. At this moment George's head was decidedly cloudy, he was well on his way to maintaining his reputation and the vino kept flowing.

Enjoying the party as he was, Rob soon discovered that events were catching up on him, tiredness was setting in. He'd had a long, exhausting road trip with little rest and now he was feeling the effects. The few drinks he'd had were starting to make him drowsy, so he decided to call it a day. Suggesting to George that they go, his pal was typically still full of beans.

"Nah, the night's young, you get off, I'll catch up later," he slurred.

Knowing it was useless to argue, Rob said his arriverderci and made the few hundred yards back to the billets for a well-earned rest. Reveille brought consternation with it, George was missing. his pit was undisturbed, Rob wasn't too alarmed, he knew the state George had been in and most likely he'd stumbled into another part of the quarters and got his head down to sleep it off.

The truth was soon forthcoming, embellished no doubt by every telling. George was in the guardhouse and gradually the basic facts emerged. After finally deciding to leave, he set off on the zigzag route to his billet and true to form, and with two bottles of vino being the equivalent of six pints of ale, most of it was ejected by the roadside on the way. Feeling slightly better, what appealed to him next was five minutes shuteye to clear his head. Finding a small grassy knoll, he closed his eyes to enter a world of oblivion. It was there that a Samaritan found and delivered him to the guardroom. They were none too pleased at their night being disturbed and as a gesture of their feelings he was given a bowl of Alfie's cold spaghetti to settle his stomach and told to shut up so that they could get some sleep.

It was not a good time to be brought before the Major the following morning, he was in an irascible mood. His secretary had said no and his toast had been burnt. Bringing the army into disrepute was the charge and George was sentenced to two days in the guardhouse and the rest of the week on graveyard shift. Now in a much

better mood, the CO retired to have another go at 'that stubborn wench.'

As the details of George's misfortune filtered through, Rob wondered what would happen next. George obviously could not go on this special mission and as his co-driver, Rob felt he should be the replacement. Anything would be better than to be stuck in camp and his hopes were fulfilled when he was summoned to the office, ordered to smarten himself up and prepare to take George's place. Top brass would be encountered and a good impression must be made.

Preparing for their departure took them about an hour during which Rob caught sight of a sorry looking George in full pack, trotting around the perimeter of the grounds. In attendance was a corporal of the guard, bellowing endearments into his ear. It had been a long time since the guard commander had had someone to play with and he was making the most of it.

With an officer leading the way, they finally set off. Six intrepid souls full of their own importance at being selected for what was obviously a very important mission. Reaching the main north/south route Rob had been hoping they would turn right, towards safer pastures. His spirits sank as the leading car turned left, a lot of mayhem was happening in the north and he wasn't keen on joining in. It crossed his mind, had George known about this and deliberately planned to get off this trip? This was a secret mission, only the officer in front knew where they were headed. Having no choice in the matter Rob concentrated on his driving, a difficult task as holes that had been blown out by missiles started to increase.

Trundling along at a steady 20 everything was calm and peaceful at first, but a few miles under their belt and ominous signs started to appear. Shattered equipment by the roadside; the glow of fire in the distance. Pausing for a break and to check the route, it was a relief to be told they were almost at journey's end. The acrid smell of burnt gunpowder hung heavy in the air and in the distance the heavy thump of big arms mingled with the chatter of the lighter stuff. Rob was getting more nervous by the minute, this was not what he had expected. Until now he had fought this war from a distance, now it was becoming too personal. OK, Kevin's demise had happened in a comparatively quiet area, the lads in the truck at Trasimeno he did not know. This was different, this was close quarter stuff with everybody trying to kill everyone else.

An open field had been chosen as their campsite and where they eventually learned the purpose of their trip. Their task was to stage a mock attack on a small hamlet under a heavy smokescreen, which Rob and his pals would provide. All they were waiting for now was for some top brass to show up to monitor what was happening, this they did some time later and Rob was relieved to see them. With so much braid about, there couldn't possibly be any danger. While hanging about, it was learned that this was to be a practice run for a much larger offensive. Ahead was a town called Faenza that was proving to be a bit tricky, the Germans had it - we wanted it!

Swiftly the manoeuvres began. This was strange territory for the squad, static docks and oil refineries were one thing, mobile troops who wouldn't stand still were another. Different techniques had to be

employed but, with practice, everything started to run smoothly. The brass seemed to be pleased because they only stayed a few hours leaving a few compliments floating in the breeze at the prowess of the operation. This wasn't for real and being away from camp there was a more relaxed atmosphere, in fact it seemed like a holiday as practice continued. George would have liked this, certainly now when he was stuck at HQ and on jankers. In all, their stay had lasted a week before it was time to pack up and leave. Although by now they had taken the sounds of war in their stride, it was noticeable that in the last couple of days those sounds had become much louder and more ferocious. something big must be going on.

Rob was happy to be leaving. he was no hero, Kevin's death had shaken him severely and he wanted no more of that. As they meandered back to base he reflected on other things, trying to keep George out of trouble would be an impossible task. It was only rarely that their shifts overlapped so that they could go out together, more often than not they visited the Guardinis separately. He could have a word with them not to be so liberal with the vino when some saint's birthday came round.

Having eaten on the road, he calculated they would arrive back while the night was still young, giving plenty of time to catch up on what had been going on. Being payday, most would be in the NAAFI so that's where he decided he would head. Harry and Taff would be up there for sure, maybe even Paddy. He hadn't had the opportunity to pay back their joint half crown so he must be feeling flush. George would have finished his fatigues by now and be a free man, it would be good to have a chinwag. Now in better spirits, they arrived back at camp, only a lone guard was there. All probably out enjoying themselves, thought Rob. A quick splash of water and a change into walking out dress and he was prepared to see what the night had to offer.

As expected, the place was crowded when he entered the recreation room, but not in the usually boisterous manner he was used to, it was more of a sombre and subdued atmosphere. Even the lumpsies had cornered a victim, a sure sign that all was not as it should be. What was that about beauty being in the eye of the beer holder? In the throng it was difficult to pick out a familiar face but spotting Harry, he made his way over. "Hi." "You got yourself back them." "Yeah, came straight back here," said Rob. "So what's been happening?" "Haven't you heard?" "Heard what?" "We got an active alert," said Harry. "Some big push was going on at the front. Everybody available had to get their skates on to give them cover for the movements. Pretty scary stuff I can tell you, stuff flying all over the place. Seems to have been a success though, as they got what they wanted and said they didn't need us any more. They said we saved a lot of lives."

"Seems like I missed out on all the excitement," commented Rob flippantly. "What about our lot? Any damage?" "Yeah." Harry's response was brief and final. After a pause he continued. "One of the trucks got hit, the bloke had no chance. All the confetti flying around ripped a hole in his chest, he was still alive when they got to him, but there was nothing we could do. Believe me, he suffered before he went." "Anybody we knew?" asked Rob. "You knew him alright. It was George."

Trudging through the village on his way to break the news to their friends, Rob gradually came to the conclusion that George's death was inevitable. Not that George himself was to die, but that one of them was to meet that fate. Maybe if there were a next time he would be the unlucky one. Although, there again, luck was an unfathomable factor. He still kept his treasured coin safe in his pocket but asked if he were superstitious, he would probably have replied that it was unlucky to be that.

Losing anyone close affects people in different ways, not having them around when you expect them to be there takes time to get used to. The real blow would come for his friends and relations back home, maybe he would be acknowledged by his Country. Rob could just visualise it, crocodile tears shed in the House of Commons to a chorus of 'Hear, Hears' from the rest of the Honourable Members to show that they cared. An obscure civil servant adds his name to the list and George will become a statistic number so and so in a voluminous ledger.

Chapter 7

In a way, Rob had his service training to thank for the ability to cope the following few weeks. Losing George was no doubt a tragedy to those closest to him, but in the bigger picture thousands more had taken the same road. That still didn't make it right, but a strict regulated regime had a soporific effect on the senses, blunting the edges of what was a disaster, this helped in not dwelling on it.

Word was now filtering through that things were going well in Europe and hopes were raised that it couldn't last much longer. Three solid years without sight of his own country was getting a bit much. Maybe one last big effort and it would be all over, get back to Blighty and start a new life.

As a rest from their previous activities, Rob's platoon was given the task of a long trip to Naples to bring back vehicles needed for the next big event. Being one of the more experienced, he was to ferry a motley crew of drivers and would-be drivers in his own truck then help to shepherd them on the way back.

With so many vehicles needed, anyone with a basic knowledge of which pedal to press to make it go and which to make it stop was good enough to get behind a wheel. This trip, having been done a number of times, the practise was an overnight stay on the outskirts of a town called Foligno in the Apennines. As a regular stopping-off place for this and other units, it had been quickly noted by the locals. This was why the first familiar face to greet them was that of Foligna Flo, a one-girl entertainer for those in need.

The second part of their journey was a bumpy ride through mountainous terrain and pockmarked roads until they'd put Rome behind them. They then entered Mussolini's pride and joy, the Apian Way, through the Pontine Marshes. Fifty miles of straight road with a decent surface gave everyone time to relax and enjoy the scenery - which was non-existent.

Good progress was made however, and arrival at the dockside of Naples acquainted them with what they would be taking back to the North East - scout cars. Testing one out, Rob's spirits sank to a new low. A tiny four-wheeled beetlebug of a creature, he couldn't imagine what purpose it would serve. With flimsy armour plating that

would barely stop a bullet, the only aggressive thing about it was a loose light machine gun rattling about inside to the annoyance of the driver. Room enough for only two people crammed together, something that would get them talked about back home, it offered no comfort whatsoever. Visibility to the outside world was minimal, Rob could only compare it with sitting in a pillar-box and peering through the slot.

Although not required to drive one himself, it would be Rob's job to follow the convoy and pick up the pieces as they fell by the wayside. He could foresee an interesting time for himself and the mechanics, as most of the drivers had still to master their own familiar trucks back at camp.

A few moments to figure out how everything worked and they were on their way. It was fortunate that after the first tricky business of negotiating the mean streets of Naples they soon hit the autostrada on their way to Rome. Taking advantage of the occasion, the officer in charge treated the men to a tour of the city. From his lofty position Rob appreciated that, admiring the Victor Emanuel, the Coliseum and even the Vatican as they rolled past. What the others could see in their little tin tanks he could only guess. Probably concentrated on trying to avoid pedestrians and other obstacles that littered the roads. Luckily, no one was hit and after finishing their guided tour they headed for the hills and Foligno, from there on was where the work really began.

Even for experienced drivers, mountain roads were a forbidding challenge. Novices and strange vehicles were not a good combination. Taking up the rear it was not long before Rob came across the first casualty, with a mind of its own it had wandered into a ditch and got stuck. Not the fault of the driver he was assured, just the fact that he could not see properly.

Well equipped for this sort of thing Rob soon had him out with the help of a tow rope and sent him on his way. A few miles on and another had stalled in the middle of a steep incline. Somehow others in the convoy had managed to squeeze past fearing a similar fate if they stopped to help. Not having the ability to start the engine, engage the gear and release the handbrake all in one go, the occupant sat there terrified hoping for something to happen. Drawing up alongside, Rob yelled, "What's the problem?" "It won't go," was the muffled reply from the slot. "Why not?" "Cos when I take the brake off it goes backwards." "Look, put it in gear, release the handbrake and let out the clutch." "You mean all that at the same time? Blimey, that's asking a lot." "Try it anyway." The voice tried it and the vehicle rolled back down the hill. "OK. Stay there and I'll fix a rope to pull you up." Rob was getting a bit exasperated by then. Tethering the rope to the two vehicles he gave the slot its instructions: "I'll take up the slack and when it's nearly taught you release the handbrake. Got it?" "I think so."

Inching forward, Rob started his manoeuvre. Whatever the reason, the handbrake was released long before the slack was taken up and the vehicles drifted apart at gathering speed. There was an almighty 'twang' as the steel rope divided itself into two while the scout car rapidly descended backwards to the bottom of the hill, trailing half of the rope in its wake. With no further means of towing left, a

new approach was needed.

"That's it. I'll have to push you up the hill," he informed the occupants. "put it into neutral and don't forget to release the bloody handbrake." Having mastered this complicated procedure, they meandered safely to the top and set off to play catch-up before they got lost.

Numerous similar incidents were overcome until their charges were delivered safe but not too sound to the depot at their destination. While they'd been away a detachment of Canadians had moved into the village. Rewarded for their efforts in the latest big show, they'd been sent there to recuperate before the next one. Rob immediately sensed that this had not gone down well with those in his own company, this was their little spot and intruders were not welcome. Over the months a bond had been formed with the locals to the extent that they'd almost become part of the community. Friendships had been formed and any strangers muscling in to disrupt the equanimity was resented in no small measure. It didn't help that these people sounded like Yanks with their brash and abrasive ways, even though they were on our side and not their own. As a result altercations were frequent when movement into forbidden territory started to get out of hand. On the whole disputes were settled with a minimum of violence, and in general an uneasy truce was maintained, that was until someone took a liberty with Jock.

An immaculately turned out figure when off duty, Jock took great pride in his appearance. Scrupulously blanched equipment bore witness to the effort he put in. Black slicked back hair owing much to a tin of boot polish was plastered down with copious amounts of Vaseline until it shone. Coupled with a natural born swagger and self-confidence he was never short of the company of females. What was in short supply were close friends, though tolerated by those in his platoon, nobody really liked him, not only because of his dour demeanour but also for what had become known about his background.

A Glaswegian raised in the sordid streets of the Gorbals was not the best of starts for anyone. With an unknown father, only his street-walking mum was there to guide on the ways of the world. As the years passed it became apparent to him that to survive, being part of a gang was much preferable and safer than going it alone. It also served as an occupation when organised crime became a way of life. This served him well in his younger days but as he got older ambition started to take over. Having built up a reputation as a hard nut over the years, he now felt the time had come to be something bigger. Various razor gangs controlled parts of the city and Jock wanted to be part of it.

He'd noted the way of life of these people; the swanky cars, the fur clad birds dripping with jewellery, parading as they dined in restaurants. This was the life he aspired to and in time he was accepted, to prove himself he was asked to perform minor surgery on someone the boss disliked. This he did without a qualm and as a reward he was installed as a minor enforcer in the hierarchy, this entitled him to possess his own personal razor.

For a while life couldn't be better as he enjoyed the lifestyle his boss, 'Terry the Tool,' had created. Refinements in their mode of intimidation were introduced. Clumsy cut-throats were discarded to be replaced by blades sewn into hat brims.

Just as effective at inflicting punishment and easier to conceal if the police came looking.

Jock had also developed a new interest, his boss' daughter. At sixteen years old, Jenny had known a life that only affluence could bring. Doted on by her father she'd been spoilt rotten from birth and played on it to the full, no one would be good enough for her was his conception and hands off was the warning. Pretty she may have been but desperate attempts to appear grown-up, with tawdry make-up and lack of style gave her the appearance of a streetwalker setting out on her first mission. This appealed to Jock even though this was strictly out of bounds he was willing to take the risk. When the hormones rise the conscience sinks.

It was enjoyable for a while with secret meetings adding to the thrill. But Jenny's hormones were also raging, making her more and more unreasonable in any arguments that invariably arose. Having been brought up where money was of no account she wanted the best in everything they did together. Jock was well paid for his activities in the gang but there was no way he could fund the lavish demands that Jenny was making. Bitter arguments ensued being made more traumatic by having to be conducted in secrecy. Any suspicion leaked to his boss and his life wouldn't be worth a used razor blade, Jenny didn't want to let go, this was her first romance and was going to last forever. In her mind she could visualise Jock succeeding her father, they would get married and live happily ever after. Inspired by this, a plan was devised to ease Jock of his financial problems and maintain the life that she craved.

As a dealer in cash her father always kept large sums of money at home, out of sight of any nosy tax inspector. Jenny was well aware of where the keys to this Aladdin's cave were kept. The plan was to borrow money from time to time, just enough so that it wouldn't be noticeable, to satisfy Jenny's needs. This worked well for a while until she could contain herself no longer, she had to share her happiness with someone. The only person she could trust was her best friend, Fiona. All their lives they'd shared the most intimate of secrets knowing that they would go no further. Even so, Jenny made her promise not to divulge to anyone what she was about to tell her. As a true friend and confidante, Fiona was as good as her word - for nearly a week. Sharing this tit-bit with a cousin shouldn't be classed as disloyal as long as she kept it to herself. As it happened, the cousin was in a volatile relationship with a spotty faced teenager who also happened to be a foot soldier in Terry the Tool's empire. In a fit of pique during an argument it was blurted out about the goings on of Jenny and Jock. Eager to get into the good books, Spotty wasted little time in passing on this information to his boss. Luckily through the grapevine, Jock got wind of this before anything drastic happened. Nowhere in Glasgow would he be safe from now on but where to go? Terry had spies all over the city, he knew everything that was going on. He would have made a good general in this war that people were talking about. Up to now Jock had not paid much notice to this bloke Hitler who had started it all. Never having been on a government register he'd avoided being called into the forces, it suited him to be part of an army of his own without the uniform. Yet seeing the

increasing number of servicemen on the streets it was noticeable how much they all looked alike. That was it then, an ideal way to blend into the background in a sea of khaki and escape the vengeance of Terry the Tool, he'd join the forces. The wrath of Hitler would be nothing compared to that of Terry's, so it was that Jock became a soldier of the realm, well equipped with the skills of gangland brutality.

Just one job remained before embarking on his new career, to have a word with the scrote who grassed him up. Rearranging those acne spots gave him great satisfaction.

Outwardly cool, calm and collected, inwardly Jock was seething as he completed his task with needle and thread. Those in the barracks had noted the split lip and discoloured eye but no one yet ventured to draw attention to this. Nobody could forecast what would be the reaction, better to let him explain it in his own good time was the general consensus of opinion. He had struck up an acquaintance with a house on the outskirts of the village. The lady may have been of dubious character, but she satisfied him, nightly visits for a chat, drop of vino and the rest whiled away many a pleasant hour. Then came last night. Spruced up in his usual immaculate way, he'd set off for the nightly liaison with his lady, with a bar of chocolate and a cake of soap as a special treat. Expecting a warm and friendly welcome he was greeted at the door by the beefy figure of a Canadian soldier. "Wadya want, Buddy?" "Who're ye? A've come tae see ma lassie."

"Beat it, Mac. She don't wanna know." Trying to push past the bulky obstacle, Jock didn't see the blow coming. All he could remember was a lot of bright lights, his arm halfway up his back and being frogmarched down the path. Somehow he made it back to his quarters. Many hours were used nursing his pride and planning what to do next.

Finishing the job in hand, Jock tried on his forage cap. That was OK, nothing showed. Satisfied, he prepared for the night out. Approaching the front door, cap in hand, he was confronted once again by 'Beefy' the Canadian. He must have taken up permanent residence, was a passing thought. "What is it now, Mac?" "I want tae speak tae ma friend." "Beat it, Mac. I told you before. You're yesterday's news."

Enough was enough. Setting to work with good skill and judgement, Jock used his cap to great effect, not too hard to maim, but forceful enough to disfigure. He'd learned in a good school, it was not long before Beefy was a screaming wreck, blood seeping through fingers clutched to his face. Jock was enjoying this, it was good to know he hadn't lost his skill.

For a moment he considered embellishing the proceedings on his ex friend, then decided it was not worthwhile. Only plastic surgery would have improved her looks, anyway, she was only following her vocation.

Diligent police work plus the evidence of an aggrieved eye witness soon pointed the finger towards Jock. Summary justice was administered and he was sent away for a few months to learn the error of his ways.

No one knew where and with only two day's notice, hasty farewells had to be arranged. Leaving was like a community being ripped apart. Troops lied through their teeth with promises to return and for the few who had managed a really close relationship it was a sad occasion.

Chapter 8

"Women!" The exasperation in Danny's voice as he scrutinised his latest letter was unmistakable. A collective pricking up of ears could almost be heard from the group around the table, any tit-bit of information was preferable to the boredom they were experiencing at the moment. Switching HQ from comfortable Cuccurano to this dump hadn't gone down too well, especially as there seemed nothing worthwhile to do. For days they'd been kicking their heels while the higher-ups decided how best they could be used, any distraction was more than welcome.

As a fairly bright young Londoner, Danny was a good example of the average conscript. With his girl friend, Zoë, they endured the blackout and blitz like thousands of others, living from day to day not knowing which one could be their last. Then the papers came and he had to depart, being billeted only a short distance away, frequent weekend leaves were available and it was during one of these that Zoë announced she had a bun in the oven.

Having only been going out together for a few weeks, neither knew much about each other or their relatives. All Danny was aware of was that she came from a largish family scattered across the city, none of whom he knew at that time. News of a child on the way was, of course, devastating, so with the help of an irate father and two hefty brothers, he decided to do the decent thing, a service was arranged and the knot was tied.

They were lucky to find a small two-bedroom house for Zoë to rent, when suddenly she had another announcement to make, it was all a mistake, it was one of those phantom things. She wasn't pregnant. Overwhelmed with the swiftness of events, Danny realised he couldn't backtrack and accepted his uneasy position.

The last visit to his wife was before embarkation, a heavy air raid had taken place the morning of his departure and chaos was on every street. He was in a hurry, it had taken him longer than usual to say his bedroom goodbyes and he mustn't be late. It wouldn't look good if the troopship had to wait for his arrival. Packed up and ready to go, there was a knock on the door, irritated, he opened up to be confronted by a dishevelled figure, bag in hand and obviously distressed. It was apparent that she'd been traumatised and Danny could make out little that she was saying. The odd words he did grasp were 'bombed out,' 'nowhere to go' and 'cousin.' Taking pity, he ushered her inside. Many were in the same position, he could sympathise, making her comfortable, he yelled up the stairs to Zoë. "There's a relative here who's in trouble, been bombed out. Can you take care of her, love? I've got to be off." "Who do you say she is, Dan?" "A cousin, I've got to go now. Bye."

And so Zoë was saddled with an unexpected companion, not that she minded. She was a good-natured girl and always willing to help other people, the sort who would thoughtfully put the toilet seat back up after use. People had to find shelter wherever they could with the blitz going on and it was pleasing to be doing her own little bit. Everything her guest had was in one bag, she'd lost all her possessions, but still she was family and you've got to look after your own.

It worked for a while with Zoë giving her plenty of time to get over the experience.

She knew it wouldn't be easy because plenty of her friends had been in the same boat. Long nightshifts at the factory and necessary sleep during the day meant there was little social contact between the two of them. More often her guest was in bed when Zoë got home and was not to be seen when it was time for work. Zoë had managed to find out her name was Sarah, but for most of the time they lived separate lives.

As the months rolled by Zoë, good-natured as she was, wondered if her guest would ever find work. Having to fund two of them was becoming a financial strain, all she could see was an indolent person content to sponge off her good nature without contributing anything herself. Tentatively broaching the subject she was met by meaningless ramblings that made no sense, until she finally gave up. She knew family relationships could be tricky, criticise one and you wouldn't know how the others would react. This was why she had tolerated the situation so long, but with her job plus a confused and inarticulate person to care for, she needed support and advice from her husband, what to do about this family member she was struggling to cope with.

Danny paused for breath after reading the gist of his letter. “You've got some girl there, Dan,” remarked Harry. “Not many would have put up with a person like that for so long.” Danny waved the letter in the air. “The missus says she can't cope any more. Wants to know what to do. Says that as it's family it's up to me to sort out my own cousin. MY cousin” he bellowed. “I don't have a bleeding cousin, I thought this person was hers!”

There was a sense of unease in the camp, a feeling that something big was imminent. Then the movements began, a platoon here a detachment there. It was at the dead of night that Rob's unit got their orders to move, destination to join the 10th Indian Division in the hills surrounding the major city of Bologna. It was a sombre journey, free of the banter normally associated with such movements, silence was imperative, with only a faint glimmer from masked headlights to pinpoint the way, sufficient on the main roads perhaps, but hazardous to the extreme on mountain passes.

Rob was glad he wasn't driving, even though it would have been more comfortable in the front. The night being hot and humid everyone was sweating profusely, whether through fear, excitement or foreboding only they knew. From what he could see of the terrain, Taff was reminded of the hills and valleys of his native country, it made him feel a little homesick.

Dawn was breaking when a halt was called and weary troops had the opportunity to stretch stiffened limbs. The first thing that struck Rob was the quietness of the situation, unlike what they were used to, barked orders at full volume, instructions were relayed in a calm and efficient way. In the half-light he was now able to make out his surroundings, they were in a range of hills, dry and dusty, that undulated around them. No buildings of any sort could be seen except for a metal cage at the highest point, it had one occupant. Rob wondered if it was a POW enclosure but decided later, on a closer look, that it was not. He couldn't imagine Hitler employing such a dark-skinned trooper in his forces. Probably it was some poor soul who'd cracked under the strain

and was kept there for his own good. Then, as if from nowhere, apparitions appeared, tall bearded figures in ground-hugging robes and hair down to their waists, gliding silently past clutching small cups of water on the way to ablutions. This was a scene reminiscent of Arabian Nights, thought Rob, what a contrast to the smart turban bedecked warriors usually associated with these regiments.

After stomach warming sustenance of porridge and beans, latrine duties were allocated and the remainder lined up to hear what was in store. The CSM approached, “Right you lot, in a smart orderly manner you will report to the QM stores. There you will be issued, between two personnel, one spade and one bivouac. You will then proceed, at no less than twenty paces apart, to dig one rectangular hole, dimensions six feet by four feet, suitable for two bodies to lie side by side. Any personnel of a corpulent nature will be considered for extending these dimensions by putting in a request to the commanding officer. The 'ole will be the regulation depth of two feet. The bivi will then be erected over the 'ole and secured by the attached strings in parallel lines. Any questions?”

Nobody could think of any so they set to with a will. Rob was paired up with Albert, a lad he knew reasonably well, and Taff with Joe. This was a problem, it was only recently when they'd almost come to blows over derogatory remarks about sheep with Joe mimicking Taff's accent. They didn't like each other, in his present frame of mind, Taff would rather be cosying up with some German gruppenfuhrer in the tiny foxhole than the odious Joe. Rob and Taff were pals while the other two belonged to a different section. The obvious answer was to do a switch round and if everyone agreed then all would be happy. It was only human nature that negotiations then took place to agree 'compensation' and several smokes later Rob and Taff resumed partnership. Taking turns with the spade they soon completed the task to the required standard, even adding an extra inch to the depth as an extra precaution. Finally the canvas was erected to specifications and there it was, they'd built a home for the night, or several nights as it turned out.

In a way Rob wouldn't have minded sharing with Albert, a bundle of energy, he was easy to get on with. Before being captured to do his army service he'd worked on a building site which had given him ideas of what a dwelling needed to make it more comfortable. Determined to have a proper shelter, he and a reluctant Joe, scoured the area for anything that was suitable. Bits of timber and a corrugated sheet for the roof were a good start. The others may have been content with their one up and one down, but he wanted something better, more on the lines of a bungalow in its own grounds. Being about twenty yards downhill from Rob it felt a bit more sheltered so only a token scratching of the ground was made to cover regulations. Showing it off to his colleagues, a plethora of compliments was thrown his way from 'not bad' up to 'silly bugger,' but it made him happy.

“Bet you wished you'd stayed with me mate,” he said nudging Rob. “Better than that old trench you'll be lying in.”

Rob ignored him, he couldn't see the point of so much effort when they'd probably be moving on shortly. Leaving them to it he made his way back to his own humble abode, Taff was already

preparing for the night underground. Undressing was at a minimum, only superfluous items were discarded to ensure a good night's rest; tin hat, bayonet and scabbard and any protruding webbing liable to dig into soft flesh.

It was the middle of the night when Rob woke up. Muffled explosions in the outside world were the cause, occasional glowing flashes through the canvas of their tent could be seen. “Wake up, Taff. I think they're having a go at us.” Lifting the flaps he peered cautiously over the parapet. Everything seemed quiet and still, fifty yards away without warning, another explosion took place, then another and another.

“Keep your head down, Taff. They mean business.” “What do you reckon, Rob. We being shelled?” “Nah, more like mortars, they lob 'em up in the air and then they just drop on you, you can't hear them coming, like silent assassins.”

Rob sounded a lot more confident than he felt, indeed a visit to the latrines was the most urgent need of all at the moment. For an hour the bombardment continued, then everything fell quiet. Cautiously the camp came alive, dawn was breaking. Sporadic calls of 'everybody alright' could be heard. Peering out Rob saw the CO approaching, checking out the damage. “You alright soldier?” “Yes, sir.” From nearby a shout was heard. “Down here, sir.”

Clambering out of his trench Rob followed the officer to where a crowd had gathered. At first glance the figures seemed to be sleeping peacefully, but the shattered structure where the bomb had landed was proof enough that this was not the case. Jagged shards of shrapnel had torn ragged holes in the blankets that mercifully had soaked up much of the blood. It was difficult to tell whether Joe and Albert had died instantly or in agony, no one liked to dwell on it.

A quick look around established that no further damage had occurred. The main target for the barrage had been the Indian emplacement, which suffered major disruption. It could only be concluded that it was a rogue bomb that had hit the two lads, one that had strayed off course. Not a lot of consolation to the families left behind though. Medics were soon on the scene to attend to the grizzly bits and give some sort of dignity to the bodies.

Rob, his was to transport Joe and Albert to a military cemetery some way back. He didn't relish the prospect but it had to be done, new blankets were obviously needed to wrap them in and he was dispatched to the QM stores to get them. “I'd like a couple of blankets, Sarge.” “Got a chitty?” “No.” “You got to have a chitty signed by an officer.” “Come on, they're for a couple of chaps who copped it last night.”

“Can't help that. I gotta keep stock of everything here, you lot don't know what it's like. You gotta have a chitty.”

“Look, my CO sent me here for a couple of blankets to make the fellows look decent for burial, you're saying you won't give them without a chitty, do I have to go back and tell him that? I don't think he'll be too pleased.” “Just this once I'll let you have them, but don't forget I want them back.”

Rob assured him they would be returned, honesty was wasted on such a moron. Now decently attired, the two men were loaded on to Rob's truck for their final journey. On the trip he was making, Rob had ample time to reflect on the past twenty-four hours. How fate had intervened once more to select Joe and not him to be rolling

around in the back of this truck. He couldn't feel grateful or thankful, because of the fact that someone had died, but he did wonder who or what decided these things that no mortal could alter. It was hard to believe that a piece of metal in his pocket could influence anything but, nonetheless, it never left his possession.

With due reverence and knowing that this would be the only cortege they would have, Rob drove as carefully and smoothly as possible, offering silent apologies for each bump and lurch along the way. Being in sole charge of two lifeless people was not something he had envisaged and he was relieved when they were handed over and he returned to his unit.

For the next few weeks work was back to normal covering troop movements. There was no more harassment as the enemy was pushed further and further back. Various detachments were sent to train with the Americans for what could be the final barrier of them all - the crossing of the mighty Po River. The way events were going they could sense that the end was near, everywhere there was optimism that soon the enemy would cave in and the misery cease. Their hopes were fulfilled, after overwhelming pressure in Europe the good news came through that Germany had surrendered and peace had been restored. The war was over.

Chapter 9

Nothing felt any different now that it was peacetime, life still went on as it had done in the past. News from home of course spoke of frenzied jubilation, but for those at the sharp end, little changed. A few beers were consumed naturally at the news, but most took it in their stride with quiet equanimity. Understandably, the prime topic of conversation was when were they going to get home. It soon became known that the older married men would be the first to go. In his heart he resigned himself to several months more of army routine. To celebrate the ceasefire a twenty-four hour respite from duties was granted, mainly for time to contemplate the future.

"The docks," proclaimed Danny. "That's where I'm heading when I get back. Zoë reckons since the dockers' downed tools or whatever, they got a great settlement, coining it they are. With everybody needing to stock up again there's going to be work for years to come, not much training needed either. Just join the union, do what they tell you and you're in."

He sounded very confident and Rob envied him, going back to his old boring job was not an option, only in the last resort. Travelling had certainly broadened his mind and he felt he needed something more interesting. "So that's what you're going for, Dan," he remarked, "Sure, just keep in with the union, keep your nose clean. Mark my words they're the real bosses."

Rob couldn't argue there, docks and unions were a foreign world to him. "What about you, Taff? Anything lined up?"

"No, nothing really. But I'm not going down the coalmines again, I tried that once and didn't like it, maybe I'll tidy up my Auntie Gwyneth's place first. I told you about my Auntie Gwyneth, didn't I? No? Well, she died a few years ago, she was a widow. Lived on the outskirts of Rhydtalog and had a small market garden she used to live off, we were only a few miles away near Pen-y-Stryt and I often cycled up there to help out with the heavy work. Although she had a bit of a temper I always got on

well with her. Anyway, she died suddenly and was buried near where she lived, I went up regular to keep the grave tidy and look after things. It was on one of those visits when something unusual happened." Taff paused to gather his thoughts. "My Auntie was a very particular person, very meticulous she was. Everything had to be just so, nothing out of place, even the vegetables had to be in straight lines.

Anyway, I go up this winter's day to put flowers on her grave, all was neat and tidy, as she would have liked. It was almost dark, the wind was howling, bending the branches and it was raining something terrible. When I got near the grave it seemed to be open and a figure was sat there tearing away at the headstone, as I got closer I saw it was my Auntie Gwyneth. She recognised me and you know what, she spoke to me."

"Dafydd," she said, "You can trust no one these days, to do the job properly you must do it yourself. My name only has one 'Y' in it." With that she dissolved in a cloud of mist and the hole seemed to close itself up. The next time I visited, her name was spelt the right way, strange, wasn't it?"

No one spoke for the moment. Their first thought was that this was a wind-up, all the time they'd known Taff he'd come across as a practical chapel-going countryman. Sober in his ways, he was not the type to dream up a tale like this. Maybe that was it, he'd dreamt about it and convinced himself that it was real. Trevor added his contribution.

Another born of Welsh stock, Trevor was regarded as the sage amongst his fellow men, quality not quantity is what they had come to expect from him. Not one for engaging in ribald banter or tittle-tattle, each proclamation was preceded by hours of silent thought and deliberation. Any subject came under his scrutiny, which tended to give the impression that he was widely knowledgeable and a deep thinker. Even statements that might cause offence to some were treated with respect. To a captive audience of varied intellect it was further proof that Trevor indeed was someone on a little higher plane than most. Now the latest product of his imagination was to be revealed. "Did you know," he pronounced solemnly, "that if all the water on the planet was drained away, we'd all be living on mountain tops?"

Everyone nodded wisely as if they'd known this all along. Realising it was not a subject for debate, Trev was allowed to retire into his own little world to prepare for his next earth shattering statement. With due deference, a moment's thought was given to his remarks before getting down to the real topics of interest; booze, birds and when were they going home.

Now that there was a goal in sight, demob, the spirits of all were lifted. War equipment had been handed in as of no further use with the trucks being retained to make them now a fully functioning transport company. Being for the moment based on the mainland opposite Venice, full use was made of this with innumerable trips at short notice. It was common practice to arrive in the early hours from a long haul to be told, 'Get your head down for a couple of hours, you're off to Udine or somewhere at 0700 hours.' For a time this added spice to the new found freedom to roam.

Such a time was when he was allocated a mission to Trieste, urgent merchandise was needed and Rob with the help of a

map-reading NCO was to deliver it. This was unknown territory for him, anywhere south he knew like the back of his hand. Now it was a new adventure to be savoured. Freedom from the strict discipline of camp was there to be relished, even for only a few hours. With no restrictions on their movements, the journey could be enjoyed to the full, as long as the job was completed.

A large port on the border of Italy, Trieste was coveted by Yugoslavia. An important link between East and West, disputes had been many. Now as part of Italy, efforts were being made to keep it out of the hands of the communists. As they approached from the surrounding mountains Rob could see the evidence of this, a ring of steel circled the city. Barrages of artillery trained in the one direction.

Looking down from a lofty perspective he was reminded of Algiers. Cradled in the bosom of the hills the layout was almost similar, ancient buildings and alleyways contrasting sharply with modern architecture. His destination, the dock area, could be clearly seen in the older part of the city. Getting there might be a tricky business but he was confident he would find a way, after all they had a map. Slowly and carefully Rob picked his way through the suburbs aided by not very bright instructions from his companion.

So far Rob had relied on instinct rather than the abilities of his map-reader to get to where they were going. Anyone could have been given the job as long as the map was held the right way up, how it came about that he got the stripe was well known. In his early days his companion had a pleasant little number as chauffeur for a major and his missus plus their pet poodle, Tootsie. Stopping to allow Tootsie to cock his leg on someone's treasured plant, an angry looking German shepherd dog appeared looking for an easy meal. "Do something," shrieked the distraught woman to her chauffeur. Leaping from behind the wheel he confronted the animal. "Shoo," he commanded sternly.

It was obvious that the dog did not understand English. Exposing its canines for inspection it advanced with a foreign sounding growl until its garlicky breath could be smelt. Showing great presence of mind the driver turned smartly and legged it down the street with his newfound friend in hot pursuit. Grabbing his little treasure in mid-pee, the lady clasped it to her bosom and sought the safety of the vehicle, uttering soothing words of comfort. Meanwhile having shaken off his pursuer, the exhausted driver returned mumbling something about diversionary tactics he'd learned as a soldier, yet greeted with praise from the devoted dog lover. Turning to her husband she gushed: "That was a very brave thing he did dear, letting himself be chased instead of Tootsie, he must be rewarded, I insist."

Anything for a quiet life, the major considered the options, decorations he couldn't bestow. It would be hard to justify this as being bravery beyond the call of duty, what he could do of course, was to hand out a promotion. A stripe here or there meant nothing, cost nothing and with luck might help in transferring some of the affection she lavished on her pet. And so the army gained an extra NCO.

This then was Rob's backup to accomplish his mission. Fortunately the streets were quiet and no traffic problems were encountered. Diligent scrutiny of

instructions on the map proved confusing but with many backtracks and a dollop of good luck they eventually reached journey's end and time now for a spot of rest and a good dinner.

Over the years Alfie had progressed in his culinary skills and had provided them with tasty bully beef sandwiches, with a hint of mustard as requested. Wolfing these down with gusto gave them time to contemplate what to do next. It was common practice when visiting a new town to spend some time checking it out before heading back. On this occasion they both agreed that this time they should give it a miss, something about the place gave them the creeps. Almost empty streets, few smiling faces; an air of menace seemed to permeate the whole atmosphere. Rob wondered if they knew the war was over. Agreeing then to waste no more time, preparations were made to leave immediately. No doubt there would be more attractive places on the way back to spend some leisure time.

Numerous twists and turns on the way in had resulted in the pair's complete disorientation as to their whereabouts. Even holding the map upside down or sideways didn't help matters, all that could be remembered was to get out of town they had to head upwards. It was with great relief when they at last came to a T-junction onto what looked like a major road.

Consulting his map Rob's superior commanded, "Turn right." "You sure? I think it's left." "You just drive, this is Route 6, the main road into Italy." Satisfied, Rob turned right. Ambling along at a steady rate of knots he had plenty of opportunity to admire the scenery. Mostly avenues of trees, the terrain seemed much flatter than he remembered. Maybe they were taking a different approach, anyway a bit further on and they'd stop for a smoke. Time and distance also had to be calculated to avoid being collared for fatigues when they arrived back. Lost in a reverie he was startled by his companion grabbing his arm. "Hold it," he barked. Rob slammed on the brakes. He had also noticed it, a barrier across the road. "What's that up there?"

"Looks like a road block, Corp, might be those Aussies surrounding the city, can't be too careful."

Taking a closer look it was obvious that they were not British uniforms that were waving about an assortment of weapons but a rag-tag of troopers in Spartan dress sporting the Red Star. "What are they, Russians?" queried the anxious corporal. "No. We haven't come that far, they could be Yugos." "Then that must be the Yugoslav border, we're heading the wrong way. You must have made the wrong turn back there," he added without the slightest hint of contrition, "We'd better turn round."

Rob was quite happy to do so, these people were not to be messed with. The ongoing dispute over Trieste had put them in a foul mood, the rules of war didn't seem to apply to them. For most POWs, surrendering to the British was a godsend compared to falling into the hands of these guerrillas.

Doing the smartest three-point turn he'd ever accomplished Rob turned his vehicle round and headed back from whence they'd come with the minimum of delay. After what was deemed a safe distance they halted for a smoke. Ignoring his companion's muttered *sotto voce*, 'the map must have been wrong,' Rob was already

mulling over his planned return, not knowing exactly where they were it was decided that not until they reached a familiar place could it be calculated the best time to avoid being collared for fatigues.

With more luck than judgement after many miles such a venue hove into sight. Skill and experience then came into play and an estimated time of arrival was established. Careful timing and judicious speed control, plus essential smoking breaks then ensured that they rolled into camp shortly after the last dish had been stacked and the last spud bashed.

It was the following morning when Rob was greeted with the news that his turn had come for a spot of well-earned leave. Along with others a small party of them were to be treated to six days of luxury in the Dolomites at Cortina. The middle of winter as it was, any break was welcome that would distance them from what had now become monotonous drudgery.

Everything was there for their enjoyment; ice skating, skiing lessons, sleigh bell rides to deliver them home safely after spirited nights out and to cap it all, a good helping of crisp clean snow to frolic in like children. Adding to the grandeur was the panoramic vista of gigantic peaks glinting in the sun, awesome in their splendour. For six full days life was bliss, housed in a smart hotel with real beds, their every need was catered for. Under warm sunshine full use was made of the outdoor facilities, fortunately with only minor accidents. Wine bars guaranteed that the evenings weren't wasted, with the knowledge of a safe return in a horse drawn sleigh. Even the clean mountain air was something they'd never tasted before, a true stimulant to the lungs. The sun had shone continuously during the day, the stars had twinkled constantly at night. No one disagreed that this was the best holiday they'd ever had.

All too soon this idyllic utopia came to an end and on his return Rob had little time to savour the delights of the previous week. Work was as hectic as ever but fortunately only short hauls of under one hundred miles were the order of the day. This meant there and back in a day giving ample time for rest, but not always. Do your shift in double quick time and you were given another. It was soon learned that time was the most important thing, getting this right led to a happier frame of mind.

There was one allotted job that Rob felt proud to do, justified or not it was deemed that only he was suitable to do the work. As one of the very few without a blemish on his character, he was to be entrusted with transporting a few bob in currency from Venice docks to the mainland, ten million pounds worth to be precise. With Italy's economy being in a mess it had been decided that a new form of currency was the answer.

He now had the job of transporting the result, square bits of occupation notes that looked as though they had come straight off a fairground printing machine. When it became known, inborn instinct ensured that overtures of a dubious nature came his way, notably from Jock who had recently been released from His Majesty's confinement. "They winna miss one wee box frae that lot," was his plea.

Resisting all temptations Rob maintained his new-found moral status delivering the goods without one note missing. Rob had enjoyed the trips along the causeway though, a rare chance to glimpse a city he'd only ever read about, without the threat of

violence these places could now be seen in a different light and with greater appreciation.

Gradually the workload subsided to a more acceptable level, with enough sleep and leisure time to ease the pressure that was building up. As it was common knowledge that they would be on the move yet again, spare time was mainly confined to their present quarters rather than in the general community. Uncertainty about the next move prompted many to stay close to their billets, temporary as they were.

It was raining, in their quarters, Paddy held sway recounting experiences he'd had back in the old country to a suitably impressed audience. "The trick is to pick a busy pub," he began, "One where the barman's rushed off his feet. Well, you go in and ask for a pint of Guinness. After the man pulls it you say, 'Look, I've changed my mind. Can I swap it for a pint of best?' He won't be pleased of course but he pulls it and you drink up. As you prepare to leave he'll say, 'Aren't you going to pay for that?' You say, 'But I changed it for that Guinness.' He'll say, 'Then you'll have to pay for that Guinness.' Then you say, 'Why should I pay for something I haven't drunk?' It's best then to leave before he stops scratching his head. Mind, I wouldn't try it too often if you value your kneecaps," was Paddy's final piece of advice. Lesson now over he accepted the drink from his audience and moved on to regale some other gullible for another free pint.

Nearby a maudlin Taff was extolling the virtues of the Land of his Fathers to a disinterested Trevor, being from the industrial south, "Best country in the world is Wales," announced Taff proudly. "The hills and the valleys and the mountain streams, always you felt good breathing in that mountain air. Even my Auntie Gwyneth - I told you about her, didn't I? Never smoked, didn't drink and was vegetarian. Even when she died the doctors told us she was the healthiest person they'd ever seen, glad to be back I will."

In Rob's little bunch a vociferous argument over politics had ended without a punch-up and they'd moved on to the skirmish that had just ended. Surprisingly few had anything to say about the subject, having only experienced it from the inside, so to speak, opinions were blinkered so the topic was quickly dropped. The only conclusion was that wars never decided who was right but who was left. Trying to lift the tone of the conversation Rob turned to their favourite subject, Civvy Street.

"What about you, Snowy? What you doing when you get back?" One on the periphery of Rob's closest friends, Snowy had never quite made it into the inner circle, mainly because few could understand him. A bluff down-to-earth trawler man, his almost white hair had instantly marked him down with the label he was now known. His hometown was an outpost on the Northumbrian coast named North Shields, somewhere between the Shetlands and civilisation. Its fame apparently came from a staple diet of something called calla herring, which was hawked about the streets on handcarts. Presumably this stuff was dredged from the sea by Snowy and his mates. Challenged now to speak out, everyone adjusted their senses to interpret what he had to say.

"A'm not sure whether a'll be gannin back t' me owld job," he started, "too much bloody hard work, 'specially in the winter. Freezes yer bleeding nippers off it

does. Not like yer poncy office walk. Mind a did have a job like that once, when a was a lad. A remember a was in this factory one day waitin' for the lads t' finish. Then a bloke in a suit comes in, face like thunder. Must have been important 'cos they all flung their papers doon and got back t' walk. Anyway a was just sat there studying the form and he came our t' me. 'You, boy.' He says, 'have you nowt better t' dee than sitting there reading a paper? How much are yee being paid t' dee nowt?' Well a was a bit scared of him like so a telled him, 'five shillings, Sir.' So he puts his hand in his pocket and gives me five bob. 'Here,' he says, 'that's a week's wages, now clear off, a don't want t' see yee again, your cards will be sent on.'

Well, a takes his five bob and hopped it. A wasn't ganna argue, it was his own fault. He should've knarn a didn't walk there. A was the bookies runner doin' me roonds, waiting for the lad's bets. It was a good job an' all, walking for Honest Ossie. Would've kept it up only the polis captures him doin' a runner after a bad day. So a had t' gan on the watter 'cos that was all there was t' dee then. But a'm not gannin back. Mebbe a'll get a job doon the pit, should be plenty of walk there. Might even send oor lass oot t' walk, she's been having it canny while a've been over here, just luckin' after the bairn."

Snowy was very proud of his bairn. Born a few months before his call-up, the lad should be a bonny four-year-old by now. He couldn't wait to see him, there was just that dodgy moment when he had first put in an appearance. That dark hair contrasting with his own white had made him think. In a mad moment he even accused his wife of being unfaithful but was placated by her fervent assurance of 'not this time.' Even so, to be on the safe side he asked one of his mates who'd lodged with them a while ago to keep an eye on her. He had a medical condition known as 'flattus feetus' and was exempt from military service.

Having said his piece, Snowy waited hopefully for the reaction. He'd tried to be as lucid as he could but a lifetime of dialect could not be changed overnight. All he could hope for was that most of them had picked up enough of his tale to allow him to be a proper member of the gang. From the vacant looks on one or two faces this prospect was probably dashed, as other subjects were quickly introduced.

Barely had they got into their stride when it was rudely interrupted by the entrance of the CSM. "Listen you lot," he barked. "On parade at o eight hundred tomorrow for inspection. Equipment blanched, brasses shining and boots polished. After that everything to be packed ready for moving out at ten hundred hours. Any questions?" "Where to, Sir?" "Austria." "But isn't that where the Germans are, Sir?" asked one nervous fairy. "Don't worry, sonny. We've captured most of them."

Chapter 10

Not since they first entered Italy and nestled in Bari had the company looked so spic and span. Smartly turned out dress and sparkling equipment was the aim to show that their own Wehrmacht weren't the only soldiers who could look immaculate. It was also a good way to use up tins of spit and polish that had accumulated over the years. Encouraged by a new-found pride in their appearance, everyone set-to with an enthusiasm never before seen in such

mundane activities. In a sense it seemed as though it was a dress rehearsal for when the time came to greet Civvy Street.

As a result there was little for the Company Sergeant Major to carp about as they paraded for inspection at 0800 hours. It was a good turn out, acknowledged by the CO who was anxious to get back to a farewell party arranged by a bevy of lumpies. Satisfied with the result they were smartly dismissed to sort out their own personal affairs for the next few hours before departure. Kitbag packing was not a problem having been on standby for most of their stay and for some, business affairs with the local rustics had to be curtailed. For those in a relationship, urgent visits were necessary to exchange false promises for intimate rewards.

A well-practised routine coupled with inbred discipline soon had the Company ready to roll. Bigger trucks such as Rob's were crammed with as many as they could hold, uncomfortable but considered as a minor luxury compared to the alternative of a route march. Officers were roughing it too, having to squeeze in as many female staff as their small vehicles could hold.

Promptly and efficiently and only thirty minutes behind schedule they were on their way, an officer at the head proudly displaying the Company flag. Although there was a chill in the air it soon became a necessity for the covers on the sides of the trucks to become unfurled, not to admire the passing scenery but to make full use of it's life-giving oxygen. In a confined space a cocktail of body sweat, cigarette smoke and methane emissions was not a welcome visitor to the lungs.

Rob was thankful that he was driving, with only his platoon sergeant as company he was travelling in comfort. All he had to do was keep his eye on the road, follow the vehicle in front so as not to get lost and try not to doze off. Behind him a male voice choir had struck up from his cargo, giving renditions of uncensored ditties picked up from their journeys through life. With his recently new-found ear for the classics, Rob soon found these discordant warblings an insult to the senses. Was he becoming a music snob, he wondered?

The first stop was north of Tarvisio, Alfie and the chuck wagon had raced on ahead to prepare a nourishing meal of lentil and spaghetti soup, with bread. An open spot beside a small river had been selected giving everyone a chance to stretch their legs. But first things first, in true military fashion a line was then formed along the riverbank to dispose of recycled vino, oblivious to the locals down stream doing their weekly wash. From past experience Rob wasted no time in heading straight for the food queue, first come, first served was a truism he'd come to respect. Soup was a favourite dish for those on the move, easy to prepare, it could never run short. Any hint that it might and more water was added to make it go round. Many a tail ender had ended up with a billycan of liquid with only half a dozen lentils and two strings of spaghetti keeping each other company.

Relaxed after his meal, Rob found a comfortable patch of grass and stretched out. Lighting a Woodbine he surveyed his surroundings. Ahead in the distance mountain peaks could be seen rising to the sky. If we're going that way there's some serious driving to be done, he thought. With some hours of daylight left it wouldn't be a problem as they'd had plenty of

experience through that sort of terrain in the past. The uncertainty was what lay ahead. How would a conquered ex-enemy treat them? Rob had never considered the Italians as such, their attitude seemed to be that they would be friends with anyone who occupied their country as long as they were left in peace. The Austrians were a different breed altogether, resentful of being defeated, Rob couldn't see them relishing the prospect of being subservient to anyone.

All too soon there was a stir of activity as the order was given to prepare to move. A last minute rush to the river to rinse out utensils and then a scramble for the best seats on the troop carriers, everyone favoured those nearest the tailgate. A bumpier ride it maybe but the best vantage point to ogle the village beauties as they passed through country dwellings.

Rob concentrated on his driving, he had to. Behind were the flatlands, ahead a mountain range, every faculty was needed. Negotiating what was now a narrow grit mountain pass the convoy had slowed down to a crawl. Time to take in his surroundings, it was awesome. Of canyon proportions, the way ahead had been cut from solid rock, meandering alongside a mountain torrent raging from the upper slopes to meet tranquillity as it found a resting place in a pool below.

Spectacular as it was it soon became an ordeal as they slowly climbed higher, dust from the vehicles in front made it difficult to see or breathe. Cab windows had to be kept shut with the heat from the overworked engine becoming almost unbearable. How they were coping in the back Rob could only imagine with the relentless rays of the sun adding to their discomfort. All chatter had stopped, possible as a way of conserving energy, adding to the misery was the thunderous sound of engine noise reverberating from the canyon walls.

It was with great relief when the high point of the pass was reached displaying before them the welcome sight of a basin of greenery. The road improved, leading to a fresher panorama of countryside, ahead could be seen the suburbs of some distant town. Emerging into this pleasant looking valley a halt was called to check that nobody had got lost and all was well. An opportunity also to establish their true destination. At some point the border had been crossed. Before them was the town of Villach in the country of Austria. It was planned that this would be by-passed and their route would follow a lake known as the Worthersee. At the end of that lake, HQ would be established at the town of Krumpendorf in the province of Carinthia, or Karnten as the Germans called it.

Acclimatised to the arid terrain of Italy, what they were now entering was a complete contrast of greenery. Lush vegetation along the lakeside was complemented with dense forestry on the foothills. Here and there mansion-sized villas could be seen peeping from behind the trees. A prominent sign proclaiming 'Lido' was visible as they passed, with yachts tethered at their moorings. With little war damage it was evident that this was a special place, a retreat for overstretched VIPs tired of slaughtering people and needing to relax. Remote and sheltered, few outside of the country would know it existed, an ideal place to escape the horrors of war. Not so for Rob, constant reminders were the black Gothic symbols

on buildings and signposts, still carrying that strange aura of menace all of its own.

Whether this would be reflected in the mood of the local inhabitants remained to be seen, the ban on fraternisation may have been lifted but it was difficult to predict how the feelings would be towards an occupation force. Given the same situation in reverse, Rob doubted if he would ever greet occupiers with any warmth.

With several months still to be served what was of immediate concern was where it would be spent. Tired of rat-infested old buildings with no decent facilities, he felt it was their due to live the final days in comparative comfort. Decent quarters would be a luxury not experienced for many years. This was peacetime after all so nothing but the best should be good enough for all-conquering troops. Not that he thought of himself as an all-conquering troop but it was a good thing to keep in reserve if ever the need arose.

Turning his thoughts to other things Rob studied the environment, when moving house, location was important. From what he'd seen so far he had no problem with that, in a beautiful setting of lake, forest and mountain it compared very favourably with the council estate back home. An added bonus was a climate only the rich could afford. This of course was no holiday, work still had to be done, albeit in a more relaxed and carefree way. Ingrained discipline would still be dominant but with a smile on it's face. Being one of the younger ones of his batch he appreciated the fact that older married men would be sent home first, he didn't mind. The big regret would be losing mates one by one when the time came. Living with the same people for over three years, a bond had been formed as strong as any family. Soon they'd be dispersed to make their own way in life, most he would never see again but with a selected handful promises were exchanged to keep in touch. It wouldn't be the same with new recruits arriving to take their place, but with the short time he had left Rob knew this wouldn't be a burden, he made friends easily.

Lost in his daydreams it was with panic that Rob suddenly became aware that the vehicle in front was rapidly approaching his own bonnet. It had come to a halt; the slamming on of his brakes was embellished by anguished curses from the rear as his cargo was hurled forward en masse. Ahead much shouting and barked orders could be heard. Rubbing the sleep from his eyes his travelling companion made a hasty departure to find out what was going on. It was not long before they were left in no doubt. Returning from his fact-finding mission the platoon sergeant was now all military efficiency, addressing his troops he barked; “Right, you lot. This is it. Dismount and get fell in. Kit to be left on the truck and collected later. The old man wants a good show, impress on these Jerries why we won the bleeding war.”

From his lone position behind the wheel, Rob eyed the building they'd pulled alongside, of modern rectangular construction it was obviously purpose built. Suitable to house troops or criminals if need be, it was a far cry from the flea-bitten shelters endured over the past few years. At least, he thought, a bit of civilised luxury. Assembled by the roadside the troops awaited orders and now fully alert, their commander was in fine voice: “Aten-shun,” he bellowed. “Slope arms left - wait for it; wait for it - turn. By the right - quick

march.”

At each command a myriad of hob-nailed boots pounded the pavement reverberating throughout the neighbourhood. Rob looked around, not many locals had assembled to witness this spectacle. A couple of urchins with a mongrel on a piece of string were obviously fascinated, an elderly drunk with a bottle was obviously not. Anxiously scanning the throng for a familiar face responsible for her predicament was a teenager cradling a few-months-old baby. You're wasting your time love, he thought, we've just got here.

Other than that, only the twitching of curtains from nearby dwellings seemed to show any interest in their movements. He couldn't help but feel proud as he watched the precision of his pals marching through the gates into the compound. Unlike their predecessors this was no stage-managed high kicking ballet performance but a purposeful statement of authority. They were the bosses now, as the last of the troops disappeared Rob started up his engine in preparation to follow them through. Neatly parked on the barrack square he took stock of his surroundings.

Close up it looked all that it seemed, a building not meant for the ordinary members of the Wehrmacht but for those of more importance, a place he could feel very comfortable with. Settling in was accomplished in an orderly fashion with close friends managing to stick together. Occupying one room were Rob, Harry, Taff, Trevor and Paddy, not only had they all supported each other through thick and thin but they could also be relied upon to form a good card school when the mood took them. Making up the maximum half dozen was Len, an amiable laconic rustic from rural Essex. Easy to get on with, his home was a country cottage devoid of all modern facilities. Lighting was a collection of oil lamps and water was pumped up from a well in the garden the one indication of opulence was the comfort of an indoor toilet. A wooden seat with hole, a bucket and ashes from the coal fire served much the same purpose as any luxurious porcelain, but he was content.

Soon some form of routine was established, as a halfway house for POWs trade was brisk transporting them to various places where they were most needed. It was also a good way to get the feel of a country they'd been at war with for over five years, get to know if they were any different from us. Although not allowed to dangle, warnings had been instilled that minger still lurked in the mountains and forests. Refusing to accept defeat, fanatical Nazis known as werewolves still roamed the area intent on creating mayhem whenever and wherever they could. Loyal to their cause, believing their Führer was alive and well, nothing deterred them from ruthlessness learned over many years.

In general little heed was taken of these warnings, bonhomie was the prevalent mood for all and sundry. Civilians in uniform were how most would have described themselves, a stepping-stone before becoming real individuals. Jackboots may have strutted on this parade ground, ‘Sieg Heils’ thundered from the rooftops in the past, but things were different now. A matier atmosphere prevailed, spreading down from the company commander to the lowest erk, with an easing of tension that had hitherto been lurking in the background. Conveying this mood to an

ever-changing gaggle of POWs was not easy, some may have expected retribution for their crimes and were fearful of the consequences, others obsequious in their fawning were hoping for favours. In total it was an attitude of sullenness that was dominant, fostered by language difficulties. Not knowing what was said about you provoked everyone into believing the worst. As a result, Rob himself was very wary when in close proximity to any of his charges. Changing from a callow youth as he stepped onto that troopship into a half decent seasoned campaigner by drilling, bullying and intimidation, he was well aware that others had experienced the same, on both sides. Years of discipline instilled into his character had seen such a change that could not be dismissed overnight. So it must be with these Austrians and Germans, it could be quite a while before they were purged of Nazi doctrine. The signing of a piece of paper to end things would not erase the ideology of a generation.

For a people who considered themselves to be a cut above the rest, humiliation was a hard cross to bear although in time this would fade as life returned to normal. For the time being it would be as well to be courteous, friendly but not familiar and to take no risks in pursuit of their duties. This was wind-down time for all of them and the last thing they wanted was a blip in proceedings to hinder that process. A quiet life with no complications was all that was yearned for, once back home the rest could be forgotten.

Sunday was a day off but the weather was miserable prompting many to stay indoors. Four of Rob's pals had formed a card school but he had opted out being short of funds. As an onlooker he was joined by Snowy seeking company, in the card school Taff was considering going ‘Nap’ with a dodgy hand. It was a big pot to go for but with the ‘King’ missing, getting the five tricks was a risky business. Still deliberating, his thoughts were interrupted by an announcement from Snowy: “A'll be glad when A get yem. Oor lass is ganna have a bairn.”

There was a stunned silence. Taff abandoned his risky call, Rob did a quick calculation on his fingers. “How come Snowy? You've been with us for three years. It must be the longest pregnancy in history.”

“Must be some other chap,” murmured Trevor, ever the realist.

“Did you know she's been playing away?” chipped in Taff. “Any idea who it is?”

“When you do find out make sure you sort him.” Harry was the belligerent one in the group.

“Bloody Yanks,” growled Paddy, for no apparent reason other than he didn't like them, “Can't leave our women alone.”

“Whoa. Howld on a minute. It's not like that,” Snowy was quick to respond. “What a meant like was oor lass is gonna have a bairn when a gets yem. A haven't told her yet.”

There was a collective sigh of relief. It was bad enough fighting for your country without others claiming the spoils of war. Satisfied that there was not another crisis to deal with the game was resumed. Deciding on his strategy, the ever-cautious Taff opted to go for three tricks instead of the full five. Although it was a huge ‘pot’ a few schillings in hand was more tempting than a prospective big payout. Laying down his

cards there was an eruption of scorn and derision augmented by cries of 'chicken.' An unfazed Taff collected his meagre winnings yet inwardly seethed when it was discovered that the vital 'King' had been sleeping in the pack, being a bit braver could have set him up for the week.

Before the next hand could be dealt there was another brief interruption, this time from the duty sergeant. His rigid finger was directed straight at Rob.

"You, soldier, I have a job for you."

Rob knew it was useless to protest. Once the military machine had been set in motion minions such as he had no power to stop it.

"Report to the officers' mess," went on the sergeant. "They need a driver."

Bored with the inactivity he followed the sergeant out. Day off it may be, but at least it was something to do. Presenting himself at the mess he was taken to one side to have his duties explained. A junior officer needed to make a vital trip into the countryside on urgent business and Company regulations stated that he must have a driver to accompany him. Rob deemed it prudent not to ask pertinent questions, he was only there to drive. It looked an easy job, the weather had picked up and a pleasant trip into the mountains was better than twiddling his thumbs in the barracks.

Returning to his quarters to prepare, numerous questions were fired his way.

"What's the drill, Rob?"

"Got to drive an officer somewhere."

"Where to?"

"Dunno. Somewhere in the mountains."

"Lucky bugger. Bring us back a stick of rock."

"Give my regards to the werewolves."

Fielding each question with dexterity, he left them to their own devices and reported for duty. Only the last remark had taken root in his thoughts, rumour had it that these renegades were operating hereabouts. They'd even been seen in the area. Luckily only by Taff who still insisted it was the ghost of his Auntie Gwyneth he'd spotted back in Wales. Nevertheless it would be as well to be extra wary. It was no surprise to see a number of boxes already loaded onto the vehicle. Common knowledge had it that equipment 'surplus to requirements' was being disposed of every day, a victors' bonus for all they'd been through.

Shortly after lunch they were on their way and soon the asphalt road was left behind as they entered the forest. The sun had emerged from its slumbers casting beams of light down through the trees in the semi gloom. Little conversation passed between the two occupants, the officer was a stranger to Rob and it was soon established that they had little in common. Only the odd remark about their surroundings broke the silence, he didn't mind. He was more interested in the scenery as they progressed up the foothills. Dappled sunlight filtering through the leaves gave the impression that the forest was alive, it probably was. Mountain squirrels or whatever must surely live amongst the shrubbery, maybe something bigger. Time after time from the corner of his eye there appeared to be unnatural movement, but nothing with any real substance. A feeling of being watched, by what or whom he had no idea, a trick of the light or an overworked imagination, he couldn't decide. Several miles on and they reached their destination, a clearing

containing an elegant Tyrolean mansion alongside a small mountain stream tinkling cheerfully as it went on its way. As a small rural retreat Rob decided that this was the sort of place to aim for when he won the pools. A short blast on the horn produced what was assumed to be the owner, a stocky stiff-backed figure with steely eyes and a no-nonsense manner approached.

"You are from the barracks, Ja?" he barked. "Come."

Nodding in agreement the officer followed him to the main door. As an afterthought their host turned and pointed a finger at Rob.

"You boy. Go through that door and Greta will attend you."

Peeved though he was at taking orders from a member of the vanquished, Rob did as he was told and entered what appeared to be a large kitchen. Inside to greet him was a blond matron-like figure in traditional bib and brace. Judging her to be at least a decade older than himself, Rob sensed that she was only too glad to welcome anyone younger than her middle-aged master. Presenting him with a cold beer and a warm smile, introductions were exchanged and he was invited to rest his legs. He was relieved to discover that her English was quite passable with only slight fractures. After courteous pleasantries she sat beside him on the small divan, it was a tight squeeze and Rob could feel the warmth of her flowing from their touching thighs. A pleasant feeling tingled in his whole body. His pulse and heartbeat competed in their own little race and his temperature soared to a new high.

"Why do you tremble, Herr Rob?"

Herr Rob couldn't help it. As a red-blooded male his emotions were out of control. His body was on fire. Heat radiated from him, sufficient to warm the beer in his hand.

"Herr Rob, I do not bite," she murmured, stroking his arm. "You do not speak, do I offend you?"

Herr Rob could not speak because his vocal chords had been strangled by his feelings. "Perhaps we can go somewhere else. I have a little room where we could talk," she suggested seductively.

Bewildered, confused and disorientated he allowed her to take his hand and lead him to her web. That still small voice of caution was banished from his conscience, moral issues overthrown. Temptation, the thief of right and wrong, prevailed. Such was his anticipation that only the slamming open of the door and the loud voices of their masters proved enough to rouse him from his reverie. "Right soldier, time to go."

Both men seemed in good spirits at a transaction well done, aided no doubt by a litre or two of schnapps. Cursing his luck at the intrusion, Rob clambered aboard his truck, opportunities like that didn't come often. Pondering on whether to mention it to his mates back at camp he decided, why not?

The truth was always the best, what wouldn't hurt was an enrichment of an ending that would enhance his status to the envy of the rest of them.

The journey back, Rob reckoned, should be no problem, just follow the road that they came up. The 'pips' beside him had lapsed into a drunken sleep and now, late in the afternoon, the sun was low creating weird and grotesque shadows. Once again indefinable movement amongst the trees played havoc with his nerves. This time there was no doubt about it, the

undeniable faces of figures lurking in the scrub and bracken. Tales of the exploits of these so-called werewolves were lurid enough without having to experience them first hand. Unarmed as they were they'd have no chance if these people made their move, all Rob could do was keep moving. Coaxing as much speed out of the engine as it would take, he tried not to think what might lie ahead and to his surprise and relief, the rest of the journey was completed without incident.

Stirring himself, the officer opened a bleary eye.

"Back are we? Any problems?"

"No, sir. Just some people in the forest I was wary of. Thought they might have been some of those werewolves we've all heard about, but they didn't bother us."

"Oh those," remarked the 'pips' nonchalantly. "I should have mentioned it earlier. Part of the negotiations was a guarantee that we'd have a safe journey there and back."

Rob had no difficulty in expressing his own thoughts on that. Bloody officer!

Chapter 11

Like other pleasures in life days off were a welcome relief from the daily grind, to do just what you wanted without interference. There was always the threat of being captured for menial duties of course, but recognising the signs and being astute enough to take evasive action was a skill Rob had learned long ago. He had to admit that he'd been luckier than most, bombs and bullets had avoided him to some extent, close enough to deliver a fright in some cases but not near enough to cause him any damage. Unlike the unfortunate Kevin and George and others, so far he remained unscathed, for that he was grateful. There had been hairy moments of course but dwelling on them, he felt, was pointless, for those who were left life went on. Look to the future and make the most of it.

In the last few weeks things had gone well, clean living quarters and hygienic kitchens were well appreciated. Even flushing toilets were classed as a luxury. Being able to relax in comfort with a fag and a pin-up magazine was something to savour. It was obvious that an amenity such as this could not be provided under combat, yet few understood the hazard of field latrines. Although two trestles with a pole across were adequate for a quick disposal, those with balance difficulties had their own problems. With nothing to grasp and no safety net, toppling into the trench below was a pitfall not to be repeated but it had been known. Another problem was the pole itself, in the circumstances no time could be wasted on smoothing the wood into a safe and pristine finish. Consequently, at times, this could be likened to squatting on a docile hedgehog, with the worst splinters having to be surgically removed, very humiliating if one of the female medical staff was on duty at the time.

At this moment Rob was feeling pleased with himself. Summoned to the CO's office he was informed that he'd been elevated to a very important job, namely IC Motor Transport Fuel Supplies, technically known as petrol pump attendant. To demonstrate the importance of this job, a pencil and ledger were provided and an office, a six foot square wooden hut with desk, door and window, from which to operate. As a bonus a stripe was given for protection and

seven pence a day extra, which would be very welcome. That should add up to a few schillings a week in his pocket, tempted by the wage rise he accepted immediately.

The actual work was simple enough, take delivery from a lorry - a load of forty-gallon drums from the central depot then transfer the fuel from each drum into ten four gallon jerry cans. No problem, except that en-route the contents had either evaporated or been mysteriously milked. Ten divided into less than forty did not equal the full quantity that the drivers were entitled to. They of course were responsible for their own consumption, having to account for miles travelled compared with petrol used. The only solution that Rob could see was to make cuts in each can. Needless-to-say this discrepancy was soon spotted.

“Ere, Rob, this can’s half empty.”

Pointing significantly to the stripe on his arm Rob enquired,

“What’s the problem?”

“These cans corporal, looks like they’re not full to the top.”

Suffice to say Rob had to think fast. Tact and diplomacy were called for. Anticipating confrontations such as this, the ground had been well prepared. In a quiet and authoritative manner brought about by his new status, he explained the situation.

“The petrol needed breathing space, room was required for expansion to maintain an optimum level of safety. You don’t want the cans to explode do you?” You’re still getting your four gallons because the cans are oversized to accommodate these factors, allowance has been made for the evaporation quotient.” Well into his stride Rob almost convinced himself. A battle of wits with unarmed opponents wasn’t too difficult after all. Despite the indignation and disbelief peace was restored. Rob could understand their discontent from his own stint as one of them. Before his appointment drivers filled their own cans, always to the brim, invariably not all of it found its way into the petrol tanks of their vehicles, locals paid good money for the precious liquid. Now, with all the rules laid down, each can had an equal amount that was classed as the full measure. More importantly, it made sure that the books balanced. Robbed as they were of their perk it was soon learned amongst the fleet that this was as it was and this was how it would remain. Jeopardising his cushy little number was not on Rob’s agenda, well satisfied with his handling of the situation he could then retire to his ‘office,’ enter a few figures in his ledger then sunbathe for the rest of the day until someone else needed fuel. Also with his promotion he didn’t have to worry about rattling dishes in the cookhouse or digging out the infernal eyes of those spuds. His time was his own as long as he kept awake, appeared alert and acknowledged every passing officer looking for a salute, time also to reflect on coming events in the barracks.

Notices were appearing on the board offering various services, organised treks into the mountains, courses in a number of skills - bookkeeping, draughtsmanship and other aids to employment. Even skiing lessons were there for the taking, although what use that would be when he got home was debatable. Rob did consider taking one of the courses until he realised that it was no more than just that, a few months to get an insight into the subject, not to actually learn about it. No diplomas or

certificates would be issued and it wouldn’t be classed as proper training, the unions would see to that. Another factor was that he would have to give up his new job, a job he was quite happy to do for the rest of his time.

Of much more interest to Rob was the announcement of party time in the barracks, with local females invited, something about promoting goodwill amongst the populace. He was well up for that. Now the thought of having a horde of beautiful young fräuleins on tap was enough to make the mouth water. Tickets would be issued and transport laid on for those needing it. A weekend had also been chosen Rob was looking forward to this. The only party atmosphere in the past was when officers and NCOs had dressed up as fairies to serve Christmas dinner.

The day dawned in a frenzy of activity, brasses buffed, webbing blancoed and boots polished to a mirror finish. Each and every one determined to outdo his fellow man. Who knew what the rewards would be? Rob and Danny had secured seats near the door, foreseeing the need for fresh air once the party was in full swing, it also gave them first inspection of the goods.

Bang on time the door opened and the waiting guests filtered inside. Tentative at first they soon relaxed at the warmth of the welcome, fortunately most had a smattering of English so communication was good. Shyness soon disappeared on the introduction of refreshments and without ado the party commenced.

Scrutinising them closely as they passed, Rob was not impressed. A motley crew of humanity, it was obvious that they had not been recruited from a model agency. Deliberate or not, no age limit had been stipulated so anyone looking for motherly love was well catered for. Also Rob noticed one or two clearly hunting for a partner before the time came for them to become a nappy changer. To be fair a few young, reasonably attractive women had turned up, but these were quickly commandeered by officers and senior NCOs and whisked off for their own delectation. For the rest there was consolation that lack of allure could easily be conquered by a few bebies under the belt.

Rob looked at Danny. “What do you reckon, Dan, not what we expected?” Mindful of his married status, Danny was non-committal. “They’re female aren’t they?”

Rob had to admit that, at least, though it did nothing to lift his spirits. All around him the get-together was in full swing, across the room he could see Jock having an animated discussion with a gaudily clad female, in his fist was a bundle of notes. It was apparent that any goodwill he had to bestow would come at a price. In the centre of the room Taff, empty bottle in hand as a makeshift microphone, was assuring everyone that there would be a welcome in the hillside. At the same time he was disproving the fallacy that all Welshmen had good singing voices. Not so much sing song but more of a singsong malodourous rather than melodious. Fortunately most of this was drowned by the hubbub around him, in all this, Harry was patiently pounding the piano.

Deferring to their location he started through a repertoire of Johann Strauss. Realising that this wasn’t going down too well and responding to helpful remarks from his audience, an immediate switch was made to any jazz tune that came to

mind. Star of the show, he was never short of a full glass.

Content to sit on the sidelines and observe, Rob and Danny kept their own counsel. A few tentative approaches were politely rebuffed. After a while Danny rose to his feet,

“Gonna get some fresh air, stretch the legs,” he said, “bit stuffy in here.”

Rob felt the cold air drift in as he closed the door behind him. Outside the doorman was arguing with a wisp of a girl who looked not much over fifteen. Pretty in a way, she had on only a thin dress to keep out the cold night air, she was shivering.

“What’s up?” asked Danny.

“This youngster’s got no ticket, you got to ‘ave a ticket to get in.”

“But my friend have ticket,” wailed the girl. “She have ticket, she say we meet here and go in together, she not here.”

“Can’t you let her in?” pleaded Dan.

“She’s freezing, you can get the ticket when her pal turns up.”

“They all say that, mate, anything for a free night out. No ticket, no party.”

Danny glanced at the girl. She looked so fragile with her hands clasped across her chest, he took pity on her.

“OK, how much?”

“Twenty.”

“That’s a bit steep.”

“Going rate, mate, risking a charge I am.”

Handing over the cigarettes, Danny escorted the girl into the barracks. Parking her alongside Rob he demanded, “How old are you?”

Holding up both hands she flexed her fingers twice, “Zwanzig.”

“Twenty? Yeah, and I’m Goering’s boyfriend.”

“But that cannot be,” protested the girl, “You are more beautiful und der boyfriend is in Berlin.” Danny was beginning to warm to his new friend.

“Sit there and I’ll get you something to keep out the cold,” he said. Returning from the bar he handed her a glass, “Here, drink this.”

The girl took a tentative sip. “What is this?”

“It’s whisky. It will warm you up.”

Tilting back her head she took a deep breath and swallowed it in one gulp.

“That is good, ja?”

“Ja - I mean yes.” Danny was getting a bit flustered. She eyed him slyly.

“That was for warm, perhaps another as friend?”

Grabbing her glass, Danny marched to the bar.

“Put another in there, Dewdrop,” he muttered. Dewdrop, so dubbed because of his runny nose, duly obliged. “And put plenty of water in it this time,” added Danny. “It’s got to last more than five seconds.”

Returning to the table he now found his guest a bundle of vivacity, eager to take part in all that was going on. Accepting her drink with a demure ‘Danke,’ she was immediately on her feet. Grabbing Danny’s hand she dragged him towards the floor.

“Now we dance,” she announced. “You show me der Valk of der Lambeth und die Jittybug.”

Reluctant though he was to be tied up with any female, Danny was tempted. There wouldn’t be any harm in it, he argued and she did remind him of Zoë - a bit, he could always pretend it was her, up to a point. Besides, he felt he was owed a return for those whiskeys she seemed to

relish. It was a battle between conscience and hormones, hormones won.

Left to his own devices Rob studied the guests more closely. It was common knowledge that Germany under Mr Hitler was intent on breeding a race of super people, fit and strong enough to rule the world and all of the one blood. From the sample before him Rob would have disputed that claim. True the majority were fair-headed or blond of varying degrees but, for some reason, quite a number had apparently dyed the part nearest to the scalp a darker colour. Maybe it was some symbol showing allegiance to the great man himself, or maybe it was the latest fashion.

After the frenzy of the first hour the mood was now toned down to a more relaxed atmosphere, conducive for those pairing off to get the feel of each other more intimately. Harry's piano also played its part with slow seductive music to accompany the few couples on the dance floor who'd discovered that the best way to get a cuddle was to stand still and shuffle the feet.

Rob noted the gaudily clad female yet again disappearing out the back with some stalwart the worse for drink. Magnanimous to the point of naivety he concluded that like any good shopper she was just sampling the goods before deciding which to take home.

Across the room it could be seen that people were gazing down curiously at something on the floor, prodding it with their toes. It was 'Hercules,' a five-foot-nothing little squirt who fancied himself as a Romeo, lying flat on his back, he'd walked into a backhand from a damsel large enough to have engulfed him, for molesting her upper thigh without permission. True to womanly fashion she was consoling him with the plea, "Why didn't you ask?"

The rest of his group of friends had dispersed to their own devices and were not to be seen. Everyone else was indulging in light conversation and chit-chat. In isolation he felt a wave of loneliness overwhelm him, this wasn't how it should be at a party, he thought to himself. It wasn't a matchmaking get-together, people were here just to enjoy themselves, to have a good night out. To mingle and make friends and shy as he was by nature he realised he'd have to make an effort and join in.

While sitting there he'd noticed a mousy looking woman sitting on her own, like himself probably a bit on the shy side too, he fancied. One or two lads had approached her for a dance but hadn't lingered when the music stopped. Forcing himself he decided to make her acquaintance. A quick twirl around the floor would demonstrate that he was not a loner and was well into the spirit of things, it soon became apparent why she was being shunned. Her only vocabulary was in a tongue he didn't understand, German, and she smelled, nobody had warned her that it was customary to have a wash prior to dos such as this. Following the example of others, he dumped her and returned to his table.

On the floor Danny and his pal were now the only couple left, locked in an embrace it looked more like smooching than dancing. They didn't care. However, they soon had to make way for a couple of revellers who started trading air punches over a lady. Judging by the prize on offer it looked

more like a contest for the privilege of being the loser rather than the winner.

With the night barely into its stride Rob was pondering on the options of heading for his bunk, when he became aware of cold air on his back, probably the doorman come in for a warm, he thought. Turning round he found it was indeed the bouncer and with him a young woman, of average height and a good figure it was the way she carried herself that immediately captured his attention. She appeared a very purposeful woman. Advancing into the room the doorman enquired, "Is that her over there, Miss?" pointing a finger towards the dance floor. Rob could have sworn there was a hint of deference in his tone.

"Yes. That is her," was the reply. By then Danny and his partner were making their way back to the table, wasting little time the young woman started berating the youngster.

"You silly girl," she began. The remainder was lost on the rest of them as she launched into a tirade in their mother tongue. To Rob it sounded like a torrent of invective until he realised that the German language always sounded like that. Looking meek and contrite the girl listened intently, interjecting a few 'Jas' at suitable moments to break up the flow. Satisfied with her scolding the young woman sat herself down, turned on a smile for the benefit of them all and prepared to enjoy the rest of the evening. A bewildered Rob asked,

"What was all that about?" Delivered in perfect English she explained. "We had tickets for tonight and it was agreed that I hold them, as we live in different places it was said that we would meet outside here. I was a little late and she thought I would not come, when she was left with no ticket she panicked. That is when that nice man came to take her in." Danny inwardly glowed.

"And now everything is alright?" asked Rob.

"It is. She said sorry so we can now enjoy the party."

Rob whole-heartedly agreed, at last, someone to keep him company. An apparently intelligent person capable of a conversation that didn't include the latest crooner or film star, she wasn't bad looking either. Taking off her jacket he noted her figure was slim and supple, undulating in the right places as an indication that she must keep herself fit. Her traditional fair hair was the same shade throughout, showing she had a mind of her own and didn't submit to the latest fashion. Regular features and a clear skin made her easy on the eye and Rob felt a touch of makeup here and there could easily turn her into a beauty.

Eager to please he dashed to the bar for her preferred refreshment - a glass of wine. Filling the glass Dewdrop was curious.

"Who's the bird, Rob? Bit of alright eh?" Rob puffed his chest out.

"Old friend of mine," he said airily.

"She's just a bit late, you know what women are like getting ready."

"Well you better stick close. If an officer spots her he'll have her, mark my words."

Rob had no intention of giving her up to anybody, he was beginning to like what he saw, despite her rant at the younger girl. The best way to go about that was to get to know more about her, try to establish a common bond in a bid to make her like him, but first things first. Introducing

himself and Danny, she did the same, looking straight into his eyes she stated, "I am Theresa. This is my friend Fredericke, how do you do?"

Under those penetrating blue eyes Rob felt his stomach do peculiar things, not since a precocious ten-year-old had pecked him on the cheek and promised to marry him had he experienced this sensation. When his mother found out she'd scolded him to stay away from 'that trollop,' blaming her for his poor results in the 11 plus. At that time Rob didn't know what a trollop was but judging by the tone of his mother's voice it didn't seem to be a sound of endearment. Nevertheless it didn't stop him boasting to his pals about his affair with a trollop, now he knew what those feelings meant. He was getting very attracted to this person.

Trying hard to keep his emotions under control he endeavoured to find out more of her background, not surprisingly she was reluctant to divulge much, Rob could understand that. Many were terrified that they could still be identified with the Nazis. He did learn that her parents were dead and she lived in a small flat with a younger brother, Markus. Any further questions and the subject was changed. A short exchange of his own history and it was soon established that in many ways they were kindred spirits. Equally he hoped she could be taking a deeper interest in him. Well versed in a few mutual interests the little tête-à-tête hardly flagged. Interspersed with a quick twirl around the dance floor, when Rob had the chance to hold her, he felt as though he was in heaven. All too soon the sign was given that the party was over.

Slowly the crowd drifted away amid the excited chatter of newfound acquaintances. Danny and Fredericke were making their own arrangements with Zoë temporarily forgotten. Rob had been struggling as to what he should say when this time came, he couldn't just let her disappear into the night. Overcoming his shyness he blurted out,

"I'd like to see you again, Theresa - if you don't mind?" The last phrase he couldn't help himself. She looked so cool and composed he felt it was only right to ask permission. She eyed him speculatively, Rob was aware of his face going bright red under her cool gaze.

"Do you really want to?" she enquired.

"Oh yes." Rob tried hard not to sound too eager. "Unless..." He hesitated.

"Unless," he continued, "you are married or have a man friend." Her laugh was delightful.

"No I am not attached, I have more important things to do." Rob wondered what could be more important to a young girl than a boyfriend. Helping her with her coat he became bolder. "So when will I see you again?" Taking some paper from a pocket she said,

"Look I will give you my address, you can visit me there. It is best that you come weekends as I work other times, now we must go." Extending her hand to Rob, there was a warmth in her voice as she told him,

"Thank you for a lovely evening, it was very enjoyable." Giving him directions to where she lived, Theresa and her friend boarded the waiting transport and Rob watched as they disappeared into the night. He was elated! He was going to see her again.

From that moment Rob was a changed

man, he'd had girlfriends in the past, girls he imagined at the time he could settle down with, but they'd all fizzled out for one reason or another and, strangely, he'd never felt any loss. This was different, it was more intense. She had a hold over him he couldn't resist. How odd that given his fastidiousness he'd had to travel thousands of miles to meet the girl of his dreams, he desperately hoped she'd return his feelings. At least she'd agreed to meet him again.

Rob had no trouble locating where Theresa lived. Having smartened himself up to the extreme, the butterflies in his stomach wouldn't go away as he knocked on her door. It was opened by a boy of fourteen or so. “Ja?”

“I am Rob, Theresa asked me to call, we met at the barracks.”

“Ah yes,” he said. “She told me, she is at the back. Come.”

It was a small flat in a war-damaged building, spartan in furnishings but comfortable looking. Complete with all services intact, only the sewers needed seeing to. Theresa was in the kitchen.

“Ah! You remembered me.” Rob wondered if he'd ever forget her he said airily. “Yeah, I just happened to be passing and hoped you would be in,” heedless of the fact that this was a street that nobody happened to be passing. Faintly amused she introduced him to her brother. “This is Markus. He is nearly fourteen and I look after him.”

Realising he was the centre of attention, Markus summoned up the best scowl he could manage and offered a reluctant hand. Stiff and awkward, his manner was polite but non too friendly. Probably doesn't like foreigners muscling in on his sister, thought Rob. What pleased him the most was that Theresa had not turned him away. She had not said ‘Who?’ when Markus had announced him, as it was her greeting was warm and friendly even though his visit was all too brief. She had things to do, ‘Perhaps another time when she'd had more warning?’ Rob was eager to agree, only too pleased that she would see him again.

The following weekends were the most pleasurable he'd ever known, sometimes they'd stay indoors enjoying each other's company as their friendship grew. When the weather was fine, they would stroll hand in hand amongst the beautiful scenery, life was bliss, the only darkish cloud was Markus.

Having now accepted Rob into the household he was much friendlier, Rob couldn't quite figure him out, for hours he'd disappear, which suited Rob, but no one knew where. Once questioning Theresa she dismissed it with, “Oh, he's probably playing with his friends, he'll come back.”

What did trouble Rob was that once or twice he'd stumbled across them both having a furious argument, he couldn't understand what was being said but it usually ended up with Theresa in tears and Markus storming out. When asked what that was all about the invariable reply was, “It's nothing, just teenage tantrums.”

Only once did she let slip that ‘he spends too much time in the forest.’ Rob was intrigued by this, he knew youngsters liked to play among trees, liked to climb them and play games, he'd done it himself. But this was no ordinary forest, it was not safe, danger lurked there, it was no place for a teenager even with friends. Unless...! Rob struggled with the unthinkable, who were these friends? Were they connected to those criminals in the hills? All sorts of

weird ideas invaded his mind, this could explain the constant arguments with his sister. Did she know and was trying to make him change his ways?

Rob was well versed in the methods of Nazi Germany. At an early age the youngsters were admitted to the Jungvolk, a military-style scout movement with outdoor activities, campfire sing-alongs and long hikes gave a feeling of belonging and even of importance. Once indoctrinated into that common cause it was then time to move on, at the age of thirteen or fourteen into the Hitler Youth. Of a much harsher regime, humane values were drummed out of them, being a sign of weakness. Lured by a variety of sport, leisure activities and a good career they were enrolled in elite boarding schools that bound them to unquestioned loyalty. Taught to die for their Führer they were the most fanatical of Nazis. From these were recruited the SA, the SS and the ‘werewolves.’ Being part of the Hitler junger was considered an honour and a stepping-stone to being a full member of the Party. Turning things over in his mind, Rob found it hard to believe the brother of his Theresa, as he now thought of her, could be mixed up in nefarious activities. The war was over, Hitler was dead. Even so evidence was there that had aroused his suspicions in the first place, he'd have to keep an eye on that young man. Nothing must interfere in his relationship with Theresa.

For the last few weeks they'd discussed what would happen when Rob's time came to leave, he was all for taking her back with him, except for the obstacles in his way. No job and no place to live were bad enough, permission to take back an ex-enemy would never be granted and how was she to travel? For himself it would be a near three day trek to Calais on the back of a truck, there was no other way. He would have to go alone and once established, he would then arrange for her to join him. “It shouldn't take long,” he consoled his tearful girlfriend, “There'll be plenty of jobs now that the war is over.”

Only once during their talks had Rob felt a slight unease, although in no doubt about her feelings for him, he'd sensed a certain reluctance in her desire to leave everything behind. Understandable, he supposed, it was a big step uprooting oneself to live in another country.

With a few hours leisure time Rob and Paddy were in the canteen enjoying a quiet beer. After demonstrating his card trick skills, Paddy was recounting his early army experiences to the white faced, white-kneed replacements who had been inducted. Rob had never figured out if his tales were true or not but they were always good for entertainment, this one apparently is what happened in the early days of the war back home. With everything in chaos, transport for servicemen on leave was a problem, hitchhiking was the norm. On a forty-eight hour pass Paddy flagged down a passing vehicle for a lift, the driver was happy to help the war effort and they were on their way. Following the usual chit-chat, moans about shortages and the meagre number of coupons, Paddy gradually turned the conversation around to the lot of servicemen and how they could never make ends meet. Some even had to sell stuff to survive, he complained, sometimes the Black Market was the only way. Eventually the hint was taken, negotiations took place and a deal was done, both were aware that this was slightly dishonest, but only if you

got caught.

As they got near his destination Paddy asked to be dropped off at the next police station to ask directions for the final part of his journey. This was done and after Paddy thanked him the driver continued on his journey. Paddy headed straight for the police desk, spotting his uniform a friendly bobby greeted him with a smile and asked what could he do for him. Looking suitable crestfallen, Paddy muttered, “I just got a lift from a motorist, I was showing him the gear we had and I must have left some of it on the back seat, I don't want to get into trouble back at camp, do you think you could send somebody after him? I have his number.”

“No problem, son, we'll get it back to you, just wait here.”

Half an hour later Paddy resumed his trip, fully equipped and a few bob richer.

Suitably impressed, a round of beer was called for and Paddy wandered off clutching his free pint. Left on his own Rob's thoughts turned inevitably to Theresa, he'd been lucky to meet a girl like her. Come to think of it he owed a debt of gratitude to Mr Hitler, but for him, their paths would never have crossed. He'd also had a ‘decent’ war, coming out of it all in one piece. Now the time had come to leave it all behind, his name was on the notice board. Just one weekend left with Theresa before they parted, hopefully only for a few months. He wished that he could have seen her more often but she insisted that it was not possible because of her commitments. He never found out what they were, but it was true that absence really did make the heart grow fonder.

Taking extra care with his appearance Rob set off for their last meeting together, taking in the vista with new eyes he had to admit that this was one of the most beautiful places he'd ever been in. He gathered a few of the blooms to make a little posy, she loved the Edelweiss, it was her favourite flower. Often when they were out they'd gather a few and together sniff the fragrance until their noses almost touched. He only wished it were possible to take her with him, as it was he was determined to make this the best weekend ever for them both. Carefully keeping the posy behind his back and with a light heart, he presented himself on her doorstep. A formal knock on her door and it was opened by Markus.

“Herr Rob! Nice to see you, but I have some bad news, Theresa is gone. They came last night and have taken her, I am very sorry.”

Chapter 12

Stunned by the boy's revelation, Rob was speechless. It had to be some bizarre joke, only Markus was not the jokey kind. Slowly it dawned on Rob that he was serious, then came the questions in his mind. Who had abducted Theresa, why and for what purpose? Seeing his bewilderment, Markus stepped aside to let him pass. “Perhaps we go inside, Herr Rob, and I will explain.”

Settling themselves, Rob listened in silence. The questions would come later.

“This is something that could be happening elsewhere in our country,” began Markus. “It is unfortunate but such are the times we live in, to help you understand I will start at the beginning. Our father was killed on the Russian front, leaving our mother, Theresa and myself. When the war was over the first troops who came were the Russians, people were

frightened, they'd heard of their reputation. We kept our heads down, as you English say, and they did not bother us much. Not until one day when a group of them turned up, they were very drunk with bottles in their hands. They were dirty and unkempt but still wore the Russian uniform. There is no doubt that they were out to cause trouble, banging on doors and trying to force their way in. Our mother was very afraid when they came to our place, she told Theresa and me to hide in the cellar, which we did. She was shaking when she had to open the door before they broke it down. From then on only our ears could follow what was happening, the drunken noises and the smashing of our belongings, it sounded as though they were wrecking our home. Then for a time it went quiet with only angry voices being heard." Markus paused as he recalled the events of that day.

"It was then that the screaming started," he continued. "Not once but four separate times. Theresa and I clung together terrified, there was nothing we could do against drunken armed soldiers. I had to put my hand over her mouth to stop her from screaming and giving us away, it was horrible. This continued for quite a while until we heard them leave and it was only when we were sure that they had gone did we crawl out of the cellar. What we saw was something shocking, the room was wrecked, our possessions scattered around and anything of value taken."

Markus paused and steeling himself he continued, "On the floor lay our mother in a pool of blood, her clothes in disarray. She had been violated, probably by all of them, her throat had been cut. Nothing I could say would comfort her and as the weeks passed and our grief subsided it was replaced by fury that such a thing could happen to our family. Theresa had become very quiet during this time but then I noticed that her anger had developed into hatred. Atrocities like this were happening all over yet nothing was done, now she had a hatred for all foreign troops in our country. In our part the Russians left and the British and Americans came, I tried to tell her that all soldiers were not alike but she would not listen, her mind was made up to exact revenge."

Markus paused, he was probably finding it difficult to recount these events. Rob listened silently as the tale was unfolded, so close had he been to these two yet he knew nothing about their history, had he been blinded by his feelings for Theresa? Was it an assumption that once there was peace everything was back to normal, that occurrences such as these could be dismissed as of no importance? Slowly he was beginning to realise what Theresa had been going through over the last few weeks, the torment of conflicting emotions between their relationship and her crusade must have been unbearable. His only consideration was that he and Theresa wished to have a future together, now it seemed that that dream appeared to be shattered. His thoughts were interrupted as Markus continued.

"To believe this Rob you must understand our background, under the Nazis us boys were recruited at ten years old and trained for many years to become subservient to the system. We had a good education at elite boarding schools, which is why I speak your language. I was lucky because I was young and did not have time to complete the course, the war was ending and I could

see that this was not the right way to live. This was not so for Theresa, girls were also taken by the regime. With lures similar to the boys they were coerced into the 'League of German Maidens.' From before the war started until its end my sister was brainwashed into the Nazi ideology, she was taught that this was as it should be, that this was the way forward. They were made to believe that their Führer was God, they were 'Hitler's Children' Theresa became one of the most loyal of the Nazis.

Consumed as she was with hatred for the foreigners in our country she decided to help the rebels in the hills. Whilst working for the authorities as an interpreter, she passed on information. This she did during the week,, this was why she would not see you then. At weekends she kept away as they went about their activities. I spent many hours in the woods trying to find out where her friends were, we had many arguments, perhaps you noticed?"

Rob nodded, it was hard to take all this in. Markus continued. "It was only when she met you that her manner changed, perhaps she realised that life was not all about conflict. She tried to break free but they would not let her, she was too valuable and they threatened her. But then I discovered where their main camp was, I did not know what to do at first, if I told someone maybe soldiers would attack them. Shots would be fired and if Theresa was there she could be killed, I did not want my sister to die. After endless nights of worry I decided there was only one solution, I had to denounce her. If she were in police hands she would be safe from these people. I urged her to co-operate so that she might be treated with leniency, the police said that if she did that it would go in her favour."

Looking Rob straight in the eye he pleaded, "What else could I do? To remain with them she most certainly would have died, if they send her to gaol it would not be forever, she would still have her life." Rob nodded in understanding.

"So, where is she now?" he enquired.

"The police came last night, they have taken her to their HQ in Graz. Other than that I do not know."

"How was she?" asked Rob.

"In a way," said Markus, "she seemed to be expecting it, not to be denounced," he added hastily, "but to be discovered. I don't know whether she will forgive me but I will talk to her and explain and in time she will understand."

"Did she say anything about me - about us?"

"When they took her away all she could say was 'I am sorry.' She was so confused and distressed. Before that she spoke many times about you and what you were both planning together, sometimes it made her happy and sometimes it made her sad. Now I understand why, it seemed as if she knew that it was destined that you would both go different ways, but there is no doubt that she loved you." Listening to Markus, Rob couldn't help but feel admiration for the stoicism of this fourteen-year-old boy. No doubt his own emotions were in turmoil but to relate such events in a calm and lucid manner would have tested the nerve of a much older and more mature person. Not in his wildest dreams could this have been envisaged, she had shown no signs of having a double life. In their intimate moments there was no indication of the bitterness she felt at the treatment of her family.

Markus had said that she was frightened but couldn't break away from these people, surely that was a good sign? If her thinking had changed maybe she meant it when she said she cared for him, she had certainly shown it when they had been alone. Courts were harsh in the aftermath of war and if she was gaoled it could be many years before her release, in the meantime their outlook could change. Would they ever see each other again? Despite this Rob was certain of one thing, he still loved her with all his heart. Interrupting his thoughts, Markus continued, "You have been a good friend, Rob, maybe I did not trust you at first but now I know different. You would have been good for my sister. Tomorrow. You will be going home and I will be trying to find out what will happen to Theresa. All we can do is wish each other good luck, now if you will excuse me I have things to do. There will be clothes that are needed and other arrangements to make." Rising to his feet he extended a hand.

"Auf wiedersehen, Rob. I hope things go well for you."

"Goodbye, Markus. Remember me to her."

It had been a sleepless night for all come the morning of departure, so much to think about and do. Kit had to be packed, a search for every known acquaintance to express good wishes to. Despite the early hour civilians were already gathering at the gates to see them off, mostly young girls they were rapidly joined by his fellow travellers for their last goodbyes.

Relationships had formed but like his own, few would survive the parting of the ways, tears would be shed. It felt as though he was not part of the scene, no one was there to share his final moments, not even Markus, he had more important things to do. Then it was that he heard that clear precise voice.

"Rob!" Markus stood there with a broad grin on his face, Rob rushed to greet him. Ignoring the outstretched hand he grabbed him in a bear hug, Markus explained, "I could not let you leave alone, maybe for ever, it would not be right. I had some time before my train. and what better than to see my friend for the last time."

"Thank you, Markus, yes we are friends. I've come to like you even more since you told me what had happened, but it will be hard for you to make a life on your own." Markus dismissed this with a smile. "It will be nothing, I will manage. Now is there any message I can give to Theresa?" Never before had Rob been so sincere.

"Just tell her that I love her and will never forget her, I hope that events will go well for her and she doesn't forget me." Fishing in his pocket he took out his battered coin.

"Please give her this. it has looked after me over the years, I hope it will do the same for her. It's my lucky mascot."

Markus placed it in his pocket, "I will see that she will get it," he said softly, "Now you must go my friend, they are boarding the transport. I will pass your message on to Theresa and I'm sure she will be as heartbroken as yourself." Turning abruptly he marched off to catch his train, this boy who had become a man in such a short space of time.

As the truck pulled away Rob took one last look, trying to imprint a lasting scene on his memory. The flurry of waving hands was for others. For himself it was Goodbye army, Goodbye Austria and Farewell Theresa. ■

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



Report: Paul Brown
Pictures: RPCA Archive

13025519 Pte Harold William (Bill) Krepper (DOB 9 June 1890). He enlisted at Sutton and joined 1 Centre Pioneer Corps (Westcliffe) for basic training on 27 May 40, after training he was posted to 141 Coy. The following are extracts from the war diary of this unit:

25 Apr 40 Formed at WESTCLIFF – recruited by the Lord Mayor of Birmingham and given the title '1st City of Birmingham'

Capt E Spencer-Smith – OC

Capt W L Parker – 2IC

Lt W H Turton

21 Jun 40 Moved to ST MARGARET'S HOPE, Orkney with detachment at FLOTTA –all undertaking hutting, pipe laying and offloading boats

15 Dec 40 Left Orkneys and proceeded to WATTEN, Caithness (part of 22 Group) – offloading trains, laying pipe lines and general RE duties

5 Feb 41 Working on snow clearance and digging out a snowed in train

21 Feb 41 Moved to WICK – defence work and camp construction

He was posted to 213 Coy on 4 July 1941, the following are extracts from the war diary of this unit:

2 Jul 41 Moved to UPPER NORWOOD for work in East India Docks, PECKHAM, DULWICH and MITCHAM

31 Dec 41 Working in detachments at CATERHAM, KENLEY, SHIRLEY, WOOLWICH, PECKHAM, THE OVAL, CROYDON, DULWICH, ELTHAM and MITCHAM

23 Apr 42 Moved from NORWOOD to CHESHUNT

AT THE end of the Second World War, all servicemen returning home were issued with a set of civilian clothing, including a three piece suit.

Although the suits were of good quality, the need to clothe millions of demobilising servicemen led to supply problems that caused some men to receive suits that were not of the correct size.

As a result, the demob suit became a common subject in British comedy of the post-war years.

Many of the suits were made by the Leeds firm of Burtons.

This was founded at the start of the 20th century by a Lithuanian Russian migrant Jew, Montague Burton (1885-1952), who initially established shops selling bespoke and ready-to-wear suits in Sheffield and Mansfield.

As the business expanded Leeds became the manufacturing centre for the company. Montague Burton was knighted for services to industry in 1931, going on to endow chairs at several universities, including Leeds.

During the Second World War Burton's firm made a quarter of all British military uniforms.

After the war Burtons continued as a successful business selling men's suits and clothing.

The photos show an ex Pioneer looking very dapper in his demob suit. He was

Digging through the archives...



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

He was posted to 145 Coy on 23 April 1942 and stayed with this unit until he was released on 20 June 1945, the following are extracts from the war diary of this unit:
 20 Mar 42 Returned to UK and proceeded to UPPER NORWOOD, London – working in scattered detachments all over London on miscellaneous duties
 Dec 43 After 20 months on miscellaneous duties all over London the Coy concentrated for a vast constructional task at CANNING TOWN
 1 Feb 44 70 men hutting in WHITE CITY & 40 men in CANNING TOWN - Remainder scattered
 Mar 44 Scattered detachments on miscellaneous duties
 27 Jun 44 Moved from NORWOOD to Marshalling Area

30 Jun 44
 1 Jul 44 RYAS
 4 Jul 44 with 6 sections at
 18 Jul 44
 26 Jul 44 MER
 26 Aug 44 – working at petrol depot
 30 Nov 44 still on POL
 31 Mar 45 duties
 9 Apr 45 Holland
 14 Apr 45 Germany – guard duties
 19 Apr 45

Landed in NORMANDY
 Moved from CREPON to HQ at LUC SUR MER
 HERMANVILLE
 HQ moved to BAYEUX
 Moved to BENY SUR
 Moved to CRESSERONS
 Moved to BRUSSELS –
 Coy on POL and guard
 Moved to BOXMAR,
 Moved to RHEINE,
 Moved to OSNABRUCK

– guard duties
 6 May 45 Moved to LEITZINGEN near SOLTAU – guarding, sorting and cataloguing enemy captured stores
 12 Jul 45 Moved to BERENSCH – constructing shelters and working on roads at KRUPPS

When he was demobbed he was aged 55 years old. He was demobbed at the Regent's Park demobilisation centre in London on 19th June 1945.
 He was one of the first British soldiers to be demobilised by the British Army.
 He had joined up on 27th May 1940 and prior to that, he had also served in France during the First World War.
 Unfortunately Bill died on 30 September 1949. ■



■ At Dover, Private Bill Krepper (middle) of the Pioneer Corps disembarks from a troopship.
 Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Private Bill Krepper of the Pioneer Corps arrives at No.1 Release Embarkation Camp at Ostend, where he is given his embarkation ticket.
 Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Private Bill Krepper of the Pioneer Corps is assisted in the selection of his demob suit.
 Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Mr Bill Krepper, late of the Pioneer Corps, leaves the demobilisation clothing depot at Olympia, London, as a civilian, wearing his demob suit.
 Picture: RPCA Archive

AGM Minutes

The 67th Annual General Meeting of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association held at The Royal Court Hotel, Coventry on 3rd July 2015

President: Brig CB Telfer
Chairman: Colonel A Barnes
Secretary: Mr N Brown
Members Present: 52

THE President opened the meeting at 1900 hrs by welcoming all present to the first AGM to be held 'out of barracks' for over 50 years and hoped everyone has a good weekend. He congratulated the Secretary, Mr N Brown, on the award of the BEM in the Birthday Honours List before handing over to the Chairman and the Secretary.

After receiving apologies from Col RF McDonald, Lt Col D Clouston MBE, Mr J Robinson, Mr A Tooth, Mr I Whittaker, Mr P Graham, Mr G Dorritt, Capt P Mitchener, Mr S Trengrove, Maj PJ Fleming, Lt Col R Othen, Mr P Richardson, Mr S Henderson, Mr R Curtis and finally Maj R Teague who blames his wife for his non-attendance – she booked a holiday in Corsica during this period.

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: Mr Dennis Reeves (a former member of the 39/93 Club), Mr William Wright, Maj (Retd) Joseph Gibbs (A WW2 vet who served in N Africa and landed in Normandy on D+2), Mr Paul Douglas (one of the Aliens who joined the Pioneer Corps and was originally known as Konraid Korn – he served in the BEF and later transferred to the Int Corps and became one of the secret listeners who listened to conversations between captured German Generals who were bugged at Latimer House), Mr George Derby, Mr Michael Lewis, Mr Leonard Holloway who passed away in April at the age of 100 (another WW2 vet who landed on Juno Beach in Normandy on D Day, he had previously served in N Africa and Sicily), Mr Pete Hollimby, Mr Philip Farrington (another WW2 vet who deserted the Irish Defence Force to fight for the Allies in WW2, he was involved in Belsen's liberation. On his return to Ireland he received harsh treatment from the Irish authorities), Mr Robert Roberts, Mr R Anslow, Mr Frederick White (another WW2 vet who landed in Normandy with 238 Coy on D+4), Mr William Halligan, Mr George Roberts, Mr Kevin Wood and Mr Mick Scogings who had booked in to attend the Reunion this year.

ITEM 1. MINUTES OF 66th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

1. The minutes of the 65th Annual General Meeting were unanimously agreed. There were no points arising.

ITEM 2 ELECTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

2. In accordance with the Constitution

one third of the Council must stand for re-election every year. The following members all were willing to serve for another term and were unanimously elected:

The following members were re-elected: Lt Col JA Starling, Maj GF Crook and Mr N Brown

ITEM 3. COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

3. Col A Barnes gave the following report:

Welcome to the 67th Annual General Meeting of the RPC Association, it seems strange holding it in a hotel as for the last 64 years it has been held in a barracks, firstly Wrexham then Northampton and for the last 22 years at Bicester. However times change.

Since the last AGM the Association has been kept busy, the Association property has now either been sold at the auction last September or presented to various institutions, for example Sandhurst, Shrivenham, HQ Land, HQ RLC and the RLC Museum and some left at Bicester for 1 Regt RLC some items were even being sent to the Seychelles.

It was pleasing to note that the last CO of 23 Pnr Regt RLC, Lt Col D Clouston, was awarded the MBE in the New Year's Honour List and last month was selected for promotion to Colonel. In the past few years it has been the practise for the COs of both 23 and 168 Regiments to give a resume of their Regiments, this if not possible following disbandment. I was going to ask David Clouston to give a short address on how the Army is coping following the last review as he is currently employed on the CGS briefing team. Unfortunately he had to cancel last week as he has been selected to attend the UW War College in Washington DC and leaves next Tuesday leaving his wife to do all the packing! It is a hard job but someone has to do it. He, of course, sends his apologies for non attendance.

It was also pleasing to see the Association Controller, Mr Norman Brown, receive a BEM in the Queen's Birthday Honours List and I, on behalf of all Association members, congratulate him on his richly deserved award and thank him for his devotion to his job.

Last November the Association had 86 members march at the Cenotaph, this doubled last years record of 42 attenders, the contingent was led by the Association President, Brig Charles Telfer – it was said that he was the only one in step and being an ex Guardsman this is probably correct.

The numbers attending the Field of Remembrance service at Westminster Abbey were down on previous years, however, our new plaque for the Corps plot was much admired and I would like to

thank Mr Peter Thomas for arranging its manufacture. Following the service personnel had a lunch in a nearby pub and most then went to the Tower to view the Field of Poppies.

Association members are also meeting throughout the country, the 39/93 Club meet twice yearly in March and October at their new location of Bournemouth, the Nostalgia Group meet once a year in Redcar and the Northampton Branch meet regularly under the guidance of the new Branch Chairman, Mr Bob Fox. Their next meet is a BBQ at the Casuals Rugby Club in Northampton on 18 July. The Past and Present Officers Club still hold their annual dinner in Bicester, the next one is to be held on 16 Oct 15. A few Association members are currently trying to start a new branch in East Yorkshire, I hope they are successful, we will do everything possible to assist them.

Finally we have to think about next year's reunion, it is not possible to go back to Bicester as most of what was available accommodation has been converted to offices and St George's Barracks is now nearly full as Signal Squadron as well as the Dems Regiment are now in situ. I believe we secured a good deal at this hotel and propose that we use it again.

Once again I am pleased to see such a good attendance especially those who have travelled long distances e.g. Mr Frank Lyle from Dublin and Mr Sammy Johnson from Germany. I hope you all have a wonderful weekend, unfortunately I cannot attend the full weekend because of work commitments.

ITEM 4. GENERAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

4. Mr N Brown gave the following report:

In the last two weeks I have had 10 cancellations for the weekend and in the last week 6 additions, I am aware that circumstances change but next year I will consider charging a cancellation fee.

The book "46 Miles" which was launched last week during Armed Forces Day will be available at National Arboretum - the author Jarra Brown (no relation!) will also be available to sign copies, the cost is £20. Jarra is an ex Marine who then joined the Police, his last job before retirement was to accompany the journey from RAF Lineham through Royal Wootton Bassett to Oxford (a distance of 46 miles) as soldiers were being repatriated.

Since we last met in September 59 personnel have joined the Association, however our active list is slightly down on last year's figure as we have had a large number of Newsletters returned with the wording "No longer at this address" – please inform us when you move. We have stopped sending out second copies to an individual, the cost is currently £1.51 per

copy.

During our visit to the National Memorial tomorrow we will hold a short service in the Logistic Grove at 1230 hrs, can I ask all members who are capable of marching to form up outside the hospitality tents for us to march down "The Beat" to the Grove. After the service we will then march back to the hospitality tents giving an eyes right to our President and Chairman. Following this can I ask you to make your way as quickly as possible to the Armed Forces Memorial so that a group photograph can be taken on the steps. Please let me know over the weekend if you would like a copy of this photograph.

Maj Bob Corbey, Controller Benevolence RLC, cannot make our AGM this year but has sent me the figures on Benevolence. In 2013 £39,113 was spent on 102 ex Pioneers at an average grant of £383, in 2014 £44,072 was spent on 103 ex Pioneers at an average grant of £427. So

far in 2015 £23,718 has been spent on 52 ex Pioneers this compares to £15,454 on 36 cases for the corresponding period in 2014, the current grant average is £456. The grants cover a large range of requirements but the largest proportion is for EPVs and adaptations to homes to enable people to stay in their homes.

I sit on the RLC Benevolence Committee, prior to each meeting an audit of cases is held, I can honestly say that the Benevolence Team is doing a marvellous job in helping our old comrades who have fallen on hard times.

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

ITEM 5. ARRANGEMENTS FOR NEXT REUNION/AGM

5. The date of the next Reunion/Annual

General Meeting will be 17-19 June 2016. It was unanimously agreed that we use the Royal Court Hotel again.

ITEM 6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

6. Maj A Mycroft informed the meeting that Cpl Dave Herring (ex Pioneer) had been awarded the MBE in the Birthday Honours List and had also been promoted to Sergeant.

ITEM 7. CLOSING REMARKS FROM THE PRESIDENT

7. The President closed the meeting by urging all members to 'spread the word' to encourage more members to attend next year and hoped all enjoy the weekend.

8. There being no further business the meeting closed at 1930 hours.

N BROWN
Secretary

Pioneer on Juno beach

| A small writeup from the World War 2 Pioneer Harold Jennings on the D-Day beach, Juno

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: RPCA Archive

ON D-Day I was a member of a Pioneer Corps' company, serving in a Beach Group on JUNO beach. We stood off Portsmouth for two or three days in a small New Zealand liner called the Monowai. Then the engines started up just after midnight and we were on our way at long last. My Beach Group was part of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division.

About seven miles from JUNO beach we transferred onto smaller boats, mostly tank landing craft, and we were packed like sardines. I remember a Canadian soldier

being hit by my side and going head first into the water as we left the boat. I can remember now – I stopped to shout at him that if he stayed like that he would drown, but of course he was dead. We ran ashore and dug a hole to get our breath and then started to help clear the beach and get things off the ships, such as ammunition, petrol and boxes of rations.

Those of us in the Beach Group wore white rings around our steel helmets to denote that we were working on the beach. I remember most of the morning being sniped at from a church tower. The sniper hit a fellow by me from the Liverpool Irish and medics took him to the Field Dressing Station. I remember him coming to

speak to me full of morphine and the orderlies coming to look for him to get him back to the hospital ship. Later that night the beach loudspeaker said, 'Rest as much as you can, because the tide is too far out for any more ships to come in.'

I looked about for somewhere safe to lie down and found a place in the sand where a tank had come along. I lay down and watched the flash of shells and incendiaries overhead.

I had been lying down for about half an hour when the loudspeaker came on again, saying that no-one should lie in tank tracks as two men had just been killed by late-moving vehicles. By this time D-Day was over and it was the start of another day." ■



Press Cuttings for 1946

The following have been taken from our archives. These cuttings are all from the year 1946. 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 1946.

The Times 3 Jan 46 MINES EXPLODE IN TRAIN ARMY CASUALTIES ONE DEAD : 10 MEN MISSING

One soldier was killed, 10 others are missing, and a further four were injured when trucks containing ammunition and mines blew up yesterday afternoon at a War Department siding at Savernake, near Marlborough.

About 200 members of the Pioneer Corps and the RASC were unloading explosives from trucks when some cartridges became ignited. The fire spread to some mines, which went off with a detonation that shook the area for miles around and was heard 20 miles away.

About 80 trucks were being unloaded and 10 or more of them blew up immediately. Several men who were in the immediate vicinity have not been found. The bodies of others were lying hundreds of yards away terribly injured. Every man working on the dump was thrown to the ground by the blast.

The dump is in Savernake Forest, as far as possible from villages and houses, although people in Cadley have been evacuated until the danger is over.

"I have been right through the war and it was the most terrible explosion I have ever seen or heard," a Pioneer Corps corporal from Birmingham said last night. "I was hurled 30 ft from where I was working and a pal of mine, also from Birmingham, was killed."

Hansard 26 Feb 46 PIONEER CORPS (FUTURE)

Mr. Leslie asked the Secretary of State for War what is the future of the Pioneer Corps; is the Corps to continue; and, if so, what are the conditions of service to be.

Mr. Lawson The future of the Pioneer Corps is at present being considered in relation to other problems of the post war Army. It is not, however, possible at this stage to say whether the Pioneer Corps will or will not continue.

The Times 14 Mar 46 NEWS IN BRIEF

Lieutenant Colonel HM Brown, commanding officer of the Pioneer Corps camp at Arlestone, Wellington, Shropshire, who was found with a gunshot wound in the head in the officers' mess at the camp on Monday, died in hospital at Oxford last night.

The Times 27 Apr 46 11 SOLDIERS CHARGED WITH MUTINY

Findings will be promulgated on all charges against 11 soldiers accused at the court-martial at Catterick Camp yesterday of mutiny in connection with the riot and fire at Northallerton military prison and detention barracks.

They are:- Privates FW Hogan 21, Pioneer Corps, DG Rann, The Royal Scots, R Costigan, 20, The Seaforth Highlanders, W Deane, 24, The Royal Norfolk Regiment, R Groombridge, 23, Pioneer Corps, Fusilier W Roberts, 21, The Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, Privates G Tegg, 22, The Queen's Royal Regiment, A McLean, 21, RAOC, S Irvine, 23, The Loyal Regiment, W Hawthorne, 21, General Service Corps, and Fusilier J Rafferty, 22, The Royal Scots Fusiliers.

The Times 30 May 46 NORTHALLERTON MUTINY SENTENCES

Sentences passed by a court-martial on April 24 on 11 soldiers charged with mutiny at Northallerton military prison on March 3 were promulgated yesterday. They were:-

Private FW Hogan, Pioneer Corps, 15 years' penal servitude with three years remitted: Private DG Ram, The Royal Scots, 12 years with three years remitted: Private R Costigan, The Scottish Highlanders, 10 years with two years remitted: Private W Deane, The Royal Norfolk Regiment, five years with one year remitted: Private R Groombridge, Pioneer Corps, five years with one year remitted: Private G Tegg, The Queen's Royal Regiment, five years with six months remitted: Private McLean, RAOC, four years with six months remitted: Private S Irvine, The Loyal Regiment, four years with six months remitted: Private J Rafferty, The Royal Scots Fusiliers, three years with one year remitted: Private W Hawthorne, General Service Corps, 20 months' imprisonment with hard labour.

Sentence on Fusilier W Roberts, The Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, who escaped at the week-end, was not announced.

The Times 14 Jun 46 RAF CRASH IN NIGERIA NAMES OF 22 VICTIMS

The Air Ministry last night issued the names of the 22 persons who were killed when an RAF Dakota crashed in Nigeria during a flight between Kano and Ikeja on the morning of June 9. All the occupants of the aircraft lost their lives. The names are as follows:-

Crew: WO CB Morgan (pilot); L/Lt JH Gilfillan (second pilot); F/O CH Lynch (navigator); F/Sgt R Pitt; F/Sgt CD Brough and ACI RW Peden.

Army Passengers: The Rev CG Clarke, Royal Army Chaplains' Dept; Capt S Rocklin, GL (Inf); Capt FJ Parish, Royal Signals; Lt Col DG Rowson, REME; Lt Col JW Borradaile, Devonshire Regt; Lt RP Alberry, Pioneer Corps; Maj WB Stimson, AE Corps; Maj WPG Morley, Royal Signals; Lt JS Westcott, RE; Capt RT Moore, RAMC; Capt

E Stirling, RAMC; Sgt JR Wallbank, RE.

Civilian Passengers – Mr WD Jones and Mr RE Pike (Ministry of Supply); Mr Hallowi and Mr Saidi.

The next-of-kin have been informed.

The Times 20 Aug 46 OFFICER CHARGED WITH MURDER SEQUEL TO INCIDENT AT TEL AVIV FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT JERUSALEM AUG 19

The trial began here to-day of a British officer who is alleged to have shot and killed a Jew in the streets of Tel Aviv the night after the kidnapping of six officers by terrorists in June. The prosecution said a curfew had just been lifted in Tel Aviv and the Jew was shot when the accused and another officer were walking in the street.

The accused is Lieutenant Benjamin Woodworth, of the Pioneer Corps. He is charged under Section 41 of the Army Act that, while on active service, he committed a civil offence – the murder of Amram Rosenberg. The Court is composed of Brigadier WD McNeil Graham and four other officers. The Judge-Advocate is Mr Edmund Davis KC, who came from England for the trial. The prosecuting officer is Lieutenant-Colonel Campbell and the defending officer Major Stubbs.

Captain HM Davidson testified that late on the night of June 19 he and Woodworth went walking from the club from which the officers had been kidnapped. A curfew had been in force most of that day. They met some civilians walking arm-in-arm across the pavement. He was ahead of Woodworth when the civilians barged into him, and he heard a shot behind him. He took it for granted that Woodworth fired into the air, and, not seeing anyone injured, he left the scene with the accused.

Cross-examined Captain Davidson said that since the kidnapping the day before, Woodworth had been jumpy. Five weeks earlier, sleeping soldiers were assassinated in a car park, and the day before that two officers were shot in Jerusalem while resisting an attempt to kidnap them. Tel Aviv was an uncomfortable station. The population had given so little help in rounding up terrorists that everyone had to be regarded as a potential enemy. On the morning of June 19 all officers were ordered to carry arms.

Mrs Molner, the sister of the man who was killed, said that she, her husband, her brother, and a woman friend were walking in a row on the pavement when she saw two military men approaching. The first man tried to trip her brother. He passed through them, and the second man also passed by. As he was just behind her, she half turned round and saw him fire a shot. Her brother exclaimed "He's shot me," and held his hand to his chest. She then helped him to hospital. She said she could not identify the officer who fired the shot.

Captain AH Penn, of the Judge Advocate General's branch of Headquarters in

Palestine, handed in a statement which the accused had elected to make to him. In this statement, Woodworth said he acted in defence of himself and his brother officer, Captain Davidson. He had no intention of injuring anyone, and did not know that anyone had been injured.

The trial was adjourned.

The Times 21 Aug 46 NEWS IN BRIEF

The Mitchell Hill Trophy for the best garden of an Army unit in the United Kingdom in 1946 has been awarded to HQ 80 Group Pioneer Corps, Cholderton House, Salisbury.

The Times 21 Aug 46 OFFICER NOT GUILTY OF MURDER ENCOUNTER WITH JEWS AT TEL AVIV FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT JERUSALEM AUG 20

A general court-martial to-night found Lieutenant Benjamin Woodworth, of the Pioneer Corps, Not Guilty of the murder in the streets of Tel Aviv of a Jew named Amaran Rosenberg. The court gave its verdict after an absence of 20 minutes. Its remaining findings, subject to confirmation, will be given to-morrow when the court reassembles.

Lieutenant Woodworth, who comes from Greatholme, Blackburn, Lancashire, in evidence to-day said he was 46, and served in the 1914-18 war. In 1939 he rejoined the Army, reached the rank of sergeant, and was commissioned in 1943.

When walking in the streets of Tel Aviv late at night on June 19 he met some Jews on the pavement and thought one of them resembled one of the terrorists who had kidnapped some officers the day before, and this man "gave him a dirty look." He regarded himself as a marked man because he had given the police information the day before. He had to consider everyone in Tel Aviv as a potential terrorist, and it was difficult to tell the difference between a peaceful and terrorist Jew.

He pulled his pistol and fired from the hip with the intention only of scaring the people away and not of hitting anyone. He said he fired into the air, but cross-examined he said he had to fire quickly without undue consideration where the shot went.

The Times 5 Sep 46 THE HONG-KONG CHARGES CHAPLAIN AND A SERMON EVIDENCE AT COURT-MARTIAL

The court-martial of Major Cecil Boon, RASC, was resumed in London yesterday. Major Boon has pleaded "Not Guilty" to 11 charges of aiding the Japanese while a prisoner of war in Hong-Kong.

Lieutenant Henry George Evans, Pioneer Corps, stationed at Woolwich, who was stated to be suffering from lack of memory as a result of his four years' experiences in the prisoner-of-war camp, said he was appointed sanitary officer at the camp and was instructed by Boon to make reports on people who were trying to escape. He was told to overhear what the men said in conversation and to report whether there were any heaters, torches or revolvers in the camp. He complied with the instructions, made inquiries from some of the men and made his reports to Boon. He reported to Boon a conversation about escaping he overheard on a working party, between some Canadians and Portuguese. A Canadian asked him about the possibility of escape, and he advised him not to try

because of lack of knowledge of Chinese and of funds. He told Boon the same thing. Boon wanted him to give the names of the Canadian and the Portuguese, but he refused. Boon sent him out about nine times to get the names. He told him he could not remember their names or their faces. When he accompanied Boon on night inspections, Boon opened doors and windows and listened to conversations. He asked him why he did that and he replied, "To hear what they have got to say about escape, or otherwise".

In reply to Mr Neville Faulks (who appeared with Mr GO Slade, KC, for the defence) Lieutenant Evans said that Boon was certainly frightened of the Japanese because he was in fear of being beaten up or shot. He wanted to please the Japanese. Mr Faulks; I suggest that you were prepared to help Boon, or to harm him, by these convenient lapses of memory? – I am here to tell the truth.

Colonel Halse – Did you have many beatings up from the Japanese? – About five or six times I was threatened with bayonets and I was beaten up with belts until I was unconscious. That was in connection with stealing two civilian shirts and sugar. Evans added that Boon was present when he was beaten up by the Japanese, but he did not interfere at all.

CHAPEL SEARCHED

The Rev HLO Davies, Senior Chaplain to the Forces said he was chaplain to the forces at Hong-Kong. After two sappers escaped he asked Boon if he thought they had got away. Boon replied that he did not know and that he had washed his hands of the men in the camp as a result of it. After a search by the Japanese he went into the chapel and found furniture strewn about, mating around a stand holding a Bible was stripped off. After that the Japanese searched the chaplains' quarters. After the officer's quarters had been searched the remainder of the camp was searched.

The Times 9 Sep 46 HONOURS FOR SIAMESE LANDED BEHIND JAPANESE LINES

When Japan forced Siam to declare war on this country in January 1942, Siamese diplomats and students at our universities were offered safe-conduct to their own country.

They declined and, instead, joined the Pioneer Corps. Later they were sent to India, trained as parachutists and in jungle-warfare, and given British commissions. Then they were dropped by parachute or landed by submarines in their own country where, behind the Japanese lines, they made contact with the local resistance forces and prepared landing grounds for supplies and the dropping of British officers, with whom they formed the famous Force 136. But for the sudden collapse of Japan they would have played a vital part in the projected invasion of Malaya.

Some were caught and killed, and all were in peril right up to the end. Now the London Gazette has announced that their senior officer, Lt Col Prince Subba Svasdim has been awarded the OBE. Captains Prem Buri and Rachit Buri, now medical students, received the Military Cross, and 10 others the MBE in recognition of gallant and distinguished service in the field. Most of them are back at their studies in England. They were:

Capt Praprit Na Nagara, Maj Snoh Nilhjarhogn, Capts Prasert Padummananada, Tos Pantumasan, Thana

Poshygnanda, Pratan Pramekamol, Areon Scrathesh, Kris Tosayananda, Maj Puey Ungphakorn, Capt Samran Varnbriesha.

The Times 12 Oct 46 AWARD OF GEORGE CROSSES HEROES OF AMMUNITION TRAIN EXPLOSION

Two George Crosses and two George Medals were among 10 awards gazetted yesterday for gallantry at Savernake, Wilts on January 2 last, when an explosion occurred in an ammunition train.

Amongst the list of awards was Sergeant James Henry Matthews of The Royal Pioneer Corps who was awarded The George Medal.

The explosion occurred during the loading of an ammunition train from lorries. Fire broke out and quickly spread to another ammunition train alongside. Further major explosions and extensive fire followed and caused the death of eight soldiers and injury to others, and the total destruction of 27 railway wagons and two lorries containing shell, mines and other explosives, out of a total of 96 wagons loaded with ammunition in the sidings.

Sergeant Matthews initiated the movement to safety of six wagons threatened by fire. He personally uncoupled these wagons though the end one was already on fire. By his leadership he encouraged his crew to continue fire-fighting in what was apparently a forlorn hope, not desisting until the water supply was exhausted and he was ordered to withdraw.

The Times 10 Dec 46 ROYAL CORPS AND REGIMENTS WAR SERVICE HONOURS

A special Army Order announces that in recognition of their past services the King has approved that the distinction of "Royal" in their new titles being: Royal Pioneer Corps. His Majesty has approved that the facings of these regiments and corps shall be as follows:

Royal Pioneer Corps – To adopt royal blue.

The then Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps was formed in 1939 from Army Reserves, and served with the BEF in France until the withdrawal in 1940.

Many Pioneers fought bravely in defence of such places as Boulogne and Dunkirk, although the corps was armed only for defence on a 25 per cent basis.

Their gallantry against heavy odds and in conditions of desperate disadvantage won them the privilege of becoming a fully combatant corps when they reformed after the evacuation.

In July, 1940, they numbered 25,000 men; in June 1945, their strength had been expanded to 160,000 United Kingdom and over 270,000 non-United Kingdom men.

In North Africa, Sicily, and Italy they enhanced the reputation they had already won. On D Day in Normandy the Pioneers went ashore "wet-shod" with the infantry. Some of them joined in the fighting and rounded up prisoners before settling down to their own expert tasks.

Later, Pioneers served in the battle of Caen, at the crossing of the Orme, in freeing the island of Walcheren, and in opening the port of Antwerp. At Arnhem, with the 1st Airborne Division, they flew to the scene of action for the first time.

On the Rhine they operated the smoke screen under cover of which the Army crossed the Rhine. ■

Bully Beef in WW2

HAVING RECENTLY been on conversation with Mr Eric Joslin with whom I spent most of my service when in 228 Company I found that he was looking after himself, cooking, shopping, driving himself to the local shopping area.

Also that he would be 101 years of age at the end of this coming June.

I myself in March last had celebrated my 100th birthday, but unlike Eric I am in a Nursing Home. It interests me to know what number of 100 year old veterans there are, can you give me an estimate?

(Ed note: a quick of the As and Bs in our distribution list showed 3 over 100 and 5 in their 90s – it must be all that Bully Beef you had in WW2!)

Philip Cramer

2015 marks the 75th anniversary of the loss of the Lancastria

I am writing to thank you for the help and information you provided concerning my grandfather George H Billings, 50 Coy AMPC (13003803) who was lost on the Lancastria.

We exchanged emails in Aug 14 and since then, using the information and contacts you provided, I have been able to secure the Lancastria medal from the Scottish Government.

As you are no doubt aware it is the 75th anniversary of the loss of the Lancastria on 17th June 2015 and I am attending a

memorial service on Clydeside Glasgow this coming Saturday (13th June) as a guest of the Lancastria Society.

I shall be wearing his five medals, 2 WW1, 2 WW2 and of course the Lancastria.

I have enclosed a donation to help with your continuing good work with the Pioneer Corps.

Once again, thank you most sincerely for your help.

Best wishes.

David Baggaley

Did you serve in the Falklands?

I THOUGHT I should let you know that I applied for, and have just received, the South Atlantic Medal without Rosette.

I was 2ic the Army Graves Registration Team which recovered the British dead from the Falkland Islands after the 1982 conflict and I applied as a result of the decision to extend the qualifying period. I am anxious that the rest of the team should know this so that they might also apply as they did a fine job and thoroughly deserve this recognition. Those wishing to apply should visit www.gov.uk/the-ministry-of-defence-medal-office or write to: Defence Business Services, Ministry of Defence Medal Office, Innsworth House, Imjin Barracks, Gloucester, GL3 1HW Many thanks, Mike Wilson Major(Retired) RPC

I do feel it would be helpful if you would publish the fact that I have received the medal, and my justification for it, as there was some doubt we would qualify in that the AGRT did not operate on the islands for the requisite time scale of 30 days. I had to show that we did spend 30 days in the qualifying area. It might help the team, if in their applications they included something along the lines of my justification which was:

"Served with the Army Graves Registration Team to recover the British dead on the Falkland Islands after the conflict with Argentina. Departed UK on MS Strathewe 2 Sep 82, arrived Falkland Islands 25 Sep 82. Departed Falkland Islands on RFA Sir Bedivere 25 Oct 82, arrived UK 16 Nov 82.

Whilst the time we actually spent on the Islands themselves did not amount to 30 days, I believe that from the time the team entered the qualifying area to the expiry date of 21 Oct would have exceeded 30 days."

I do want to ensure the team receives the recognition it deserves.

Mike Wilson

Deeply proud of the RPC

PLEASED TO read about 'The Simpson Bust' on pages 14 and 15 of the last Newsletter. Following my transfer from 522 Copy RPC to the RAMC in the early 60's.

I had the honour of nursing General Sir Frank in the VIP Ward at BMH Millbank. When he heard I had been a Pioneer, he insisted I attended him whenever I was on duty, much to the annoyance of the Ward Sister (possibly another reason, among many, why I was posted to 8 Casualty

Clearing Station in Malaya). Sir Frank was a man's man and deeply proud of the RPC, and all who serviced under the 'Red on Green'. I remember, before leaving for Malaya, Sir Frank invited my wife to be and myself, on a personal tour of the Royal Hospital Chelsea.

He took us into areas not seen by the general public. A great man, who's memory I have the greatest respect.

Michael Guest

Deeply touched by this

WELL Norman Brown I think it's fair to say the page you created in memory of Warrant Officer Charlie Wood in your magazine was proudly recognised by his mother Barbara Nicholson.

She asked me to post this message and thank you for publishing the article in such an honourable manner:

"Dear Jarra I have just read the story of Charlie in the pioneer magazine I am so deeply touched by this story I cried while reading it, and to say that so many people did respect Charlie is unbelievable.

I didn't realise that so many people do care and as I have always said Charlie was a soldier like any other who lost his life but all I can say is Thank you so so much for this.

I am going to try and get another 2 copies so I can put them in frames and give them to my daughters which I know will make them proud to know that you wrote this with such meaning and love.

Thank you once again from the deepest part of my heart and respect to you and your family xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Jarra Brown

A pleasant surprise

THANK YOU for my winning gift of a special decorated cushion for spotting the Cuneo mouse in the last edition, it was a pleasant surprise.

All the copies of your newsletters I keep in A4 binders but not the ring type. The reason is my family often borrow them to read. This week I was looking at the October 2007 edition and was greatly amused by the article "It didn't cost you a penny" with the 34 sketches.

Also Norman do you send a copy of your Newsletter to Arthur Sullivan who lived in

Wallasey but I think he may have moved down to Colchester to be with his daughter. All my family including grandchildren think your Newsletters are wonderful and so do I.

Will it be all right if I send you the story of Bill Sears when he served in the 8th Army in Africa, it is quite good. Bill and I have been friends for about 40 years, but regret we are now of an age when we are not physically fit and so we are sorry but we will not be going to the reunion in July.

George Pringle

Give him my address



■ Jack McTaggart and Les Banks in the Sgts Mess

Pictures: Jack McTaggart

RELATIVE TO page 54 of the April Newsletter, I was in Horsley Hall with Les Banks in 1952-1957, it was good to see his picture in your last newsletter.

Enclosed is a photograph of us in the Sgts Mess, could you please give him my address. I was a Sgt from 1954-1957 and

acting CSM when he went on leave. I moved to Australia in 1958. I read the newsletter from page to page – great.
Jack McTaggart

Ed Note: Have passed your address on as requested, hope to see you at the next reunion :)

Horsley Hall again

THANK YOU for the Pioneer Magazine it is a great read.

As I was in training at Horsley Hall in Jan 1954 we were never told the history of the Corps and have now after reading the magazine feel very proud to have served my

two years in our Corps.

Keep up the good work in producing such a good "Pioneer" magazine.

Doug Rolfe
ex Sgt 251 Coy
Kineton

THE PIONEER

■ HI NORMAN I received the newsletter this morning what an excellent edition, keep up the good work and hope to see many more newsletters in the future.
John Hatfield

■ NORMAN, well done with the 'Pioneer' – again! The Brown team is still setting the standard for others to strive for. Best wishes
Brig HJ Hickman

■ THANK YOU for a wonderful magazine which I received today. I had a tear in my eyes with Omaha Beach, my dad was that gunner in one of the Landing Crafts, so thanks again.
Keith Moore
(Victoria, Australia)

■ I WOULD like to say a massive thank you to Norman Brown for another fantastic read of the Pioneer Magazine. Some great stories and lovely photo's especially the unique colour photos of the landings in Italy.
James Upfield

■ RECEIVED my Newsletter this morning, what an awesome read keep up the good work buddy.
Derrick Shaw

■ THE MAGAZINE is excellent and the many plaudits of you in the magazine are very well deserved. Well done.
Ross Bennett

■ MANY congratulations on a another fantastic magazine. The hard work put in by you and your son Paul, has made this magazine one of the best, in my view, Newsletters' produced by any Regimental Association. The photographs and the stories make it a unique Newsletter for all our members.
Pat Fleming

■ I WOULD not like this issue to pass without congratulating you on producing an excellent copy of the Pioneer in colour. The copy and photos are first class, and very professional lay-out and interesting to read.
Dennis Hanks



Write in or email us...

The Royal Pioneer Corps Association

c/o 1 Regiment RLC
St David's Barracks
Graven Hill
Bicester OX26 6HF

or email us at:
royalpioneer corps@gmail.com





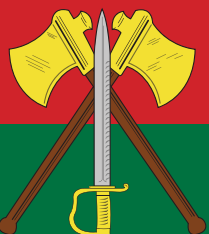
Top Left
2Lt PDN Baird & Sgt Downes
Gibraltar Bks Northampton
64-66

Top Right
9 Sig Regt - year not known

Middle
WO1s Ledgey and Warren
with Lady Thatcher in the
Falklands

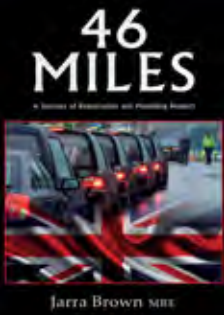
Bottom Right
Capt Crook, Sgt Woodward,
Capt Horne and Maj Davies
at the 1 Div Shoot

Background
Lt Alan Sharp



Blast from the Past

Here are a selection of photographs from The Royal Pioneer Corps Association archives.



Journey of Honour

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

JARRA Brown is a former Army Commando soldier who joined the police in 1990, serving 22 years and retired in March 2012. He was the instrumental link between the Police and the military over the repatriations through Wootton Bassett and was awarded the MBE in 2011 New Years' Honours List.

When he hears church bells he cannot fail to be reminded of the hundreds – 345 to be precise – of service personnel who passed through the beautiful rural Wiltshire country side into Oxfordshire. These men and women were not hiking across its green pastures or sitting on top of the number 55 bus, instead they were lifeless,

resting inside a coffin draped with the Union flag. By the end of August 2011 the bells of St Bartholomew's Church in Wootton Bassett had tolled more times than the residents of this once peaceful town cared to think about, for each chime represented the moment the police convoy accompanying the hearse from RAF Lyneham entered the High Street.

A Moment frozen in time, a moment when the residents of this town came to show their respects, a moment that couldn't have been more fitting even if it had been choreographed. There was no call to arms by the Town Crier, just a spontaneous, modest and unprompted response to those who had paid the ultimate price in the name of duty.

46 Miles is not a book about the politics

of war, the whys and wherefores of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, or indeed the hidden agendas and government strategies. It is about a town which captured the hearts of our nations and whose emotions rippled the entire 46 mile journey of honour, dignity and respect into Oxford. It is dedicated to those 345 people who, having signed up to serve their Queen and country, paid with their lives. Wootton Bassett, who nurtured the grieving on every occasion, wanted to let the nation know that these brave soldiers will never be forgotten.

(Ed note: it is important to read this book without shedding a few tears)

46 MILES
AUTHOR: JARRA BROWN
ISBN: 978-1-908336-81-1



Arnhem Lift

Report: Norman Brown
Pictures: Supplied

BORN IN 1917 into a family of wealthy German-Jewish bankers, Louis Hagen was brought up in Potsdam, on the outskirts of Berlin. Apprenticed as an engineer with BMW, in 1934 some indiscreet comments he had made about Hitler's SA led to his being arrested and sent to a concentration camp, where he was beaten and humiliated until, after six weeks, rescue came at the hands of one of his family's influential friends.

His parents now realised that Germany was no longer safe for their five children and arrangements were made to get them out. Louis Hagen came to England, where he worked for several years until war broke out and he was officially classified as an 'enemy

alien'. He volunteered for the Army and was called up into the Pioneer Corps. In 1943 he joined the Glider Pilot Regiment, which changed his name to Lewis Haig in case he were to be captured. On 17 September 1944 he and his comrades were ordered into action at Arnhem.

On his return he was posted to a glider unit in India; it was there, early in 1945, that he learned that Arnhem Lift had been published. In India, he almost immediately transferred to the staff of Phoenix magazine, for which he travelled widely as an official war correspondent. After the war he worked as a journalist in Berlin for the Sunday Express, and then for John Bull and Country Life.

In 1950 he formed his own film company, Primrose Film Productions, which he still runs. Married to a Norwegian, he

divides his time between homes in England and Norway.

Forty-five years after the battle, at a dinner party in Germany, the author found himself next to a man of about his own age, the former Major Winrich Behr who had been Adjutant to Field Marshall Model during the Arnhem battle.

The two men became friends. Louis Hagen's interest in the battle was rekindled and Behr told him his own side of the story, which is included here.

Here, too, are balanced assessments of the planning and strategy of the operation, of the remarkable German reaction to the airborne incursion, and the reasons for its failure.

ARNHEM LIFT
AUTHOR: LOUIS HAGEN
ISBN 978-0-850523-75-1



The Last Post

Since the last newsletter it is with great sadness to report the following deaths

HOLLOWAY LEONARD HENRY (LENNY) 13029232 EX CPL 8 APR 15 (AGED 100)

He landed on Juno Beach with 73 Company Pioneer Corps. For recognition of his services he was awarded France's highest decoration, the Légion d'Honneur. The accolade has been ratified by the Ministry of Defence. He was a 29-year-old corporal with the Pioneer Corps on Juno Beach on 6 June 1944 and helped keep the front line supplied with ammunition.

He recalled: "When we came over the side of the boat the sea was calm. We had a hell of a lot of stuff to carry. Our job was to unload the boats that came ashore with ammunition and put them on to lorries to go to the front line."

He added: "D-Day was the most amazing thing and the organisation was marvellously thought out. How the Germans couldn't see all the ships arriving I don't know. You are just a soldier, you are not there to stand and reason why you are here. You are a soldier and you do or die."

Leonard, who also served in Sicily and North Africa before the war ended, said: "My secret to a long life is to have a whisky a day and to always keep active."

Lenny was part of the Royal British Legion for more than 50 years, is survived by his five children, 24 grandchildren, 31 great grandchildren and six great great grandchildren.

HOLLOMBY PG (PETE) 24401312 EX CPL 23 APR 15 (AGED 58)

FARRINGTON PHILLIP 13119123 EX PTE 2 MAY 15 (AGED 94) DUBLIN

The last known surviving Irish soldier to have been pardoned for leaving the Irish Defence Forces to fight for the Allies in World War Two has died. Phil Farrington was involved in the liberation of the Belsen concentration camp, but had been jailed as a deserter when he returned to Ireland on leave.

He was among a group of servicemen who received an Irish government pardon in 2013, following a two-year campaign.

Mr Farrington died in a Dublin hospital on Saturday morning at the age of 94.

Having gained independence from Britain less than a generation earlier in 1922, the Republic of Ireland remained neutral during WW2. At the time, the Irish government referred to the global conflict as "the emergency".

Mr Farrington was among a number of Irish soldiers who went absent without leave (AWOL) from the Irish Defence Forces and joined the British Army to fight against the Nazis.

However, instead of being treated as war heroes, many were treated as criminals when they returned to their native land.

In 1945, the then Irish prime minister Éamon de Valera passed an emergency powers order, outlining the punishments for "desertion in time of national emergency".

Many servicemen were dismissed from the Irish Defence Forces, lost their pensions

and were barred from holding jobs paid for by the state.

Peter Mulvany, who led the Irish Soldiers Pardons Campaign from 2011 to 2013, said that when Mr Farrington first joined the British Army, he became a member of the Royal Sussex regiment.

When he returned to Ireland on Army leave during WW2, he was arrested and put into a prison in Cork.

"On his return to the Irish Defence Forces, he went absent again and joined the Royal Pioneer Corps," Mr Mulvany told the BBC, "and it was with the Pioneer Corps in Germany he was involved in Belsen's liberation."

Mr Farrington spoke about the harsh treatment he received as a detainee in Cork in the book *Spitting on a Soldier's Grave*, written by Liverpool author and veteran, Robert Widders. The Irishman recalled how the inmates were never allowed to speak to each other and were given very little food.

"We were in jail through the winter," he said. "It was freezing cold without any bedding or heating. And once a week we'd all be hosed down with cold water."

Sometimes we had to stand to attention for hours in the freezing cold."

Mr Mulvany started the campaign after Queen Elizabeth's visit to the Republic of Ireland four years ago, the first state visit by a British monarch since the partition of Ireland.

"The cordial response from the Irish public to the Queen's visit to Ireland in May 2011 suggested that there would be a chance of success to seek redress from the Irish government for these blacklisted soldiers and their families,"

Mr Mulvany said. In 2012, the Irish government apologised for the way Irish WW2 veterans were treated by the state.

In May 2013, the Irish parliament passed legislation granting a pardon to the almost 5,000 soldiers who left the armed forces to serve with the Allies during WW2.

The bill also granted an amnesty and immunity from prosecution to the servicemen. The campaigner said he had learned of Mr Farrington's death "with regret".

The pensioner had been in the care of staff at a veterans' hospital in Foxrock, County Dublin.

ROBERT RAC (ROBERT) 23030770 EX SGT (AGED 79) BASSINGSTOKE

ANSLOW ROY 23423943 PTE (AGED 76) CWMARAN Served 1957 – 1959

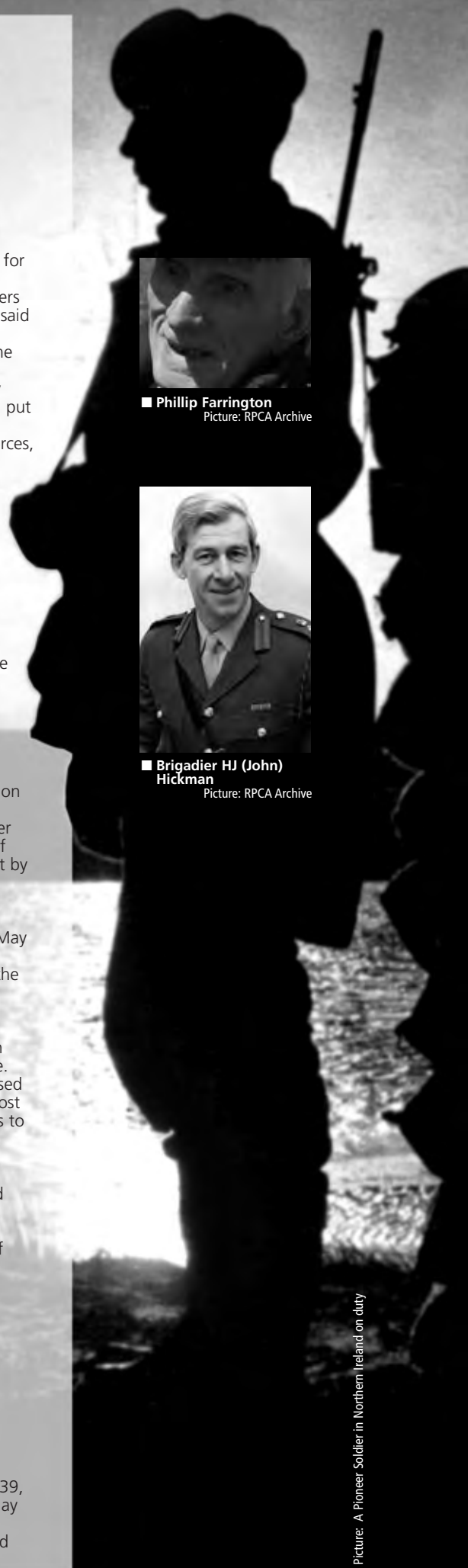
**WHITE FREDERICK EDWARD 5385396
EX PTE 16 DEC 15 (AGED 92) OXFORD**
Enlisted into RA (Searchlights) on 2 Sep 39, transferred to the Pioneer Corps on 7 May 42 and joined 238 Coy. Landed in Normandy on D+4) and served until 4 Aug 46



■ **Phillip Farrington**
Picture: RPCA Archive



■ **Brigadier HJ (John) Hickman**
Picture: RPCA Archive



Picture: A Pioneer Soldier in Northern Ireland on duty

HALLIGAN WILLIAM MICHAEL 23247980
EX CPL 10 MAY 15 (AGED 77) HUDDERSFIELD.
Served from Jul 55 to Jun 58

ROBERTS GEORGE ALFRED 22183801 EX CPL 7
MAR 15 (AGED 82) BARNSELY.
Served 7 Jul 52 to 6 Jul 55 and 8 Aug 56 to 25 Jan 57

WOOD KEVIN ALAN 21125327
EX PTE 11 APR 15 (AGED 85) DAGENHAM.
Served 13 Apr 62 to 13 May 69 mainly in 521 Coy RPC (also had former service in Middlesex Regt from 1947 – 1953).

WOOD KEVIN ALAN 21125327
EX PTE 11 APR 15 (AGED 85) DAGENHAM.
Served 1962 – 1984. A regular attendee to the Pioneer Reunions.

HICKMAN HJ (JOHN) 460866)
BRIG (DAPL) 11 SEP 15 (AGED 79) ALDERHOLT,
FORDINGBRIDGE

Served 1957 – 1989. Brigadier John Hickman was born of farming parents in Warwickshire and educated at Solihull School. He enlisted into the Royal Pioneer Corps in Feb 55 (service number 23263488) and was quickly recognised for his potential. He achieved Best Student on a Potential NCOs Cadre and in Sep 57 promoted Sgt, appointed as an instructor for recruit, NCO and officer training.

He was commissioned in May 59 (service number 460866) and joined 260 Coy which was then tasked with clearing unexploded ordnance from the North Yorkshire moors upon which Fylingdales Station now stands. He next served in 206 Coy at Stratford Upon Avon and later still 521 Coy at Bicester, which he also commanded.

During tours at the Training Centre he served as Adjutant, Second in Command and Senior Instructor at the Pioneer School. In these and other appointments he has been responsible for a number of significant developments in Corps training, particularly in leadership and management. He continued to take a close professional interest in training methods and always regarded training and development as probably the most satisfying as well as the most important aspect of the military profession.

His service abroad has included Pioneer Civil Labour Units in North Africa and Germany and on the staff of HQ British Army of the Rhine. After a short tour as Second in Command of 13 Group at Bielefeld he moved to HQ Directorate Army Pioneers and Labour to take up the position of Assistant Director. In June 1981 he was awarded the OBE.

The citation reads: Assistant Director of Army Pioneers and Labour April 1980 to January 1981. Lieutenant Colonel Hickman assumed the appointment of Assistant Director of Army Pioneers and Labour in May 1979, and as the only grade one officer of a very thinly manned Directorate, is totally responsible for the policy co-ordination of the masses of detail that routinely passes through all Directorates, most of which are staffed at a higher level; this he does quite magnificently in the most positive and cheerful way. Currently the Royal Pioneer Corps is going through a period of rapid expansion, which has placed great demands on the Assistant Director. There is no doubt that his astute staff expertise and negotiating dexterity has been largely responsible for, not only steering this expansion with great skill, but creating the atmosphere of complete confidence with the other Ministry of

Defence departments with whom he deals. He never spares himself in his efforts to further to good of the Corps and the Army.

During the last six months the Deputy Corps Secretary retired, and due to a recruiting ban the post was vacant for three months. Lieutenant Colonel Hickman without the slightest hesitation, took on the responsibilities of the post, which meant examining all applications for grants to the Army Benevolent Fund from impoverished ex members of the Corps or their dependants. Also dealing with Corps Council matters, all of which involved him working innumerable 'off duty' and weekends hours for the benefit of others. A lesser man would have failed. Lt Col Hickman has also been responsible for co-ordinating Recruiting liaison for the Corps, and has travelled with the Director Army Recruiting teams to lecture headmasters and teachers conventions, and also Army recruiting seminars. He has also spent many evenings and weekends attending Corps Recruiting displays, encouraging officer and soldier entry into the Army; resulting in considerable success, not only for his Corps but for the Army at large.

This senior officer is an inspiration and fine example to everyone, and an outstanding ambassador for the Army. His dedication and devotion to duty are far in excess of what would normally be expected of an excellent grade one officer.

During a tour in Germany he served at HQ BAOR in Industrial Relations and Management Appointments and also as Commander Labour Resource. During this period he was responsible for much of the development work for the then new Pioneer Labour Support Units which replaced PCLUs in 1984.

He assumed the appointment of Director Army Pioneers and Labour on 19 March 1985 and retired in 1989, also in that year he was awarded the CBE.

His citation reads: Director, Army Pioneers and Labour 12 Mar 85 – 30 Jun 88

Since his appointment as Director of Army Pioneers and Labour in March 1985 Brigadier Hickman has worked tirelessly to enhance the already high standards of his Corps and has succeeded. This has not been an easy achievement. Indeed it has been accomplished against a background of severe pressure on manpower, reducing resources and various major re-organisations – all of which would have daunted a man of lesser ability, dedication and energy. Throughout his time as their Director, his small Corps has operated on a plethora of diverse tasks worldwide. From Belize to Northern Ireland they have carried out, under his guidance, not only the normal administrative functions associated with the Pioneer and Labour role: they have undertaken many important, operational functions, notably in Ulster. These have included Security Protection of HQ, Personal Protection Rover group, dog handling for guard, search and bomb disposal duties, plus support for Royal Engineers working on the reinforcement of Security Force Bases. In all this, they have gained a deservedly high reputation, which is on no small part to the drive, encouragement and personal leadership of their Director.

As Director, he has proved a great innovator, as well as being a first class leader. His Corps has been at the forefront in developing the latest labour management techniques and using them to the advantage of the Army as a whole. It can justly claim to be a fine example of a

cost effective operation and this again owes much to Brig Hickman's skill and encouragement. His dedication to his Corps and the Army is a shining example which is reflected throughout his Corps.

Despite his many commitments as Director, he has much enhanced the public view of the Army by his participation in Business Education in the Northampton area, where his contribution has been of great benefit to the community at large. He has also found the time to be a very active President of Basketball both for the Army and Combined Services. In summary, Brigadier Hickman's immense contribution to his Corps and to the Army in general, has been well in excess of this required in the normal course of duty. His stewardship of the RPC during the past 3 years has been a true pinnacle of 33 years and thoroughly deserves appropriate recognition.

However his work for the Pioneers continued, he remained a member of the Council of the RPC Association and was appointed its Chairman in Feb 90 and remained in post until Oct 96. He was then appointed President of the RPC Association and held this post until he finally retired in Jul 13 – nearly 60 years' service as a Pioneer! Our condolences go to his wife June and to his son and daughter Julian and Rachel and their respective families.

The Association received many messages of condolences, the following are some examples:

Norman very sad news about the Brigadier. He always use to make a point of coming in to see me in Salisbury when I worked at Tesco. He and his wife were lovely people. He also met Michele when she was interviewed for the DAPL secretary's job. Please pass on our condolences to his immediate family. Kind regards, Tony Way

Norman, Really sorry to hear the news. John Hickman was a real Pioneer who always had the interests of the Corps and its soldiers at heart. Recent developments must have come as a bitter blow to him, when he had struggled for so long to promote and maintain the Pioneer role. RIP. Best Wishes Robert Webb

Dear Norman, So sorry to hear this news especially as I knew him and served with him through much of his career. God bless his family. Yours Michael Grinnel-Moore

A gentleman, an exacting boss for accuracy and clarity; he was my first boss at DAPL in 1981. He was always helpful and would always listen and offer advice. Socially he was very kind to me as we were a very small crew at DAPL in Andover. I bought his small speedboat from him, on which he had done a great deal of work himself and he always asked how it was running and made sure that I was taking care of it. My sincere condolences go to his family who have lost a loving husband and father. RIP Brigadier John. Rod Othen

For me, in my career, he was a inspiration, a senior figure who saw a person for their potential not for the way they were described to him. He was a gentleman who i wanted to work for. My prayers go out to his family. Neil Robertshaw

Thanks Norman, very sad. The Corps has lost an outstanding member who worked and fought tirelessly to promote the Pioneer cause. Gary Cooper

Thank you for letting me know the sad news. He was a great support to me when I took over as CO 23 Pnr Regt RLC. Mark Baker

And finally...

**Two from George Pringle - The D-Day Dodgers, surviving D-Day +2.
Geordie Dewsnap, a Green Goddess and SSgt Perry...**

**Report: Norman Brown
Cartoon: MAC**

THE D-DAY DODGERS by George Pringle... It is generally believed it was Lady Astor, who was an MP, who was old and not pretty who first called the men of the 5th Army who were fighting in the Italian Campaign the "D"Day Dodgers but then she was known to say many things she must have later regretted.

She was the one who once famously chided Winston Churchill who was drunk - to which he countered that she was ugly and at least he would be sober in the morning!

During another encounter with the Prime Minister she said if he was her husband she would give him poison, to which he replied if he was her husband he would drink it!

For many of you who served in Italy will be aware of the nickname the D Day Dodgers who were and still are the famous band of fighting men who inched their way over the mountains through mud and snow and torrents of rain drawing away and engaging the cream of the German army

away from the scene of Normandy landings but with depleted forces they fought their way to Northern Italy but at a cost of 46,000 dead and 300,000 wounded.

So remember them as you sing this song to the tune of Lilli Marlene...

We are the D-Day Dodgers, out in Italy
Always on the Vino and always on the spree

8th Army and 1st Army skivers and lots of idle Yanks

We lived in hotels in Rome dodged the tanks

For we are the D Day Dodgers out in Italy

We landed at Salerno which was a

holiday with pay

Jerry brought his bands down to play us on our way

They showed us the sights and brewed up tea

We all sang songs and the beer was free

For all the D Day Dodgers out in Italy

Naples and Cassino were taken in our

stride

We did not go to fight we just went for the ride

Anzio and Salerno were all a farce

We did nothing at all as we had a day pass

For we are the D Day Dodgers out in Italy

Once we had a blue light as we going home

Back to dear old Blighty never more to roam

Then someone whispered in France you will fight

But we said "blow that ". We will just sit tight

For we are the D Day Dodgers out in Italy

If you are in the mountains amidst the snow and rain

You will see rugged crosses some which bear no name

Heart breaks and toil and soldiering done

The lads beneath they just slumber on

For they were the D Day Dodgers out in Italy.

Then on the way to Florence we had a lovely time

We ran a bus to Rimini right through the German Gothic Line

Soon to Milano we shall go

When we have chased Jerry beyond the River Po

For we are the D Day Dodgers out in Italy

The years have quickly passed today we are old and grey

But we still remember this our special day

When all the lads and lasses are gathered here

To sing the songs and drink the beer

For we were and still are the D Day Dodgers who fought in Italy.

TO ME today it is June 8th 1944. and not 2015 as my thoughts are recalling memories of 71 years ago so instead of writing this epistle I would be leaping out of the (LCI) landing craft infantry into water and racing up the beach to the nearest cover which is about 60 yards away and to avoid, if possible, the German machine gunners or the good luck to avoid treading on a land mine.

The houses and shops just off the promenade were occupied by German troops and tanks whose plan and object was to stop us getting off the beach and reach the trees and fields with ditches for cover and have a palaver to what was our



Geordie Dewsnap came downstairs after a heavy night on the beer. His wife, Laura, says "Geordie I'm wearing something of yours which you have not worn for 30 years". "Is it my beret?" "No" "My boots?" "No" "Why I give in", says Geordie, "What is it?" "I'll tell you", says his wife, "It's your Gas Mask".

Coming up in the next newsletter ...

- News ■ Forthcoming events ■ Your stories ■ Your Letters ■ WW1 in colour
- Bill Sears Life Story ■ Blast from the Past ■ Digging through the Archives
- Photo Gallery ■ Book Reviews ■ Press Cuttings ■ And much more!



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next move. So this was the Second day of Operation Overlord and we had landed on Gold Beach near a town called ARROMANCHES.

All going to plan but it was occupied by Germans who were not very friendly so I did not like this place and was glad to take cover and to make contact with our Sergeant Major who was taking a roll call to ascertain the names of the dead or wounded and pass on the information to our Commanding Officer who would ask Headquarters for reinforcements before our next battle to attack the Germans and occupy more land.

Then our Lieutenant received the orders from HQ and then informed the Sergeant Major who then told us that our next move was to advance and make contact with an Infantry regiment who were having a lot of trouble as they attacked the Germans and to support them.

This skirmish was successful and it had been a very long day so we were informed that we could make a brew and eat some of our hard tack biscuits.

However, we received orders to make our way to the North of the town and locate a suitable empty building and assemble there and await further orders.

The afternoon and evening passed by until when it was dark we could then make

our way and advance further inland.

So passed my "D" day plus 2 and I was still alive! George Pringle

GEORDIE DEWSNAP goes to the doctor, "There's something wrong with my arse." The doc says, "What is it?" Geordie says, "It keeps singing 'Sunderland, Sunderland, Sunderland'." The doc says, "Don't worry, lots of arseholes sing that."

I TOOK I took the photo on Thursday 4th June on Brighton Front, I wonder if it is still a pig to drive, does this bring back any memories? Will you pass it on, many may find it very interesting. Regards Tom Appleyard.



AT THE last minute before going to press we received a photograph of 25009295 SSgt Perry RLC whom was awarded the GOC Force Troop Command Certificate of Meritorious Service (article on page 22).



AND FINALLY let us increase the attendance at next year's Reunion, those that attended this year tell your friends how much you enjoyed it.

Please remember to obtain the membership discount you must book by 1 May 2016.

THE PIONEER



■ Reunion Weekend 2015, available to purchase at £10 (18x12 inches) which includes postage and packing

Picture: Paul Brown



This tribute is to the soldiers
and officers of
The ROYAL PIONEER CORPS
and its predecessors who served from
1917 to 1993

They came from the United Kingdom,
British Empire, Commonwealth, China,
Egypt, Ireland, Macedonia and other countries;
26,806 died while bearing arms for peace and freedom

Labor omnia vincit



LABOR OMNIA VINCIT