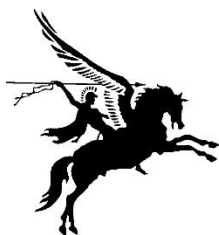


The following articles were originally published in the printed version of the Journal in December 2001, Issue No. 5



The Airborne Engineer

December 2001 Issue No. 5

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Airborne Engineers Directory

(amended as at 31st August 2001)

The most recent edition of the AEA Directory is now available for purchase. Since the last publication there have been more than a hundred new entries and a substantial number of amendments, which include changes of address/telephone numbers etc.

This year's directory is selling at last year's price - Hard Copy £5.50 or an E-mail Copy £4.50

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From the President

Brigadier Garth Hewish MBE

I write this in troubled times. The International scene concerns many and it looks likely that our Armed Forces will be engaged in active service in the near future-yet again. I know that in whatever way emerges to be appropriate our Association will be ready to play a proper supporting role. However I hope that between now and the time this appears in print the conflicting issues will have been resolved and peace restored.

As the year's end approaches I am happy to report that overall the Airborne Engineers Association (AEA) continues to operate on a sound footing, with a strong membership and a good number of those intent on seeing that we meet the objectives set out in our Constitution. We also owe much to the Committee for the way in which they have selflessly pursued the Association's best interests and have ensured its continued development and wellbeing. I am sure that the AEA had already grown to a size that exceeds the founding members expectations. All that having been said, I have been prompted to write something for those who are not happy or were unable to attend to know why at the AGM the majority voted that your Committee should approach the Royal Engineers Association (REA) with a view to us becoming a National Functional Branch of it and in the process making available the full benevolent resources of the REA. Your Committee was properly authorised, by vote, to reach an agreement with the REA providing that:

- We retain our title, our structure and that no changes are imposed on our method of operation
- There are no changes to our funds and financial arrangements
- We retain our charity status
- There should be no cost to a present fully paid member of the AEA, as he automatically and additionally becomes a life member of the REA.
- There shall be no change to the qualification for membership of the AEA.

Our approach along these lines will be considered by the REA Management Committee at their meeting in January 2002. I am confident that the above conditions will be met.

This proposed link was considered 5 years ago at Chatham, but not pursued since conditions were not then favourable. It was thought that a 5-year period should be allowed to lapse before the subject was reviewed. During this interim period much has changed within the REA and culminating in the present EinC seeing that the successful way ahead for the REA will depend increasingly on the success of Functional Branches. (such as Armoured, Survey, Postal, Commando etc) rather than Geographical Branches which are experiencing dwindling membership. Against this background of change your Committee felt that it would be wrong for the AEA apart as the REA reshapes itself for the future. We can and should, as members of the Corps Family, stand alongside and influence the REA's way ahead. It is for sure that we can't contribute if we stay on the outside.

I have, so far, left out the highly charged emotional issues. Whatever it is that causes strong Airborne emotional tie-long may it live. It is not being threatened by anything that is being done to regularise the position of the AEA within the Corps Family. The sentiment towards the AEA and the day-to-day life of a member of the AEA will not be changed by us becoming a Functional Branch of the REA. However, the support of the larger Corps organisation will be available to us when we need it and will give us the platform from which we move in to the future.

Let us keep the whole in perspective. We should all be proud of being Royal Engineers and of all that the Corps has achieved in its life to date. Additionally we can allow ourselves that extra pride in our Airborne Family and all that it entails. Let us enjoy the best of both worlds.

I conclude by noting that the large majority of members feel that only good will result from our closer links with the Corps family, so please let us accept that democratic procedures were followed, that there are no hidden agendas and that we move into the future in a positive frame of mind and to the good of all involved.

I wish all a Happy Christmas and a healthy 2002.

From the Chair

Bob Prosser - Association Chairman

North, East, South, West, we have held our reunions throughout the UK and each time old friends turn up. some for the first time. Why are we so hoarse on the Monday morning? Is it the talking or the drinking? Whatever it was, it was good. Thank you everyone who came to Bristol and the AGM and for all your support.

It is Blackpool next year, 11th – 14th October, please put it in your diary, same price as year 2000. Hope to see you all there plus many more who were unable to get to Bristol.

May I wish you all a Very Happy Christmas and Good Health for the New Year.

A Good Personal Staff is Crucial

Former Troop Commander

I remember my uncle telling me that during the war he could never get a really good driver/batman. They were either, good drivers and lousy batmen or vice versa. Luckily in my day I had a driver and batman and radio operator sharing my life (and fags and anything else they could get their hands on) Talking of which I was not the only one to get a few things wrong as one day we saw what we thought was the 2IC of 9 Sqn walking down the main street of Fayid only to realise it was his batman wearing his blazer, one of his ties, his cavalry twill trousers and suede shoes. I seem to remember the 2IC who was with us had a total sense of humour failure while we enjoyed the joke enormously.

Well, spoilt for choice as you can imagine one would be in 9 Sqn, I selected a batman who nearly killed me, a driver who nearly killed us all and a radio operator who was in the wrong job. He did, in fact become my regimental Chief Clerk when I was a CO. Let's get rid of the batman first. I should have got rid of him first many years ago.

A very well meaning SSM of 9 Sqn in Cyprus saw fit to educate the various batmen in the Squadron in the matter of their duties (apart, that is, from cleaning their officer's kit, (joke) bringing their exhausted officer his meals (joke) making sure he had hot water to shave (joke) and the other normal batman like duties). One of the more demanding chores, the SSM explained, was to be his officer's personal bodyguard, which my hero took very seriously indeed. He must have considered me Colonel Grivas's most likely target for kidnapping, execution or an even worse fate. Anyway, suffice it to say my batman was forever dodging about in front, behind and to the sides to be sure Colonel Grivas was not lying in wait for yours truly as we went about our business (in the infantry role) of trying to find Colonel Grivas. A Greek church was on the list for a search and I approached the front door only to be pushed aside by my batman who informed me that he would have to open the door and go in first in approved fashion with his Sten gun at the ready.

Well, who was I to argue with this proposed sacrifice? Problem. The door would not open. My batman had not noticed that all one had to do to open the door was poke the index finger through a hole in the door and with palm uppermost use said finger to lift the latch. Before I could impart this practical information my batman had hammered the door with the butt of his Sten gun sending two or more rounds past, but incredibly close to, my left ear and fortunately over the head of the Sapper standing next to me. Naturally we quietly remonstrated with him and gently pointed out the error of his ways. I got a new batman.

Now you can appreciate the calibre of my driver when I tell you that two of his exact contemporaries in boys service also wore the red beret and made Lt Col. My driver once made full Corporal but it didn't last. On our way back from a parade for the Duke of Edinburgh on the Rushmoor Arena in Aldershot (where, incidentally, we had the indescribable joy of seeing the Gunners in front leave a gun behind when it fell off the tow hook) Sorry back to my driver who spotted a traffic accident across the street and became so amused and absorbed by it that he drove slap into the squadron vehicle in front of us. Well, somehow, despite the intervention of the driver in front a visit to the OC and several days admiring the Guard he was still my driver in Cyprus sharing the Champ with my radio op, a Jock, my batman/bodyguard and self I can hear my radio op now screaming "You'll kill us all you mad fool" and clinging for dear life to the radio set in the back as we careered down one of the really dodgy Troodos tracks at a seriously life threatening speed. I suspect that the only thing that allowed us all to survive the Jehu at the wheel was the propensity for the Champ to cut out in anything over a moderate temperature due to the fuel pipe passing over the hot engine causing the fuel to evaporate before it reached the carburettor. Throwing a bucket of water over the engine cooled it sufficiently to get going again.

I have to say that when I got my own squadron I picked the best young Sapper to be my batman, taught him to drive and operate the radio and made him LCpl after six months and elevated him to driver for a further six months, and then put him on the JNCO's cadre. I know the first chap I put through this routine gained a green beret and was commissioned, so something must have worked. Sadly, I lost track of later batmen who followed the same routine. I also have to say that in later appointments I had better personal staff than I had in 9 Sqn but they were never as interesting.

Greetings from Down Under

Mal Scott & Henry Witcherley

We would like to congratulate everybody concerned in making and printing the AEA Journal. Fabulous!

Both Henry and I, as you may already know, are long-time members of the Sappers Association, Queensland. Eight of us of the Sapper Association attended the unveiling of the plaques at the 6 RAR Memorial ceremonies on the 9th August. Also there were two Brit Sergeants attached to that battalion for Exercise Longlook, Sgt Tony Tighe and Sgt Mal Young both of 2 PARA. That made three of us wearing Red Berets, so we had a great session and chin wag in the 6 RAR Sgt's Mess following the service.

Finally. Please can you use your influence in getting the English cricket, rugby union, rugby league, tennis, swimming, hockey, netball , etc., teams to actually win some bloody thing soon. Anything! We have to live here and take all the Aussie banter and p*** taking with a cheerful grin and give sportsmanlike congratulations. It's getting wearying doing it non-stop.

Peter Parman (ex 1 Troop)

My regards to all AEA members, and if anyone is travelling to Oz, we would be pleased to see them. We meet at Northfield Returned Serviceman's League (RSL) Hall on the last Monday of each month.

Rogues Gallery

Preparing to deploy to N. Ireland - September 1974



Pete Kershaw, Bob Cole, Paul Downie, Froth Beer, Jake McKue, Danny Daniels, Paddy Savage & Jed Stone
(Froth Beer reckons that this is the last photo of his left leg - August [2001] Journal refers)



6th Airborne Division Reunion - Chelsea Barracks circa 1952/3
L to R: Harry Knowles, Tom Brown, David Breese, ?, Jack Garbutt, Charlie Willbourne, George Hopkins, Dave Docherty, Phil Butler, (all 3 Para Sqn) Cyril Haslett, Gordon Ramsey (both 249 Fd Coy AB) & Ted Coy 3 Para Sqn



We're just borrowing it
Ken Bowen, Danny Hart, ?, Kevin McGrath & Baz Henderson



7 Section, 3 Troop, 1957

Standing: John Prince, Tich Shaw, Mick Crampton, Terry Connors, Sandy Scott, Wally Mayne, Jock Roberson (Tam)
Sitting: Yorkie Elmer, Steve Stevens, Jock Newton, George Brown & Pete Burgess

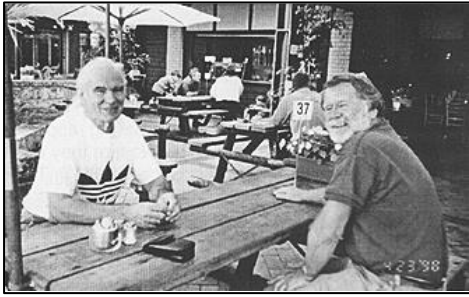
Where's Mick Turner?

Fred Gray

A number of former 9 Squadron friends have asked, "What's happened to Mick Turner?" Being the very restless person that he is, he often takes off in any direction seeing and enjoying as much of life that is on offer. In 1997 he turned up in Australia staying with George Jones for three weeks at his home in Perth before taking off for the more remote parts of the east coast. George received a letter from Mick sometime later telling of a pretty hazardous experience near the Great Barrier Reef. Mick had bought himself a Toyota Hiace long wheel base land vehicle and toured the coast enjoying the many golden beaches that Australia has to offer. After a few weeks of this he became bored and turned inland. He soon found that he liked the coast more than the interior so turned back and headed for Queensland. He bought a 3.9 meter powerboat with a 25 hp engine. Stored with fishing tackle, snorkelling gear and the best Australian cheap wine, he decided to become a "beach bum." He spent most of his time in the water marvelling at the beautiful underwater world that on the Barrier Reef. He caught and ate his own seafood and enjoyed this idyllic life until it came to a sudden stop as the result of an accident.

He was camped at a place called Cedar Bay just south of Cookstown. During the night when a gale was blowing his boat dragged it's anchor and overturned in shallow water. Mick managed to turn it over again and rescue his kit, but the boat was full of water. Having buoyancy tanks and a double bottom this was not too serious; but the fuel tank had been contaminated by sea water. After bailing the boat out he tried to take it out to calmer waters. Before he had gone any distance at all he was again capsized by a large wave which knocked him on his back and the boat landed on his legs; which resulted in a very nasty gash about nine inches long on his calf. He also injured his foot, which left him unable to stand. He crawled out of the water back to the beach. The gash in his leg was pumping blood at an alarming rate, but he was able to stem the flow using a Field Dressing that he carried in his first aid kit. By now the boat had been washed back onto the beach, and was laying on its side filled with water and sand. At this stage he was isolated on a beach about 35 kms from the nearest hamlet that was only accessible by sea. Bailing the water he managed to get the boat floating again and eventually got it into calmer water. Taking stock of his situation he realised that he had big problems. The electric's of his motor were waterlogged, his kit was soaked through, he had a nine-inch gash on his leg and an injury to his foot, he was miles from the nearest civilisation and worried about infection to his leg. Taking antibiotics and painkillers he then tried to get the motor running but without success. He decided to take the boat back inshore and work on it there. For the next two days he worked on the engine but again no luck. The fuel was contaminated. On the third day he put out his red distress signal and lit a fire close-by. He still had plenty of food and water but his leg was the concern. On day four he saw a fishing trawler about half a mile off shore. He lit the fire again but was unable to get any response from the fishing boat. On day five he said that panic was beginning to set in. By now his ankle had swollen to almost twice it's normal size and was black and blue. He realised that there was no possibility of walking out of his predicament, so he decided to row out. As he was preparing for his departure a powerboat appeared about half a mile away. Waving his red panel like mad he was still not able to attract its attention.

Leaving most of his kit hidden in the Rain Forest, which came right down to the beach, he set off to row the forty odd kilometres to the nearest hospital. He estimated it would take two days to complete the trip. He had been rowing for about four hours when the powerboat he had seen earlier returned and took him in tow. He landed at his original starting point. Following a nourishing meal and a good night's sleep he completed the repair to his boat's engine, then returned to Cedar Bay to collect the remainder of his kit. After sorting out his battered gear he sort medical attention for his injuries. Driving to Cairns along the badly corrugated road surface, the water tank of his vehicle broke loose. This was just another in a series of events. At the hospital he was immediately put on a drip feed and a course of antibiotics for five days. He said that he enjoyed the rest and all the fuss and attention given to him by the nurses. Word had got around that he had been stranded on an Island for ten days so was a bit of a celebrity. As he said, "Who was I to spoil a good thing." He left hospital on 15th December but had to attend twice daily for dressing changes and injections. Warned by the South African doctor about possible re-infection he had to stay away from boats and water. The next few days, which covered the Christmas holiday period, was spent resting and lazing about on the beach, reading and drinking lots of Australian red wine.



The last that was heard of Mick Turner was that he was stranded in Queensland due to the rainy season and the need to reregister his motor-cruiser, and also renew his visa. He was considering going to some other remote offshore islands or possibly New Zealand. No doubt he will resurface in the not too distant future.

This article is compiled from a letter written by Mick to George Jones in 1998.

30 Years with 131

Bud Oldfield TD How it Began - Summer of 1956 – Age, a young 17^{1/2}



Hiking in the Derbyshire Moors - (now known as Tabbing), along with a mate of mine Dave Oliver - we stood at the side of the road, whilst a small convoy of army vehicles passed, yes, you've guessed it, full of Paras who were giving us some strange signals, and telling us how f***** stupid it was to be walking. What they didn't know was that they would be walking all night over the hills and crossing a Reservoir into an ambush laid on by a PSI called Timber Woods.

Later that day, looking for a suitable site to pitch tent, we again came upon some of the Paras, who kindly invited us to join them in their Harbour Area. Not only that, but also to share in the evening meal, all in stew followed by fruit pudding and custard. 'Oh yes, and lots of tea. This was our lucky day.

After a full interrogation by the PSI and QM etc., we were invited to join them in their exercise and help out with a night ambush. This we did with great enthusiasm. Can you imagine us, innocent young civvies? After instruction on the 303 rifle - trip flares and not forgetting the thunder flash, we were issued with some blank ammo. Now we were ready! Sgt Barber from Hull, a great bloke, gave us our instructions on the variety of stores and equipment, and later taught me a great deal; which stood me in good stead for the future.

The exercise went down well with a lot of swearing coming from the wood in which the ambush had been laid. Can't think why! So many wanted to kill the PSI and the other Sgts (who had been so kind to us!) Maybe they were tired after the long 'tab' and wet from crossing the reservoir. Anyway after a hot supper and a cup of tea they soon fell quiet and went to bed. (I mean crashed out).

Daybreak came with a clap of thunder; we nearly lost the tent. Yes - it was the same Paras telling us it was time for breakfast - with a thunder flash! This was when we discovered just who they were, 299 Para Fd Sqn RE (TA). There were dozens of Paras now, having appeared overnight, you might say. History shows that they came from three locations HQ and 1 Troop Hull, 2 Troop Doncaster, and 3 Troop Liverpool. As soon as the Doncaster Troop found that both of us young civvies lived there, we were marked men (Information obtained from previous interrogation). Surrounded by SSgt Fowler, Cpl John Barrett (SAS Att) and Cpl John Davis, the latter served many years with 131, and went on to become a Captain and my lifelong buddy. We were given all the necessary information about the Regt and the troop, ending with an invitation to attend the following Tuesday at Scarborough Barracks, Doncaster. To cap it all, they even gave us a lift back to Doncaster, which was most appreciated.

We couldn't wait to attend the barracks that Tuesday, and they said you get paid for it! After meeting the troop commanders, Capt Chance and Capt Creech, the paper work started to flow. Medicals completed, only one more stage, and that was to be attested. Attestation was carried out at a Field Firing Ex held at Scarborough. We had no kit at this time, but was issued with a smock and a Para helmet, and then told to join the rest of the guys and build our own sleeping accommodation. (This was serious stuff). This we did with grass sods and some corrugated iron sheeting. The following weekend we attended at SHQ Middleton Barracks Hull - and were issued with our kit by QM Busty Marriott. Shortly after this we were sent to No1 Parachute Training School, Abingdon. We were just about able to put our kit on in the correct manner. Pre PARA! What's that? The Troop must have been desperate for numbers at the time. We successfully completed the course after many a last minute nervous "pee" and managed to avoid the 'brown paper bags'!

The excitement of it all, being part of the Elite, what more could a young recruit ask for. We proudly returned home to show off our Para Wings. "Yes," directly after the wings parade, everyone rushed to the tailors shop to have them sewn on (As you would).

We now settled down for a couple of years, taking part in as many Weekends and Annual camps as possible, not forgetting drill nights. Parachuting was the thing never missed the chance of a (*Jump*)

I remember my first Annual Camp - (tented camp) this was held at Thetford. The full Regiment attended together with the Para Battalions. Easy to remember because Cpl John Davis (then) was hospitalised with burnt hands. (Must have forgot the safety drills when using petrol) Ask him about it. One poor Para bloke was killed by electrocution, he was assisting in the erection of a metal flagpole, which touched the overhead cables. Not a good start to camp!

October 1959: Called up for National Service.

A bad time as the phasing out of the above was taking place, for the army to become an All-Regular Force.
3 Trg Regt. Cove Farnborough

12 Indep Sqn. Barton Stacey - Andover (disbanded late 1960) 15 Fd Pk Sqn Ripon, spent six months here as a Trade Course Instructor to the regular soldiers- Note As a Sapper!

October 1961: Having completed my 2 years I opted to rejoin 299 Sqn rather than being on the reserve force for 3 years.

1962: Back at Abingdon for my second Para Course - this consisted of one-week refresher, the second week spent at Thetford with other members of 2 Troop. Also, there were some of 9 Sqn members. Our task was to clear a large area of unexploded shells! (BLOODY HELL) I thought. In charge was a 9 Sqn Sgt, Rick Mogg. A good soldier, hard as nails, who was well liked by the lads. His orders for this job - pick them up carefully and slowly walk to the dumping area, we will blow them all up together. Luckily, we all survived this ordeal. (Methods have changed since) Oh, I forgot, the reason for the task? To create a Para DZ that is in use today. (Local Ref - Frog Hill)

1964 - 1965: Attended both camps in Aden. 1964 as part of the Regiment based at AL-ANAD on the Dhala Road. The history of this annual camp has already been documented. 1965 - Aden again but this time only 2 Tp Doncaster based in Little Aden. By this time I had been promoted to Cpl. Our PSI at the time, another stalwart who we owe so much to was Joe Brine.



Weekend Para Ex - Pat Fitzwilliam, John Davis & Bud Oldfield (1966)

1966 - 1967: reorganisation began. The Squadron was to become - 299 Troop based at Hull. (Tp Comd. Capt Ken Newton). Prior to this there were moves to Re-Badge the Doncaster Troop to SAS. Training began to take on a different form. Basically there were three choices:

1. Stay with the Sqn and travel to Hull on drill nights and weekends etc. (90 miles round trip)
2. Attend the SAS selection course at Brecon and hope that the proposed location in Doncaster would be their base.
3. Transfer to some other unit or finish with the TA

As events unfolded some decided to pack it in. A few transferred to other units, with others opting to travel to Hull.

A group of us, about 20 in all, attended the SAS course. I won't go into full details, but a few of the older members failed the course, the rest of us passed with various grades. In due course, about six finally ended up with the SAS which in turn, due to location problems, moved three times, ending up at Leeds. Over a short period of time they lost all our members who went over to them. (What a waste). Had things been done in other ways the SAS could well have ended up with a strong ready-made troop. In the end I decided to stay with the Squadron, and spent many years travelling back and forth to Hull. During this time I moved up through the ranks to SSM, and

completed the APJI course and French Para Wings course. A time, I really enjoyed.

1975 Given a commission to 2Lt and in 1976 promoted to Lt

After passing the required exams I took over as Tp Comd 299 Troop. The OC, Maj Tom Gillett (during the above period) arranged for me to be attached to 9 Sqn for a short period in Cyprus.

This I enjoyed very much, thanks to their OC, Maj Mike Payne and a great 2iC, Capt Ian McGill, who as we all know has progressed on to higher achievements (with pay of course). I'm pleased that he picked up a few pointers from me. Only joking Sir.

1977: Promoted to Capt, after passing another exam. Hard work this officer stuff. I'm really a 'hands on' type, but on we go.

1978: Aged 40 attended Lymestone for the RE Rolluent - Cmdo Course, along with the rest of the squadron, where we sadly exchanged our Red Beret's for Green.

Other posts held within the Sqn:

1. Recruit Trg Officer - Ops Officer- Sqn 2iC

1987: Retirement. Feeling proud, to have been part of the military, and to have shared so much with so many. On leaving the Sqn, I joined the South Yorkshire Police (Specials Unit) becoming a section officer. 1989 - 1995.

Year 2000 - Now fully retired (a couple of years early might I add) and now taking a well-earned rest.

PSIs that served with 299 - Do you know them?

Woods, Edwards, Stevenson, Malley, Matterface, Brine, Magee, Camp, Tape, Gosling, Strickleton, Henry, Halkett.

There are many names not mentioned (all ranks) it would involve too many stories. Anyway, I was asked to produce a short summary of service (Who's Idea Was This?)

For all the encouragement, advice and help given by so many, which enabled me to achieve what I did, I shall always be grateful.

"WHAT NO PENSION?" After all - were only *play soldiers*, as we have so often heard!

Presentation to the Association



The above whisky Quaich has been presented to the Association by our 'Piper' Frank Menzies-Hearn. The Quaich features an engraving of Menzies castle of which Frank is also the 'Piper.'

Many of our reunion dinners have been graced by Frank 'piping' in our President and honoured guests.

On behalf of the Association members we extend our sincere thanks to Frank for this excellent presentation piece.

A Wartime Bridge Demolition Exercise

Major (Retd) Tony Jackson

A curious thing happened the other day. Mr David Phipps of Swindon who was unknown to me rang to ask if I could tell him about a bridge demolition on the Wilts & Berks Canal carried out by 2 Troop 591 (Antrim) Parachute Squadron RE on 19th November 1943.

As I commanded 2 Troop at that time he'd come to the right person (another former 591 officer had told him where he could contact me). I was surprised to be asked to describe a demolition exercise, which took place 58 years ago. Was a Council official belatedly seeking compensation for the demolished bridge? Fortunately this was not so. Mr Phipps explained he was interested in the history of his local area and although he knew that the bridge was blown up during the war he had few details apart from some papers he had unearthed at the Wiltshire County Council Record Office.

These papers included a hand-written memo signed by me informing the tenant farmer on whose land the bridge was situated that on 19th November 1943 there would be a parachute drop followed by demolition of the bridge at 1600 hrs. The farmer forwarded my memo to the County Land Agent who confirmed to him there was no objection to the bridge being demolished provided the RE reinstated the crossing and did not blow him up or any of his animals.

I have kept a file of 591 Squadron and Troop exercises carried out between autumn 1943 and spring 1944. All this training was designed to practise 591 in engineer tasks, which were likely to arise when the invasion of the Continent took place.

591 Squadron were allotted seven Albemarle aircraft on 19th November 1943 of which four were earmarked for 2 Troop. At that time there was an acute shortage of aircraft for parachute training so the Albemarle, which was normally used as a glider tug, was given a trial. It was a small aircraft which could take only 8-10 men and was very cramped for heavily laden paratroops. By the spring of 1944 Dakotas and Stirlings were in general use by 6th Airborne Division, the Albemarle being reserved for specialist roles.

2 Troop were dropped at 1330 hrs on the appointed day. The DZ was some miles from the bridge site so there was a rapid approach march with the demolition kit being transported in airborne trolleys. The demolition was carried out successfully and the crossing was made good "so as to be fit for jeeps" in accordance with exercise instructions. The farm tenant later reported that the only problem left was collecting the stones, bricks etc. hurled over the fields by the explosion.

I wonder how often old-timers are asked to describe in detail events which occurred nearly sixty years ago!

With the 1st Para Brigade in Tunisia

Ron (Pinky) White

This article is about the 1st Para Sqn RE and the rifle battalions of the 1st Para Bde ably supported by the medical staff during the fighting in Tunisia.

As the writer I was in 'A' Troop RE, the bias is slanted towards them, but B & C Troops were every bit our equal and sometimes surpassed our efforts.

In theory, an engineer troop is attached to a particular battalion, but when the "stuff" hits the fan, you go where help is most needed. Troop strength is approximately forty, and the Battalion strength is about five hundred plus. On this particular day, most units were at or about 50%. with the rifle battalions much lower.

'A' Troop had lost 25%-30% of its effectiveness in one raid. The battalions had achieved limited success in ambushing armoured vehicles. The "modus operandi" would call for the engineers to lay a necklace of Hawkins antipersonnel mines in front of the first vehicle and another necklace behind the last one. Then the Infantry, plus sappers, would blaze away. Having boxed them in, it was usually successful. This operation called for speed on the sapper's part because they hid in culverts under the road and then would pop up to lay the necklace.

In their endeavour to improve speed, it was decided to arm the Hawkins before setting out (bear in mind that forty pounds pressure sets them off). The sappers loaded up, joined up with the infantry and off they went. Crossing a wadi, one sapper fell, detonating his mines, sympathetic detonation set the other mines off and "x" number of sappers, plus officers, were blown up. No traces were ever found. For the remainder of the troops. with thoughts of friends, we numbly "pressed on."

The enemy having much shorter supply lines were reinforcing twice or more: times faster than the 1st Army. The Luftwaffe were having great success in shooting up anything visible. With a flight of a few minutes, how could they miss?'

Those 'above' decided to raid these airfields with Paratroops. The enemy quickly occupied the 1st Battalion's target in strength. So that was scrubbed. The 2nd Bns targets were three airfields, all within thirty miles of Tunis, and the sappers were issued with incendiary bombs to eliminate their aircraft. Just before take-off, the 1st Army had taken the first airfield, so the drop would have been on No. 2. The planning was suspect as the Colonel had to stand by the door looking for a suitable spot to drop. Unfortunately, there was no evidence that this airfield had ever existed, and on landing, and due to the hard baked ground, they had several casualties. So, it was a march to No. 3 airfield. By this time the enemy was alerted, and No. 3 was no different from the others: a few wrecks, and hangers turned out to be haystacks, and there were a few armoured vehicles donning the ugly black cross.

By the time the Battalion reached friendly lines, and after heroic stands by small groups to cover the withdrawal, two hundred and fifty officers and men reached safety, but over three hundred were lost. With casualties like this it is easy to understand why sappers were also infantry.

The 1st Army had now switched from the offensive to the defensive with the enemy being superior in number. At this time the Para Brigade switched to plugging holes and retaking key features that the 1st Army had lost either as individual Battalions or as a Brigade.

It was such an occasion that brought 'A' Troop to assist the 3rd Battalion who were being heavily attacked. We "stood to" at dawn, stretched our weary bones, and as the sun came up it looked to be a beautiful day. First came isolated rifle shots, and then machine guns, and explosions from mortars and grenades. The unspoken word told us that someone was up to the neck, and the noise boded no good. We collected our gear, checked grenades, Bren magazines, all the other paraphernalia one needs, and then squatted, waiting for orders.

Tunisia has its share of scrub-covered hills, and after being briefed, we knew our job was to clear the enemy from

what was known on the map as "Djebel bou Arada." The army simply called it "Hill 375." It was an average size hill and at the crest it dropped away to a steep escarpment. The hill was situated on the left of the 3rd Battalion, who did not have sufficient troops to cover all areas, and the Battalion had maintained a listening post at the crest. The enemy had eliminated the three-man post during the night and come the dawn they were well dug in with machine guns and mortars. We arrived at the base of the hill awaiting a guide to brief us.

Squatting in the shade and sheltered from strays, the Troop was silent, everybody's mind on the immediate future. Somebody pointed to the skies and several miles away was a host (unlike Wordsworth's "golden daffodils") of Stukas surrounded by fighters. Like many others, I prayed silently that they were passing.

Colonel Frost once told his troops, "Never show anything light coloured and hide your white face." 'A' Troop showed the pilots rear ends, which weren't white. They strafed and then the Stukas dived. The siren attached to the wings makes a chilling sound, and since we were well away from the bombs when the aircraft moved off, so did we.

We were well trained in field craft but what followed can only be described as a "Light Brigade charge" punctuated with going to ground from the missiles and to catch our breath.

During one of these stops we discovered that we had no Bren mags. No. 1 was yelling for mags, and No. 2 saying to me "Be Jesus, I left them at the bottom." "Come on," I say I'll help you find them." Down the hill we ran, and it seemed that everybody was after us. Of course, being exposed was no help. We jumped into a pit full of empty M-V Bully cans and other garbage, spotted the mags, rushed to pick them up, and then it was back up the hill at a rapid trot. Meanwhile, the Troop had continued the rush leaving behind those who would charge no more. No. 2 joined his partner, who unfortunately was killed a few moments later. Yells, noise, screams, more noise, and then... it was over.

One very popular Sergeant had a bullet go through his throat missing the vital parts, but nevertheless a very traumatic wound. We had no medics in the sappers, so I knelt to help. My efforts were not very professional, but were sufficient until we got him to the first aid station. While doing this, I was asked by several others to "come and help poor so and so," as everyone was concerned for friends. One of those I tied up that day was Reggie Orton, and I believe I used two more shell dressings on him before the war was over.

Having taken on this job, my fate was sealed. Anybody who was hit after that, received my non-qualified assistance.

Whilst no counterattack developed, they mortared and shelled the position. Due to the trajectory and slope of the hill, the shells seemed to run along the ground making weird noises before exploding. Unfortunately, some of the wounded were hit again. I dived for the nearest trench, and as the Germans had dug it, it was deep, but not deep enough for the many! One chap, in his dive, emptied his can of meat and vegetable stew over the backs of those fortunate enough to get in the trench. Afterwards it caused plenty of laughs.

After the shelling, one chap was gazing down at one of our dead lying side-by-side with one of theirs. He was surprised at the size of this big fellow when the German corpse opened one eye. Getting over his surprise, he booted the enemy up the rear end who immediately jumped up yelling "Kamerad." Eventually, this chap and myself were taken prisoner at the bridge at Arnhem, and many a laugh was had when he would pantomime this incident.

Sometime afterwards I was detailed to escort the Major to a conference of chiefs. The walk over the hills was spring-like and quiet. The Major was a very relaxed person, easy to talk to, and well liked. So whilst I was swinging my Sten side to side at shadows, he's chatting about wild flowers.

When we arrived, I wandered over to the other escorts who were talking shop. After greeting old friends, I joined the rumour mill; the favoured one was that we were going back to the UK.

Returning to my unit, I fielded all questions. No way was I going to tell what the favourite rumour was. When

eventually the Brigade was relieved from line duty, we entrained on T. C. V's and moved off.

Two nights later we awoke to the words "Everybody out and be quiet." It was bitterly cold and teeming with rain. 'A' Troop was instructed to follow the guide. Good feelings about the move disappeared quickly. The question "Where are we?" elicited many responses of "How the **** do I know?" Trudging through mud is not conducive to friendly chatter. Come the dawn, the dreary place looked better and we discovered it named by some soul with tongue in cheek. It was "Happy Valley." That name did not last long.

The next morning it started all over again. The day before, one of the Brigades in the 46th Division had been overwhelmed and now without any rest, the Para infantry were "thrust into the breach."

Among the 1st Parachute Brigade's battle honours you will find Tamera, Nefsa, Sedjenane, Djebel Aboid, all of these are grouped around Happy Valley.

After nearly five months of continues action, the Brigade was withdrawn. A small monument was built by the sappers in tribute to the guts and tenacity of our comrades. Brigade casualties totalled over two thousand officers and men, slightly more than the full strength of the Brigade. General Allfrey came along with, "Splendid show and we thank you." The Germans went one better: they named the troops "Die rotten Teufel," The Red Devils.

That tribute came from the best that the enemy fielded, Paratroops, mountain troops. Panzer Grenadiers and some from the Afrika Corps.

Covered in red clay and mud, superbly led. the Brigade earned that title from some of Germany's best



L to R: Ron Embry, Dave Thomas & Ron (Pinky) White - Italy 1943

When I read in the Regimental magazine that changes are being made to the Airborne structure, I call to mind an American saying, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." My family lives in America now, but I follow the fortune and attend the reunions yearly. I know that my fellow sappers deemed it a privilege to have served with the very best.

Peter Stainforth, a Sapper officer in 'B' Troop, wrote a wonderful book, *Wings of the Wind*, covering the 1st Parachute Brigade's role from start to finish.

This is what he said of the Para Infantry:

"It is sometimes overlooked in these days of mechanised warfare that it is the infantrymen who is still the winner of battles. It is he who suffers the highest proportion of the casualties, lives under the most wretched conditions and yet is deemed to earn one of the lowest rates of pay."

Nothing more to say! However, please note, having not kept a diary, I plagiarised dates and numbers from Peter's book.

Sapper Initiative

Mervyn (Gilly) Potter

During the weeks leading up to the invasion of Italy (Taranto for us), the CRE must have sensed a feeling of frustration and boredom amongst his sappers and in order to bring back some "life," he decided we should hold a Sports Day.

The venue would be in the camping area of 261 and each of the Squadrons should organise some particular event, such as inter squadron short duration soccer matches, relay races, etc. etc.

Our squadron decided to hold horse racing, well, horses were not much in evidence in North Africa, so it was to be donkeys. Someone, I don't remember whom, engaged the services of some local donkey owners, who arranged to bring them to our camp at a certain time and were briefed on what they were going to do. I remember very clearly; the donkey owners were highly amused about this and no doubt thought we were mad.

Our MT Sgt (Sgt Powell, nicknamed, Sandy Powell), was in civilian life, a bookmaker's clerk and was well versed in the art of bookmaking. So, naturally, it fell to him to organise the betting. After some races, it became abundantly clear, one of the donkeys did not have his heart in this foolish activity and no matter how hard his owner used the stick, he would not go faster than a slow walking pace and was last in every race. Towards the end of the racing, some of us 261 lads put our heads together and decided on an idea. "*The Last Race.*" In view of the poor performance of this errant donkey, the bookmakers odds on it were tremendous and we suddenly descended on Sandy Powell and laid on a lot of money. We had plenty, there was nothing much to spend it on in our area. Sandy looked puzzled and worried, but he took the bets.

The race started and true to form, the errant donkey was well behind, when the leader was well up the field, this was the time for action and about 8 or 10 of us ran forward, picked up the donkey and rider and ran like H--- for the finishing post. We won, there were no objections and Sandy sadly paid out.

I was that Soldier

Tom (baldy) Gilks

Having read Brigadier Fergie Semple's piece "OC on the Mat," it brought a few memories back to me, because I was that 'soldier,' and here is a bit more to the story.

I will start from when we came under attack. As Fergie said, the "enemy" (I think they were disguised as Tom Tuddenham, Mick Gibbs, and Joe McGrath, but not sure, perhaps Tom can answer that one), were throwing lumps of PE at us. As we went to ground (note the jargon), a piece dropped against my foot and blew my boot off giving my foot and leg quite a clout. I think it was second lieutenant Owen, as he was at that time, (affectionately known as Jessie) which applied the field dressing. It was then from out of the blue with all the banging still going on appeared this lady dressed in the appropriate clothing for the occasion i.e. deerstalker, tweeds, brogues and carrying a good stout stick.

On seeing me she started to go on at Captain Mike Matthews, as he was then and Graham Owen for putting such a filthy piece of rag round that poor boys foot, and then immediately started to forage about in the heather. "Sphagnum," she proclaims, "That's what you want on that wound my boy," and immediately began to apply this moss like stuff to my leg and foot. Then she went just as quickly as she came.

The attack now over we carried on, I've got a funny idea that it was the Wades road hike that we were doing, but not sure. Having travelled about another 10 miles, and half way up one of the mountains we stopped for a spit and a drag, it was then that I asked Capt. Mike what he was going to do about my foot, as by this time it was giving me a bit of jip and the blood was still coming out the bottom of what remained of my boot. His answer was, as you would expect, "Nothing." So I said, "What if I refuse to go on?" He then said, "Well I will put you on a charge." I said, "What if I still refuse?" He said, "I will just have to have you shot." With that I told him that officers have too much power, he replied, "Yes, good isn't it!" Typical Mad Mike, one of the best officers I ever came across. We duly finished the exercise and I was carted off to the hospital to have things put right.

The sad part of the tale is that General (Mad Mike) Matthews related the story to me when he came to stay at my house a year before he died. He remembered after all those years and we had a good laugh about it.

Double Hills Witness

Dennis Healey

"I met her at a dance." An oft repeated remark uttered by numerous 9 Squadron blokes, but this was different. My wife, a Somerset girl, introduced me to a lady she had not seen since their school days. We were at a dance in Minehead a couple of weeks before the Double Hills Memorial Service of September 2000, and the story was told.

Jean Brook and her father were on their usual Sunday morning walk on a very unusual Sunday in Somerset; the sky was full of planes, most of them towing gliders.

Jean was of junior school age, old enough to appreciate that something important was happening and young enough for the event to leave a lasting impression.

While they stood and watched the aircraft swarm over from the Bristol Channel, she saw the glider fall. There was a lot of aero engine noise but she does not remember hearing an explosion until the glider hit the ground when there was a very loud bang and the smoke and flash was visible from where Jean and her dad were watching.

They thought it was only a couple of fields away and started running towards it, but Mr. Brook soon realised that it was much further and took Jean home to Clutton. He went to the crash site on his bike and retrieved a piece of Perspex from RJ113, and later carved a small cross on a plinth which Jean still has. By the time Mr. Brook arrived the Paulton villagers had already made the grim discovery that there were no survivors. Ruby Bowell, the Paulton nurse who was one of the first to arrive, was the mother of the lad who later married Jean's sister. Ruby's poem is engraved on the memorial.

Jean Ette, as she is now, still lives in Clutton and she and her husband have a holiday caravan a couple of fields away from where we live at Blue Anchor Bay, so we see them quite often.

Congratulations Paul Eldred

We extend hearty congratulations to Paul Eldred on his recent promotion to WO1 and his subsequent appointment as RSM 38 Engineer Regiment, Ripon.

Libya 1967



L to R Standing:

**Pete Plowman, Fred Pinkney, Gurney Fisher, Wally Clift, Derek Sowden,
Derek Arnold**

Squatting:

Geoff Dyer, Danny Daniels, Ken Mason & Taff Vickery

Normandy 4-8 June 2001

John and Paul Shave



Memorial at Horsa Bridge

During the visit we wished to attend the main ceremonies and to record memorials to Sappers in the 6th Airborne Div area. From the ferry at Ouistreham on 4th June, we drove to Benouville past the 7 Para Bn memorial and on to the new Pegasus Bridge, built across the Canal de Caen when it was widened. Over the canal we passed the new museum 'Memorial Pegasus' and saw our first RE memorial by 'Horsa' bridge over the River Orne.

The plain stone slab by the roadside is headed by the RE badge and those of the Ox and Bucks and Glider Pilot regiments. The inscription records the assault by glider on the bridges over the canal and river by a company of the Ox and Bucks under Major John Howard DSO, supported by a platoon of 249 Field Company RE (Airborne) under Captain Godfrey Woodcock RE.

On to Ranville we passed the 13 Para Bn memorial at the cross-roads, which commemorates the clearing of the town by the Battalion. During this action a platoon under Lt Jack Watson assisted 591 Para Sqn RE under Captain Fergie Semple RE to remove obstacles on the DZ, to ease the arrival of the gliders of 6 Airlanding Bde.



John Shave MC, Bob Beaumont & Bob Sullivan MBE with the RSME officers at the Old Pegasus Bridge

On the morning of 5 June, with Bob Beaumont and Bob Sullivan MBE, we described the RE part in the D-Day assault to a group of young officers from RSME Chatham. We spoke in front of a map of the operations of 6 June 1944, hung on the girders of the old Pegasus bridge behind the new museum.

The 'Memorial Pegasus' is well laid out with many exhibits. RE achievements occupy several showcases and the Museum is well worth a visit. There is a large car park and the outdoor exhibits behind the museum include guns and vehicles as well as the old bridge.

Our next engagement was at the Brigadier James Hill square at the cross-roads of Le Mesnil de Bavent, the centre of operations of 3 Para Bde during the occupation of the area. After a service, wreaths were laid at the impressive memorial to the 1st Canadian Para Bn and Harry Mosley laid our wreath at the 3 Para Bde memorial.

L to R: Harry Mosley, George Taylor, Bob Beaumont, Ivor Anderson, Bob Sullivan MBE, John Shave MC & Charles Willbourne at Le Mesnil



During the afternoon of 5 June Paul visited Robehome and Varaville to photograph the bridges blown by 3 Troop 3 Para Sqn RE. The Robehome Bridge is under repair but the crossing of the River Divette in Varaville is in good condition. At 1600 Hrs a ceremony took place at the bridge in Bures. The bridge is now a wide single arch of RC which replaced the small steel one blown on 6 June 1944. Wreaths were laid at the memorial to No.2 Troop 3 Para Sqn RE commanded by Captain Tim Jukes MC, RE, which demolished this bridge and the railway bridge 300 metres downstream. The troop later moved through Troarn to complete the demolition of the stone arch bridge over the R. Dives at St. Samson. The memorial by this bridge commemorates the exploit of Major Tim Roseveare DSO, RE and 8 men of No. 1 Troop 3 Para Sqn RE who first cut the bridge in the early morning of 6 June.

The evening of 5 June was spent in Troarn where wreaths were laid at the town war memorial. Bob Beaumont then laid a wreath at the wall of the Old Mairie, which bears a plaque commemorating 3 Para Sqn RE.



On the morning of 6 June we attended the open-air service in the Airborne cemetery at Ranville where Bob Sullivan MBE laid a wreath at the Airborne Cross. The ceremony was attended by a huge crowd which was thrilled by a Dakota which made three low passes over us, reminiscent of the flight on 5/6 June 1944. After the ceremony we drove down 'Rue Major Roseveare' out of Troarn to the River Dives, which marks the boundary with the commune of St. Samon. The memorial referred to above, stands beside the attractive new bridge.

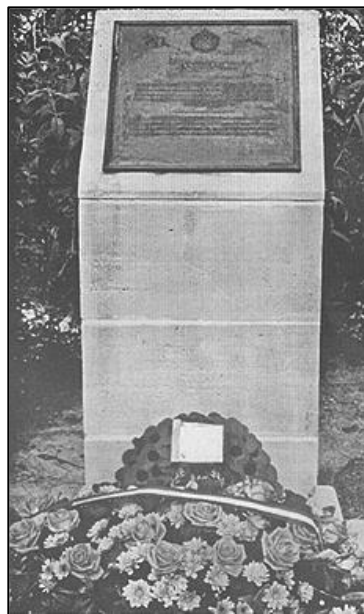
Memorial plaque to 3 Troop 3 Para Sqn RE on the bridge at Varaville

On 7 June we visited Grangues near Dives sur Mer where two Stirlings and two Gliders were shot down. A memorial organised by the late Lt John Shinner in the churchyard records the names of 41 men who died there on 6 June 1944.

Amongst them were seven Sappers of 591 Para Sqn RE who were captured and later shot near the nearby Chateau.

The ceremony here was attended by a group from 7 Para Bn to which many of the dead belonged. The Chateau owner M. De Chanecy afterwards held a vin 'd' honneur in the village hall.

During our last day on the 8th, we followed the route to the River Seine taken by the division during the advance of August - September '44 and visited friends at Ablon near Honfleur.



Memorial at Juckes Bridge to 2 Troop 3 Para Sqn



Troarn Bridge Memorial to Maj Tim Roseveare DSO and men of 1 Troop 3 Para Sqn RE



3 Para Sqn RE Memorial plaque of the wall of the Old Mairie



Airborne Cross in the Ranville cemetery

2 Troop- Jungle Warriors of Borneo

Geordie (Toots) Ridgway

I wonder if anyone remembers the fierce battle fought by 2 Tp in the jungles of Borneo in early 1965. This was during the 'Confrontation' with Sukharno of that year.

For me it all began on 30th December 1964 with an RTU telegram. Being a patriotic Geordie and reluctant to give up local traditions (especially with New Year only one day away) I decided that I wasn't at home when the telegram arrived. Well, it could have been true! So after a good New Years binge I caught a train at Newcastle Central station on 2nd January '65. It came as no surprise to find a couple of mates from north of the border on the train and in the same predicament. However, when we got to camp apart from a right bollocking, no further action was taken. Within a couple of days we were all processed and on our way to Singapore.

Apart from a minor incident at Istanbul airport involving myself, Taff Brice, the airport cat, the pilot, and our troop officer, the flight was uneventful, and we landed in Singapore on 6th January. (I may be a day or so out - check with records)

From Singapore we went to Kluang, a Ghurkha training camp, where we were shown the rudiments of living in the jungle, the various types of punji traps we were likely to encounter, and most important, how to avoid being eaten alive by mosquitoes. One lesson however was sadly omitted from their training schedule!

From Singapore we flew to Labuan, and then on to Tawaw in Sabah. Here we were based for about 6 months building chopper pads along the border between Indonesia and Malaysia.

It was during a spell back in base camp that we were ordered to do a cordon and sweep, to root out guerrillas hiding out in a local swamp. It is hard to visualise areas after all this time but I would guess the area to be swept would be about 4-5 acres. The cordon was to be mounted by 42 Marine Commando and we of 2 Tp, who were back in base camp, were elected to do the sweep.

This is where the Ghurkha training fell woefully short, and battle commenced. We started the sweep and hadn't gone 20 yards when one of the lads tripped and grabbed a vine to stop himself falling. Unfortunately, on the other end of the vine was a hornet's nest the size of a 45-gallon drum. Down it came with an almighty crash and thousands of angry hornets swooped and stung everything that moved and anything that didn't. There was no escape! The jungle was alive with shouts and curses. SSgt Mick Leigh yelled, "Stand still, and they won't sting you." Unfortunately as he said this, he moved and a tree branch swept off his jungle hat. A swarm of hornets descended on his head. Exit Mick screaming!

After advancing a full twenty yards, we were beaten into retreat by the nest of hornets. However, we regrouped at the start point and called in reinforcements. We were in communication with a contingent of the Malaysian army, who were asked to carry on the sweep. On being appraised of the situation, their C.O. refused point blank. (In my opinion, wisely).

And so, 2Tp were sent in again. We got in a bit further this time and were advancing steadily, albeit with a few more casualties, when what should we hear? Choppers!

Some smart arse had hit on the idea that if choppers hovered over the swamp they would blow the hornets away!

How many hornets' nests in 5 acres of swamp?

Where did the choppers blow them and their nests?

No guesses required!

The sweep was supposed to be conducted with us sappers just a few feet apart. After a quarter of the way into the swamp when the choppers started, I never saw anybody else till I got out hours later. Being of a cowardly disposition I was lucky, I saw a stream and dived in. And stayed in! I got away with a bunch of stings on my hand (I was holding my SLR out of the water) and a beauty on my nose when one caught me as I came up for air.

Others weren't so lucky. I remember quite a few of the lads had to have medical attention. We also had a photo taken a couple of days later (I wonder if it's around somewhere?) and very few of the lads were recognisable. In particular Paddy (then Cpl) Fulton who had at least twenty hornet stings on his face alone.

So, to conclude, Willy Wiltshire wasn't far out with his reference in issue 3 of the Journal, when told that he was joining 2 Tp (the fairies) 'cos we certainly danced like fairies that day!

P.S. In the Rogue's Gallery - Issue No 4 - top right photo. The unknown is Eddie Fisher, who, with Pete Measures were actually Para Regt but trying for a transfer to 9 Sqn. They were with us all through Borneo and for a few months before and after. Probably due to red tape they were not allowed to transfer, although in my opinion would have been a great asset to the Squadron.

Pete Measures, incidentally, was the strongest man I had ever known. The Iban tribesmen in Borneo would watch in amazement as two of us sappers would lift a tree trunk under each of his arms and he would carry them to the required location.

Greetings from South Africa

Alan "Taff" Brice

In the August edition of our magazine in the Sqn photo on page 26, the chap next to Bill Rudd, is (I think) Harry Harrison of 1 & plant troop. Between Fred Robson and Taff Benson, is John "Bwana" Bennie (who was best man at my wedding). John regrettably passed away in South Africa a couple of years ago.

Perhaps it's old age or Alzheimer's that has fogged our editors memory that he failed to recognise the above mentioned characters!

I would like to take this opportunity to extend an invitation to all AEA members to visit us in South Africa. We look forward to any excuse to take a few days off to take friends to the Battlefields (Zulu & Boer wars) game parks, beaches etc. in this beautiful country. We reside in Pietermaritzburg, which is 50 miles NW of Durban.

Stan Halliwell

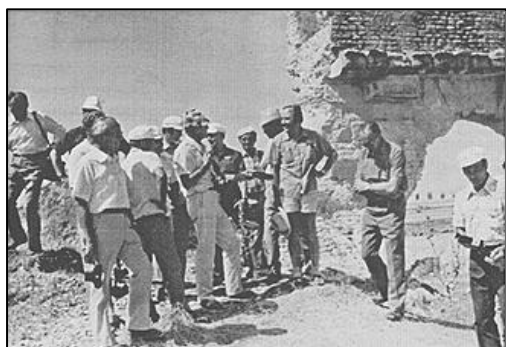
Peter Stainforth

I was very impressed by the very fair and accurate German version of the Battle of Arnhem, which included the account of the Sapper sergeant being sent by the SS Panzer General Harmel to Colonel John Frost to demand the surrender of 2 Para and attached troops defending Arnhem bridge.

That Sergeant was Stan Halliwell, 1 Para Sqn RE, a veteran of four parachute operations. On 27th February 1942, Stan was a member of Capt Dennis Vernon's small party of sappers who accompanied John Frost's 'C' Company of 2 Para on the Bruneval Raid to dismantle vital parts of the German radar station and bring them back to this country for examination.

In November 1942, Stan was my section corporal on the 5-day Oudna operation in Tunisia with Colonel Frost's 2 Para Group. In the battles on three successive days against Major Hans Jungwirts' 1st Bn, 5th Fallschirmjager Regiment at Oudna Station, on Sidi Bou Hadjeba hill, and at El Fedja farm 2 Para Group suffered very heavy casualties, only 180 returning out of the 550 that dropped 15 miles from Tunis.

On 13th July 1943 Stan took part with me in the 1st Para Brigades' attack on the Primosole Bridge on the south side of Catania airfield in Sicily. Some of our Dakotas were shot down, many dropped their sticks miles wide, but I and half a dozen sappers landed in the right place and were able to remove the explosive charges from the bridge and join in its defence until forced to evacuate it at the end of the day. Our opponents that day were the 3rd Fallschirmjager Regt! Colonel Johnny Frost knew Stan quite well from the days of Bruneval, Oudna and Sedjenane in Tunisia, and Stan was able to tell him about the state of German morale round Arnhem Bridge. It was not until they brought up three Tiger tanks that they were able to blast 2 Para out of its position. Afterwards, Johnny Frost paid the men of 1 Para Squadron the unprecedented compliment by saying that we were the best infantry he had ever commanded. In his book, "A drop to Many," John Frost also seems to confirm the origin of the name "*Red Devils*!," first mentioned by General Alexander in a congratulatory message to Brigadier Flavell at the end of the Tunisian campaign as having been bestowed on us by the Germans (5 FJR). Frost also mentions an extraordinary incident when the 1st Brigade, travelling in a train of cattle trucks back to Algiers at the end of the Tunisian campaign, passed a prisoner of war camp full of Germans of 5 FJR. On spotting the host of red berets, the Germans ran to the wire and cheered, paying 1st Parachute Brigade, Frost confirms, the tribute he liked best of all.



Thirty years after the end of the war in Tunisia, veterans of 2 Para and 1 Para Sqn RE held a joint reunion with German old comrades of Jungwirts' 5 FJR at Hammamet in Tunisia, visiting the battlefields on which we had fought each other, almost hand to hand.

The photograph shows myself (3rd from the right), giving an informal lecture at Oudna aqueduct to mixed British and German veterans. Hans Jungwirts is second from the right, Horst Lochstadt, then a platoon commander (now Colonel) is seventh from the right (wearing a sun hat) and holding a microphone. Stan Halliwell is on the extreme right of the picture holding a camera.

Calling All Golfers- "Airborne Engineers Golf Day"

At this moment in time I am seeking to find out how many of our intrepid members would be interested in participating in an Airborne Engineers Golf Day. The format of the day would be something like, 9 holes of fun/relaxing golf during the morning, an 18 hole Stableford Competition during the afternoon, followed by evening dinner and prize giving.

The course would be located somewhere in the Midlands for easy access for the majority, and we would hope to keep me cost to approx. £60. This of course would not include any accommodation requirements before or after the event. I am now touting for names of possible contenders for the honour of being the first "AEA Golf Champion."

If sufficient players/hackers come forward to make the day a possibility then I will commence to make more definite arrangements and will provide those interested with more detailed information.

Phone Bob Ferguson now on 023-8077-6866 and register your interest

Spring Fling 2001- 82nd Airborne Experience



Brian Jones, Bert Flatters, Barry Ladlow, George Barrett,
John Murphy, Dave Mellors, Al Lowry, Bert Hendy & An other -
Smokey Gibson had gone walkies



On Parade - including Smokey Gibson!

Birthday Descent

Dennis Thomas (Queensland Australia)

I'd always promised myself that I would do a parachute jump on my 65th birthday. Unfortunately, my right knee swelled like a balloon three days prior to the day, which was 24th August 2000. It didn't recede for almost a week, so naturally I was forced to cancel the jump. I planned to try again for my 66th birthday this year. On the 28th July, a barman in my local asked me if I fancied jumping the following day. he'd never jumped before, and wanted some morale support. Reflecting back on what happened last year, I thought why not - and went for it!



We were doing tandem jumps from 10,000 ft. The aircraft was a Cessna in which was crammed a pilot, cameraman, two instructors, myself and the other lad. We took off at 0730 hrs and reached our jump height at 0802 hrs. I was never so glad to leave an aircraft! Once out, the sight and experience was well worth the discomfort. It was an experience I would recommend to all of the Association members.

Bert "Duke" Stevenson-Some Reflection of 2 Troop

Brian Jones

I am proud to say that I was one of the "Dukes" boys, and I would like to express the deepest condolences to Maureen and the family at the passing of our Troop Sgt.

I remember Maureen in Moascar and did actually meet her, although only as a lowly LCpl!

On one occasion when walking into camp towards the Igloos, I was accosted by the orderly officer, Lt Grosvenor (Daphne to the troop). "Why are you so late?" he enquired. "I've been out with my girlfriend," I replied. "Well you are a naughty LCpl and I shall report you to your troop Sgt, now get to your bed." The following morning before he had a chance to get me, I informed the 'Duke' about the incident with the orderly officer. "Not to worry," he informed me, "He got me just after catching you!" Obviously no romance in the said officers soul!

Do you remember how we had to carry our Sten guns stripped down and pushed in our harness when jumping? On this particular occasion I was the Troop radio operator and had landed near the 'Duke.' I was curious about the flickering lights nearby. A voice pleaded, "Give me a hand". Yes it was the 'Duke' and his Sten gun had come adrift and he was trying to find it by the flickering light of a match. Success - we found it!

Some years later, during the RE Games in Osnabruck, several former members of 2 troop shared a nostalgic evening together in the Sgts Mess - they were the 'Duke' (RQMS), WO1 Tom Thornton, SSgt Ian McGregor, Sgt Tom Tuddenham and your truly as a WO2.

I am proud to have served with the Sqn in the company of Capt Peter Wade, Lt John Grosvenor and Sgt 'Duke' Stevenson at a time when I was 2IC of 6 section with Tom Thornton, Bob Prosser and Ken (Plank) Ramsden. There are quite a few of the "Dukes Boys" still around - they were good days. Thanks 'Duke.'

Exercise Gobi- Sinai Peninsular January 1953

David Brooks

The 16th Independent Parachute Brigade was at that time deployed around the strategic town of Ismailia, which is in the Canal Zone and at the eastern end of the road that led to Cairo. It was also the location of the Headquarters of the Suez Canal Company.

The Squadron was all together and shared Nelson Lines with 2 d Battalion The Parachute Regiment. These barracks were within the Moascar Garrison. Although the Middle East Land Forces were all bottled up in the Canal Zone, the Sinai Peninsula, which was outside this zone, was used for various exercises.

9 Squadron was given the task of mounting a Recce to find a vehicle route from the eastern coast of Sinai, on the Gulf of Aqaba, through the mountains, to St Catherine's Monastery, at the foot of Mount Sinai. There was no record that this had been done before so there was no certainty that such a route could be found. The maps available showed no tracks but only major features such as mountains and some named wadis (intermittent river beds which can be dangerous from thunderstorms high up in the mountains which result in flash floods, not a place to bivvy overnight!)

The OC, Major Ian Lyall Grant selected and briefed the group, under command of Capt John Chappel. A great deal of detailed planning was involved and the amount of water and fuel that could be carried was critical. It was also essential that we should have the capability to undertake running repairs to our jeeps as the terrain was, to say the least, hostile, so the choice of spares was very important. A resupply by air would be needed. A patrol of 12 men in 4 jeeps and trailers was judged to be of a self-supporting size in case of difficulties.



L to R: (standing) Spr Gummer, Cpl Hadden, Spr Jones, Sgt Parker, 2Lt Radford, ?, Cpl Baker & Capt Chappel (sitting) Spr Christadoulou, Cpl Wood & Spr Cotterel - (Photo taken by the author)

With Capt Chappel in the leading Jeep, wireless operator Cpl Baker and his unnamed driver. (Alas memories fade.) They were followed by 2Lt Bob Radford, with Cpl Hadden and his driver Spr Jones, Sgt Ned Parker, with Cpl Wood and his driver Spr Cotterel and 2Lt David Brooks, with his driver Spr Gummer and Spr Christadoulou, who brought up the rear.

The patrol set off from Moascar on Friday 2nd January 1953 heading south to Fayid and beyond to the Kubri Ferry to cross the Suez Canal, just north of the port of Suez. The plan was to take the established route from this crossing point which headed east towards the Gulf of Aqaba, some 150 miles away. The map showed a road and desert track.



The ferry was chain operated, with limited capacity, and thus could only take one jeep and trailer at a time. 2Lt Brooks crossed first at about 1000 hrs with a radio to maintain contact but on the ferry's return journey. The ferry broke down!

David Brooks waiting for the rest of the recce party

The ferry-landing site on the Sinai side was near an Egyptian Army base. They took a close interest in our predicament! It wasn't until 1800 hrs, the next day, some 32 hours later, did the

rest of the patrol get across. Luckily the OC, Major Lyall Grant aware of the hold up, caught up with us waiting to cross. He realised that our resupply drop would now have to include extra rations.

We camped a few miles east that night, ready for an early start next day.



The going was good next day and for some time on a macadam road, slowing down sharply to mount numerous sand drifts across the road. We stopped for a brew up and it wasn't long before two Bedouins appeared out of nowhere in this wilderness. Baksheesh, baksheesh! Some tobacco and tea made them happy! That night we camped at the foot of the now famous Mitla Pass.

Baksheesh!

Next morning we again made an early start but very soon found that the macadam road surface petered out. Indeed it wasn't long before we were in soft sand. The less experienced drivers soon learnt to look after their clutches. It was a taste of what was to become standard drill, of digging, laying sand channels, heaving and shoving!

It took some 3 hrs to get through the pass but from there on, the going was very fast and on a hard firm surface. The desert track headed eastwards, at times followed for a short way an old Turkish railway track, scenes perhaps of some Lawrence of Arabia's skirmishes! There was just miles of desolation with only at times a line of telegraph poles as a guide to confirm our compass bearings. We were following the ancient trade route from Egypt to Arabia through what was then known as the Wilderness of Paran.



Wilderness of Paran

We passed an occasional village; one was Nakhl where the villagers were at prayer. Their curiosity was to be satisfied only by a fleeting glimpse of us as we passed viewed from under their armpits as they knelt with heads bowed to the ground!

We made a mid-day stop to refuel at El Themad and made the usual daily wireless contact with base. By then we were on CW using the usual sky wave aerial. That day it was strength 5.

We pushed on and camped that night near the border post of Ras el Naob.

Next morning, we called on this frontier post, a small Turkish type fort, a relic of the 1st World War, complete with an Egyptian policeman. He seemed quite pleased to see us but unaware of our coming.

We then headed south on an established desert track towards a small coastal delta plain and village of Waisit. This juts out into the Gulf of Aqaba and was about the only reasonable site for a resupply DZ.



Bob Radford & friend

We arrived there at 1400 hrs and set up camp. A quick recce established a suitable DZ, which was confirmed to base by radio for the resupply drop next day. Our arrival aroused interest from some of the nearby villagers. One came on a camel. One or two hardy souls, perhaps impervious to fleas, had a ride. One was 2Lt Bob Radford of generous proportions; the camel was heard to complain as only camels can! With an early start to set out the DZ and markers, the resupply drop was on time at 1000 hrs, a Valetta, with 8 door loads. 2Lt Trevor Creech another 9 Sqn Officer was on board to see all was well, however in helping to

heave out the door loads, he succumbed to air sickness! The last of the 8 basket panniers had a red chute. This was the first to be rescued. It contained not only the mail and the extra rations but also sufficient bottles of McEwan's Red Label for each member to have two bottles. (This was of course some years before the advent of the tinnie.)

With all the new supplies safely stowed and the basket panniers, with parachutes stowed inside, attached to the roof frame of our jeeps, we retraced our path westwards back towards the mountains for some way, until we once again turned south up the only major wadi on the map, named Wadi Gazallia.



This headed south towards what appeared to be a fairly steep pass through the surrounding mountains and seemed the obvious route from our maps as it headed in the direction of St Catherine's Monastery. The going was slow as the wadi bottom was littered with large stones. That night we camped on the wadi bottom, with an escape refuge if there was a flash flood as we were hemmed in by mountains on either side and reliant on the alertness of our sentries.

Maps showed good going!

Again an early start before it warmed up, even in winter it could get quite hot, but we soon found that the going became very bad; a lot of heaving and shoving of laden jeeps and trailers on sand channels. We were at it for 6 hrs and covered only 3.5 miles. We made it to the head of the pass and camped there for the night. There was evidence that other previous attempts had failed and those that had tried had turned back. That night it was very cold and we were very glad of our sleeping bags.

Next day we were through the pass by 0900 hrs but immediately found that our maps showed the terrain to be completely different from that on the ground. We found gorges and steep sided wadis. We spent the day recceing any likely route without success. It was very frustrating but we did have one consolation. At about midday, the beer was retrieved from inside our sleeping bags where it was still as cool as the previous night's air. It was pure nectar!

At about 1700 hrs, an hour before nightfall, a rider and camel was spotted for about a minute some 4 miles away which seemed to indicate a way through the mountains. 2Lt Brooks was dispatched to follow the route and tracks. As darkness fell, a way was found but by then he was some miles from the rest of the patrol. A few minutes into the return journey, the engine petered out, but after the usual checks and with little daylight left, the problem was traced to a fuel blockage in the fuel line to the filter. This was caused by the sin of over a period of dipping cotton waste into the tank to clean hands and tools, done when the MT Cpl was not looking!

In retracing the route in the dark, the tyre tracks showed up rather well in the headlights. With the patrol reunited, we camped again that night in the wadi bottom.

That evening Capt Chappel made a decisive appraisal of the position as to whether to go on or turn back. We had used a fair amount of petrol to get so far. It was decided to send on 2 jeeps ahead without trailers to recce what appeared to be a route to Bir Safra, marked as a water hole on our map and could be on the route to the monastery, if we could believe the map.



Our luck changed. By mid-morning we came across a Bedouin and his son on foot. With the help of Spr Christadoulou, a Greek Cypriot who spoke some Arabic, we were able to persuade them to guide us towards the monastery and to the water hole shown on our map as Bir Safra. They knew of it. The patrol quickly reassembled and we set off with the boy sitting on the bonnet, his father beside the driver giving directions.

Bir Safra water hole

On the way the front spring and steering of one of the jeeps collapsed when it hit a rock. However we were able to repair it without too much delay. The selection of spare parts to take proved to be important.

When we got to the water hole it was no more than a deep scrape on the bottom of the wadi, but water was found. It could have been a lifesaver. However we still had an ample supply but it was strictly rationed.

Our guides had been a tremendous help to get us so far and as they were heading, we understood from Spr Christadoulou, to see their uncle Ahmed, we bade them farewell and thanked them with a supply of porridge and marmalade. We were nevertheless impressed with their ability to know each feature of the land without any map. They were never lost and the detour for us was of no consequence to them.

We were still some miles from the monastery but as some degree of confidence was returning over the accuracy of our maps, we pushed on for a while and found our way into Wadi Saal. This was about 20 miles from the monastery. We set up camp here well before dusk but decided immediately to recce the route ahead with 2 jeeps.

The recce made very good progress and arrived outside the walls of the Monastery as the route proved to be comparatively straightforward. However we were immediately surrounded by lots of excited small boys who appeared out of the mountains behind.



Very soon the wicket gate to the monastery opened and a Monk appeared. He walked over to us and greeted us in perfect English and introduced himself as Father George. He soon asked for anything we could spare like petrol and food. We explained that we might be able to help when the full patrol got there next day. In exchange, he offered to show us round the Monastery. During our conversation he told us that he was Greek and had been a lawyer. He also revealed that he had led a fairly dissolute life around the Capitals of Europe before WW1 and as he was now well into his 70's, and as he had not married, it had been suggested to him that he became a Monk. He also claimed that he would have been promoted to some higher rank, but preferred to remain as he was, like some sappers perhaps!

Slaves of the Monastery

As a one-time man of the world, he showed his ability to communicate other than by word of mouth. With several Sappers standing around smoking, it wasn't long before instinctively one of them offered him a cigarette. With his back towards the monastery wall, he accepted this with great alacrity. With night falling, he displayed the old soldiers ability to hold his lighted fag in the cup of his hand. This he did with great skill with a further precaution so that he couldn't be seen from the monastery, by putting his hand up the sleeve of his cloak! We also asked where all the boys came from, "Oh yes, he said, they are our slaves! They live in the caves in the mountains behind us"

We bade him good night and returned to camp in the knowledge that we would have a warm welcome next day if we came up with some "donations". It wasn't till we got back to camp that we found that one of our Sapper's sleeping bag was missing! We learnt our lesson; we would need to post a guard at all times next day if we didn't want to be fleeced by the so called slaves.



Next day, Father George was there to greet us, and we gave him what we could spare. He was obviously pleased and immediately arranged to show a small party of us over the monastery. The monastery was built 527 AD and contains the site of Moses's Burning Bush, a vault where they keep the priceless copy of the Greek Old Testament, Codex Sinaiticus dated from about 400 AD. We were shown the Charnel House where they stack the bones of the monks who were buried here many years ago in the tiny cemetery, and have been dug up to make room for those who have yet to die! We were shown a small recess in a wall where the present Archbishop would be buried.

Outside the Monastery

We were told that the monastery and the summit of Mount Sinai were visited by an increasing number of pilgrims and so they were now providing limited accommodation, being fairly inaccessible, for those that came from around the world. The culmination of the pilgrimage was to watch the sun rise from the top of Mount Sinai.

Our "donation" had obviously been well received as we were granted an audience and were ushered into the presence of the Archbishop of all Sinai. We were graciously received and sat down to the usual hospitality of a small dish of quince jam, a small glass of water and small cup of black coffee. Father George, our interpreter, served us from a very large round engraved brass tray.

It was interesting to learn that they kept themselves up to date with world news by listening to the BBC World Service. It was not every day did that the Archbishop receive some rather dusty sappers but he was clearly interested to learn of our journey and the route we had found.

This was perhaps because we had probably retraced the route of the biblical exodus of the Israelites from Egypt which had taken them from the Red Sea crossing somewhere near Suez to Mount Sinai following the coast and from then through the mountains we had come through and on to Aqaba, then called Ezion-geber.

Later we were invited to attend Vespers. Their church was magnificently adorned with gold and silver crosses, candlesticks, incense burners and icons. The gold candlesticks had been presented to them by a onetime Empress of Russia. The singing and chanting of the monks with their deep voices, was very impressive. However we noted



that even in this monastery there was a monk late on parade who came dashing down a side aisle struggling into his vestment well after the service had begun!

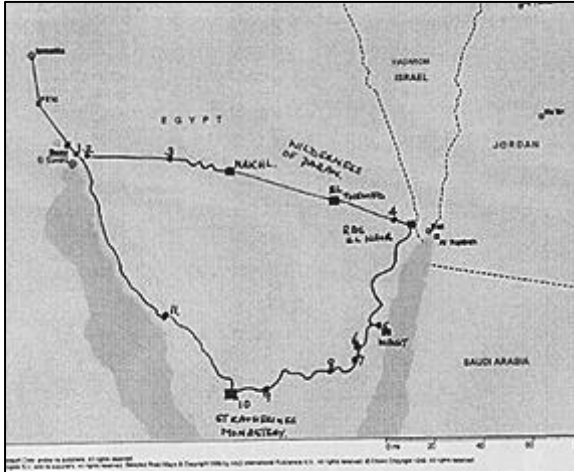
Next day we had a general clean up and then moved out. We were now on a well-used track, heading north to the coastal road, which led back to the Kubri ferry. We passed a place called Phaseus. It was densely planted with date palms, a pool of water, camels and with some cultivation, described on the map as an oasis. However we pressed on until we got as far as Wadi Fieran for the night as we had a fair distance to travel next day.

Oasis of Pharan

By then Sgt Parker had run out of cigarettes, a real crisis. He cadged some pipe tobacco from 2Lt Radford who had come well supplied for his smoke "stack". With the only available "thin paper" readily to hand, Sgt Parker made himself an enormous cigarette. Peace returned!

The coastal road was a well-used dirt track, which was in poor condition with miles and miles of ribbed surfacing caused by wear and wind. This began to set up a vibration in our jeeps, threatening to shake us apart!

Along the way, we passed under a large loading conveyor belt at Abu Zenima, which led from high up in the mountains out to a loading quay for the Umbogna Mines. Magnesium Permanganate was then mined there but also in the past, Turquoise.



We arrived back at the Kubri Ferry by 1630 hrs, now working perfectly, crossed and camped that night Genefia, ready to drop off our basket panniers and parachutes at RAF Fayid next morning. As the OC had specifically instructed us to not festoon our vehicles with the trappings of a long range patrol and as we couldn't leave these panniers to the villagers of Waisit, so it was important for us off load them before we made camp. Our arrival back at base in good order with nothing hanging off our jeeps was noted! It wasn't until our photographs were developed did the OC see what we really had looked like!

The recce had taken 12 days, had covered some 600 miles or more and we had found a vehicle route to St Catherine's Monastery from the Gulf of Aqaba.

Some Follow-up Thoughts

Major Ian Robbie

The photograph of 2 Tp, 9 AB Sqn RE, with the central figure of Capt Godfrey Messervey, the late Sir Godfrey Messervey, (August 2002 issue of the AEA Journal) brought back memories and some thoughts; although I do not claim to have known Godfrey Messervey well.

The photograph of some of Plant Troop, 147 AB Pk Sqn RE, shows troop commander Lt John Collyear, who was knighted the same year as Capt Messervey, 1986. John Collyear was said to be the best operator in the troop and we, his fellow officers, spent many hours of an evening being taught to grade, doze and scrape. I believe it is surely a unique achievement that the Div RE, in Palestine, produced two knights of the Realm in later years.



L to R: ?, Spr Curry, Spr McDermot, Spr McQade, Lt Collyear, ?,?
St Jean's airfield in the background and 147's perimeter fence

I well recall, in 1947, travelling from St Jean's airfield, north of Acre, to the airstrip at Muqesbila, complete with No 5 rifle, in order to attend an Officers' Drill Parade. The late RSM Mo Lambert was waiting 'in the wings' to drill this officers squad. I had arrived some two minutes late after a 'hairy' journey, of some 50 miles; having started out at a time which had upset my driver. I cringed when the senior officer on parade, Capt Messervey, reported to the CRE (Lt Col Tony Hunter), "Parade present and ready for your inspection, Sir, Mr Robbie was three minutes late for parade."

I also recall, in 1947, Godfrey Messervey and others attempting to reach Montfort Castle, near the Lebanon border, on motor cycles. Messervey was a motorcyclist of some note in later years; he also drove Formula three cars and held a private pilot's licence.

Impromptu Reunion



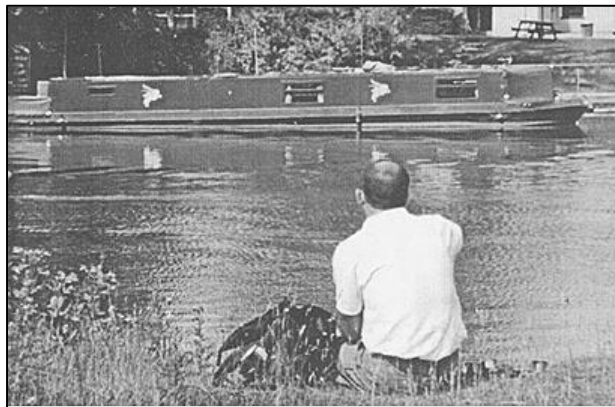
Rear: Bert Tate, Tony Manley, Phil Poulton, Pete Bates. Froth Beer, Yorkie Davies, Bof Harrap, Keith King.
Kneeling: Dave Rutter, Barnie Rooney, Dave Grimbley and Phil Philipson

An impromptu reunion was held in Oswestry in August on the occasion of the return from sailing to all places exotic of Alex (Froth) Beer. Many of those present had not seen Froth since he was medically discharged from 9 Sqn in 1975. A great occasion, which continued (for some) into the early hours of Sunday morning.

Froth has since returned to Cape Town to complete the refit on his boat. He hopes to make it back to the UK in time for the Blackpool Reunion.

Pegasus Encounter

Tom Hicks (ex 1st Para Sqn RE)



While walking along the banks of the Severn, I came across a pleasant scene. The river was busy with colourful narrow boats and gleaming white cabin cruisers. Across the river on the opposite bank a narrow boat was tied up, just outside a pub (where else?) On each side of the cabin in all its glory was our old Div sign "Pegasus," and the boat also carried the name "Pegasus." Through my binoculars I could see a man sat in the 'driver's seat,' glass in hand. I gave a bellow, "HOMAHOMET! RSM J.C. Lord would have been proud of me as the cry echoed around the valley just as it did at Djebel Mansour. The man

jumped to his feet, turned to see where the cry had come from, and gave me a two-armed salute in return.

My daughter-in-law, Pat, said, "Do you know that man?" I replied, "No!" "Does he know you?" she enquired. Once more my reply was, "No." "Then why are you waving to each other?" was her next question. Ever tried to explain Airborne Brotherhood to a civvy?

Accelerated Promotion- Rhodesian Style

Alan (Taff) Brice

Besides my skills in logistics, in particular, supplies of petrol to deserving Sappers, and in addition to my many hours of drill being marched in and out of the OC's office, I have, I think a quite unique record in the British Army. There can't be many people who managed, after 9 years' service to Queen and country, to leave the service at exactly the same rank as when they entered recruit training. Well I did! Sapper to the end!

This was all to change after I ended up in Rhodesia, via Zambia, in 1970. From then until early 1973 was known as "the piping hot days of peace." However, after Zambia in 1973 under Kaunda, followed by Mozambique led by Samora Machel in 1974 allowed terrorist bases along our Northern and Eastern borders respectively, things changed dramatically.

The bush war started in earnest and Brice was "recruited" into the Rhodesian Army. Backed by a fraudulent claim to having been a Sgt in the UK, I managed to reach the dizzy heights of acting SSgt., without too much publicity in the form of charge sheets.

The sergeant's mess in Cranbourne barracks in Salisbury was destined to become the site of one of the quickest promotions in military history. After a good few bitterly cold beers one hot and humid night, a W02 and CSgt visited us from the Rhodesia Light Infantry, a.k.a. "Rhodesia's Least Intelligent". The W02, who would not have been out of place in the NAAFI club on a Saturday night, started picking on me. Eventually nature called and while I was busy recycling the vast amount of previously consumed liquid gold, the R.L.I. W02 jumped on my back. I managed to get him off and gave him a good hiding. (He was even drunker than me). Realising the ramifications in the army of one rank striking a senior, I went home.

The following morning our training officer, Gavin Rawstron, a good officer in the Sid Rooth mould, phoned to say that the W02 was in hospital and had laid a charge with the military police and that the OC. wanted me court martialled. I protested my innocence, which in this instance was the truth, only to be reminded that, under no circumstances, can you strike a senior rank.

The next morning, a Saturday, the Gods and Gavin Rawstron came to my rescue. Gavin took down the latest copy of part one orders from the notice board and retyped them with an additional item promoting Acting SSgt Brice to substantive SSgt and again promoting me to acting W02. When the charge sheet was issued on the Monday it showed two W02's having a set to.

I managed to retain this rank till the end of Rhodesia in 1980 but, quite surprisingly in my book, got no further.

P.S. The above has resulted in a serious disagreement between myself and my old mate Jock McLellan, who completed his service in 2 Para at the rank of Colour Sergeant. Jock maintains that he out ranks me on the grounds that my rank was dishonestly obtained. My view is simply "check the scoreboard." Do we have an unbiased and sober member to make a ruling on this?

Psst. Anyone want to buy some petrol?

Operation Freshman- Stavanger (Norway)

John & Ruth Barrie



While visiting friends in Norway, we took the opportunity to lay wreaths on the behalf of the Airborne Engineers Association at the memorials to those who perished on "Operation Freshman" in November 1942. The first memorial is in tribute to all of those that died when their gliders crashed in November 1942.

The inscription reads: "In memory of Royal Engineers of the 1st British Airborne Division, two Glider Pilots of the Army Air Corps and two Pilots of the Royal Australian Air Force,

occupants of two Gliders which crashed at Helleland and Fylgjesdalen on 20th November 1942 whilst engaged on a Gallant Mission against the German Atomic Bomb Research Installation at Rjukan For Det Er Det Store Og Det Er Det Glupa at Merket Det Stend um Mannen."

The second memorial is for the four Royal Engineers who initially survived the glider crash only to be tortured and killed by the Gestapo. This memorial is located within 15 metres of the of the first plot. There are no headstones for those four as their bodies were never recovered. The inscription on this memorial reads: "In Memory of Four Royal Engineers 1st British Airborne Division 1872832 LCpl T.L. Masters 2110314 Cpl J.D. Cairncross 2010213 Dvr P.P. Farrell 1892979 Spr E.J. Smith they were on Operation Freshman - a Mission to Destroy the Heavy Water Plant at Venork.

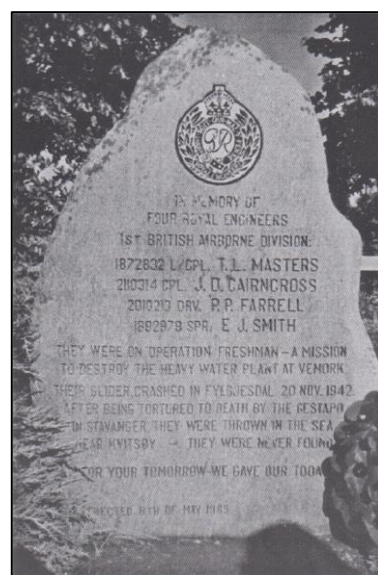
Their glider crashed in Fylgjesdal 20 Nov. 1942. After being tortured to death by the Gestapo in Stavanger they were thrown in the sea near Kvitsoy - they were never found. "For your tomorrow we gave our today."



While placing our wreath we were approached by an elderly Norwegian gentleman who pointed out that there was also a memorial to commemorate the Norwegians who had lost their lives during the conflict.

Ruth & John at the Norwegian Memorial Cross

Our friends Rolv & Elsa Waldeland informed us that Stavanger Airport was the location for the first assault conducted by an Airborne Force. Rolv explained that the Norwegians, who were defending the airport, offered no resistance to the German Airborne assault as they could not believe what they were seeing or what was happening. He later informed us that as a 7 year old, he recalls seeing German Airborne soldiers marching through Stavanger eating blocks of butter - a luxury item they had obviously not seen or eaten for some time.



Battle Tour Guides



War Veterans Bob Jones and Tom Carpenter joined members of 14 Geo Sqn RE on a two-day learning exercise on the Battles in the Arnhem area of Holland. Members of 14 Geo Sqn RE could not have asked for better guides during their recent battlefield tour to Arnhem - two British veterans of the campaign. The squadron, which has some of the Army's foremost mapping experts, spent two days learning about the battles in the Arnhem area of Holland and invited former Royal Engineers Tom Carpenter and Bob Jones to join them for the trip. Both from Birmingham, Tom, 76, served in 9 Field Company RE (Airborne) and Bob, 78, in 1st Parachute Squadron RE.

Bob & Tom (the "Birmingham Rascals")

As they accompanied their younger colleagues, Tom and Bob gave graphic first-hand accounts of the house-to-house fighting and the desperate, but doomed, struggle by the Allies to secure Arnhem's bridges over the Rhine.

To hear where and how their comrades were killed, and they themselves were captured, made chilling but compelling listening, and food for thought for some of today's soldiers about the realities of war.

Bristol Reunion- 2001

Outside of the AGM, one of the main aims of the Bristol Weekend was to renew old acquaintances and to establish new ones. The following selection of photographs confirms that the aim was adequately achieved.



Stan Marley with Don Doherty



Don Lay, Monty Woolley & Lofty Gibson



Our Piper, Frank Menzies-Hearn



Tom Tuddenham prefers a side profile



Happy smiles all round



John Grosvenor and Ruth Barrie rush to beat last orders



John Smith with Bobbi and Tom Thornton



Sheelagh Willis, Louis Gallagher & Dave Grimbley



Ray Coleman, Chris Davies & John Hooper



Davy Jones, Phil Poulton and Porky Willis



Rosemary & Mick Blackmore, Christine & Mick Humphries with Tony Murphy



Charlie Willbourne and his lady with Bert Flatters



Mandy & Charlie Edwards with Maureen & Billy Bradley



Ken Moore gets the point from Dave Rance



Margaret & Derek Taylor with Liza & John Elliott



Charlie Dunk & Ted Ellis keeping table 15 in order

Elvington- Airborne Forces Weekend



What now seems an age ago, the Elvington Airborne Forces weekend attracted several thousand former members of Airborne Forces, their families and friends. It was a memorable occasion that witnessed Brig 'Fergie' Semple taking the salute on the march-past during the Sunday morning parade.

The weather was kind to us, the events spectacular and the company of former colleagues enlightening.

L to R: Brig 'Fergie' Semple, Don Lay, Lofty Gibson, Tom Thornton, M Monty Woolley and Bob Prosser

9 Parachute Squadron RE

Having returned from their operational tour in Macedonia during the first week in October, the Sqn quickly vacated Aldershot for some well-earned leave. No sooner were they back in barracks than they were once again packing their kit and weapons. This time, for the not so exotic location of Otterburn for two weeks of range activity and live firing. Needless to say, with such a flurry of activity so quickly after returning from Macedonia, there was little time to draft an inclusion for the December Journal. However, the following extract of a letter written by Maj Rob Rider (OC) to our chairman Bob Prosser gives a flavour of how things shaped up in Macedonia.

...A quick progress report from the Balkans. The Squadron deployed successfully with 117 members on Operation BESSEMER, the NATO mission to collect weapons from the Albanian National Liberation Army (or UCK) starting from 10 August. The start of the tour was, as you will be well aware, overshadowed by the tragic death of Sapper Ian Collins at the hands of Macedonian youths when the vehicle he was driving was stoned whilst passing through Skopje. Despite the best efforts of the Skopje University neurological unit, he died on 26 August of severe head injuries. We gave Col a fine Airborne send-off in Macedonia and I know his funeral in Sheffield on 7 September was extremely well attended by airborne engineers past and present and I would be grateful if you would pass on my gratitude to the members of the Association who attended.

Despite this setback, the Squadron cracked on in its own inimitable way and has been at the centre of this operation, setting up the Weapons Collection sites at Kumanovo, Tetovo and Radusa (near Skopje) and have been proactive in assisting 2 PARA and the other multinational battlegroups such as the 2nd French Foreign Legion Regiment (deuxieme REP) - with whom we have struck up a good rapport, conduct these operations. Aside from the Weapons Collection Operations, the Squadron has helped set up the life support for 2 PARA and field defences for the French, which has enabled us to brush up on some critical trade skills - some of the boys were a bit rusty but received "Direction"! The operation has been very successful so far and a credit to the British Army. Two phases of three of the weapons collection operations have been achieved so far - a total of 2200 weapons systems including a T55 tank, which the Squadron helped destroy in a live demolition! Further progress on the mission rests on the development of the political process within the Macedonian Parliament and ratification of the Ohrid (a lake/holiday resort near Skopje) Peace Agreement between the Macedonian Government (Slavs) and the NLA (Albanians) which exchanges constitutional amendments in favour of the Albanian minority for disarmament and resolution, of what is effectively a Civil War, for peace. I suspect the prognosis is not good as the Macedonians want lands seized by the NLA returned, and the NLA want a continued NATO presence or international observer presence as a follow on force after our mandate runs out on 26 September in order to guarantee their security. The Macedonians have stated that a NATO presence (less KFOR rear) will not be permitted beyond that date. The third phase of weapons collection therefore promises to be awkward!

In the meantime, rest assured that the modern Squadron is upholding the distinguished tradition of airborne engineering and the reputation of its predecessors, and will continue to be at the heart of this mission - whichever way it turns out. (The letter is dated 13 September)

News from the Branches

Aldershot Branch

Betty Gray-Branch Secretary

The summer months have been relatively quiet for the branch with a few problems arising from the lack of accommodation for our August bimonthly meeting. With the Squadrons quick departure for foreign lands (Macedonia) we were unable to have the use of the John Rock Room. We could not contact the RSM of the Welsh Guards to ask permission to use what was the old 5 Brigade mess and our other options were virtually non-existent. Fortunately the manageress of the Falcon Hotel where we had arranged to have lunch let us have the use of one of their rooms so the meeting was able to go ahead. This problem of accommodation is a taste of what is to come when the Squadron leave Aldershot in the not too distant future.

In spite of miserable weather the annual BBQ went ahead as planned. Enough gazebos (five) were erected in the garden to provide cover for everyone attending. Tony Manley, as usual; cooked the food as well as providing all the crockery and utensils. It was an excellent effort by all concerned and the damp conditions (the rain was warm) did not detract from the enjoyment of the day. Forty-five members and family attended and we were particularly pleased to be able to welcome Joe and Sylvia Stoddart to our branch. It has been many years since we have seen Joe and he is most welcome as the newest branch member. Wally Clift did his usual trick of making people part with money for the raffle and a considerable amount was raised for branch funds. Unfortunately Captain Dick Brown and SSM Neil Fitzimons were unable to attend as they had been hauled off to Macedonia with the remainder of the Squadron.

Captain Chris Gosling and wife Jean have now departed Aldershot for Gods own county of Yorkshire. No doubt this will please Jean, as Ripon is her hometown. We all wish them the best of luck in their new posting and hope to see them whenever they visit Aldershot.

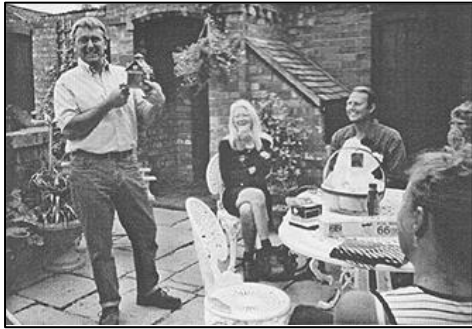
Our next major social event will be our annual New Year Dinner Night on Saturday 19th January 2002 at the Falcon Hotel, Farnborough. We take this opportunity to invite (on payment) members of the Association to join us. The cost will be approx. £18-00 for 3 course dinner and wine. For further information, please contact Dave Rutter (01252 326140)

Anyone living in the vicinity of Hampshire, Surrey and Wiltshire would be most welcome at our meetings, which are held bimonthly in the John Rock Room, Rhine Barracks. For further information please contact either myself or Fred on 01252 668339

Birmingham Branch

Nev Collins

To celebrate his retirement from the 'Fire Service,' a contingent consisting of over 250 partygoers joined Alan Brough at his smallholding in Dorsington (near Stratford on Avon) on 21st July 2001. Engineering skills of former years were put to good effect by a half section of the Birmingham Branch, consisting of Ozzy Holdsworth, Roger Howies and Nev Collins. Tents were erected; corduroy pathways laid and electric ring mains festooned with lights were established. The most essential installation was that of the bar and all of the supporting elements. Members of the local village aided us in our construction tasks. To grace the occasion, a hot and cold buffet was laid on; which adequately catered for the hungry gathering.



The following morning at the 'headache' breakfast, our Entertainment's Officer Roger Howies presented Alan with a miniature 'fire station' model.

L to R: Alan Brough, Kay & Roger Howies

The 'retirement' event proved a total success and was much enjoyed by all that attended.

Chatham Branch

Ron "Smokey" Gibson

The Branch is still going well, and we are retaining our number of members, on average of fourteen to eighteen at the meetings, many travelling a fair distance to attend. Unfortunately we loss two of long serving members Mike Farrow and Frank Shepherd who will be sadly missed. On a brighter note, we have had an addition to the membership, Tim Van de Kraan who recently left 9 Sqn, perhaps some of you know of him. He is most welcome to the branch.

During the year we have had enjoyable visits, with wives and friends to pub Sunday lunches in different parts of Kent. Our next Sunday lunch is in December at the King Charles hotel Chatham, where will visit our "Pegasus" bar. We have had the Veterans weekend at Chatham barracks and had some pleasant chats with comrades from Yorkshire and Aldershot. Some visited the Pegasus bar and found it quite good. There was a comment made that they did not expect to see a rogues gallery of Chatham members, but that is only because they are the only pictures we have. So if any of other association members would like to send picture of themselves together with service i.e. dates and places, or any pictures of groups of pals in camps, we will be only too pleased to put them up.

Two of our old uns have had knee operations, Jim Rogers Ex 3rd Sqn and our chairman Arthur Cheesman both have come through it all and are back with us. Yours truly is now a member of the 82nd American Airborne Chapter having taken part in the Spring 2001 in May of this year. We were made very welcome and we all had a great time. With some thirteen AEA lads and PRA lads we took part in some memorial parades, also one with the 82nd Airborne at Fort Bragg. Our sixty Red Beret lads accompanying the Standards put a lot of 'bull' into it, and everyone congratulated us on our turnout and bearing.

Chatham branch wish all readers a Happy New Year and we look forward to seeing many of you at the AEA functions in the year 2002.

Edinburgh Branch

Mick Walker

Our bimonthly meetings continue to be well attended and we are now preparing for our AGM in December where we hope to see some of the guys who by dint of distance do not normally make it to meetings.

The AGM is being delayed for a fortnight to accommodate our Secretary who will be in New Zealand on the originally scheduled date. Dougie claims he is going to visit friends, but those of us in the know reckon he is going to recover from and prepare for a hectic schedule of family weddings or recruit new members.

The Branch was shocked and saddened by the death of Dick Barton. A tribute appears elsewhere in this issue.

Those of you who have ventured north of Hadrian's Wall will be aware that Scotland suffers from unbearable heat in the summer and those who can, in the fashion of colonial India, take to the hills in that season. One of those who can is our Treasurer and he invited members and ladies to join him at his Trossachs home-from-home for a barbecue in August. Thus it was that Jock Donaldson cooked under a large fir tree and the remaining dozen or so of us dashed from Mick Walker's log cabin to collect our food to avoid the pouring rain.

The rain subsided long enough to allow for later entertainment of badminton and petanque in a quagmire. It was just as well that the generosity of the guests allowed everybody to be wetter on the inside than on the outside and all had a good time.

While on the subject of water, Brian McKean continues to take members out on his yacht in the Firth of Forth. Not much sailing gets done; and reports indicate that this is due to the amount of alcohol consumed by the motley crews.

On a more serious note a local memorial was dedicated in September to those members of 300 Troop, 131 Parachute Sqn RE (TA) who lost their lives in the tragedy at Cromwell Lock in 1975. The memorial - a cairn - is located beside the war Memorial in Grangemouth and its dedication attracted advance TV publicity. Conversely the families of the deceased specifically requested that the dedication be low key and accordingly the Branch was not represented. One or two of us have however subsequently visited the memorial to pay our respects.

Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year to all from the Edinburgh Branch.

Yorkshire Branch

Bill Rudd – Chairman

Not too much has happened during the summer season, our meetings carry on as normal. However we would always like to see more members come out of the woodwork. Our Sunday lunches are very popular and well attended and alternate between South and North Yorkshire.

We are always looking for new members and have recently snared two new members, George McConnell ex 3 troop 1960/65 and Mal Joinson 131 and 59. We welcome them and look forward to their support of our Branch activities.

The highlight of this past period was our AGM at Bristol, we all thank Bunny Brown and Tom Brinkman and their committees for all their hard work, a super weekend and long may they continue.

For the future we have our Xmas Lunch in December date to be arranged, followed by our Annual Dinner on the 26th January 2002 in the WOs & Sgts Mess Ripon. We would like to take this opportunity to invite members (on payment) i.e.; £15-00, which includes a 4 course meal, wine, loyal toast and entertainment. More details from Bill Rudd on 01423 536191.

We continue to carry on the involvement at our Airborne Museum thanks to Bob Prosser and big Tom Thornton in charge; this is obviously an ongoing project. Lastly on a lighter note, congratulations to Charlie Dunk for volunteering for the post of Association Property Member, he's not told the wife yet!

Wales Adventure Weekend- 2002

Chris O'Donovan

The Wales Adventure will be happening again during the weekend 17-19th of May 2002. We have booked the accommodation. At the time of writing participants have already booked eight of the nine family rooms but there is still plenty of space in the six man dormitory rooms.

The core activity will be mountain walking on the Saturday and the Sunday with alternative activities of sailing, indoor climbing wall, swimming and using the gym. We will be staying in the Nuffield Trust Facility at Joint Services Mountain Training Centre Indefatigable in Llanfairpg, which is close to the Britannia Bridge over the Menai Straits. The location is idyllic and the scenery with its backdrop of the Snowdonia mountain range is stunning. The accommodation is superb and consists of family rooms and small dormitories. They issue us with the cookhouse and the boat club bar. We have coach transport that we use for access to the mountains and for going out for a meal at night.

The outline program is that we meet up in the swimming pool on the afternoon of Friday 17th May, then have a few beers and stroll into the local village pub for a few more beers and something to eat. Saturday morning breakfast, coach to the hills, tab various routes, RV at Pen Y Gwryd hotel, coach back to Indefatigable then clean up and coach again to local restaurant for a good meal.

Sunday, breakfast, hills, tabbing other routes, beer, and bed.

Monday, disperse.

Sailing will definitely be an alternative activity for those who prefer sailing or who do not consider themselves able for the hills.

Last year the foot and mouth epidemic was cruel to us but didn't beat us, it resulted in restricted access to the hills so we had to find alternative activity, the weather however was kind and we were able to sail, climb restricted routes in the hills and have some great barbecues outside the boat club.

Costs are minimal, a dormitory bed is £2 per night, family room is £55 for the weekend, food is about £8 a head, coach £10 after that it's just your beer and your meals out. I quote my good friend Den Healy to give an idea of how the guys feel about the weekend. "The Menai weekends have been the best move since the AEA got off the ground. Spinning a yarn about old times over a few pints is what we have always done and can look forward to "until Alzheimer's, arthritis and death does for the lot of us.." I quote from an unforgettable source. Doing the kinds of things we used to be good at, at a slightly reduced level of skill and energy only appears to enhance the enjoyment, in good company."

This year is likely to be exceptional in that it will provide a broad based forum, halfway through the Association year, for informal discussion of the developments of the Bristol AGM.

If you want to join us contact me, Chris O'Donovan on 00 353 1 608 1010 at work, 00 353 1 4972674 at home or better still email me at codonovn@tcd.ie

I want to cap numbers at about fifty that is the capacity of the coach and is small enough not to make the weekend an admin exercise for myself. I want to get into the hills, not count heads. That being said, nobody is likely to be turned away, we will always find room for one more.

Twins in Action

Cyril Larkin

Claude and I were twin brothers and both members of No. 2 Platoon, 249 Field Company of the Royal Engineers, attached to D Company, of the Ox. and Bucks Light Infantry, which was incorporated into the 6th Airborne Division. On D-Day, we comprised 180 men in 6 Horsa Gliders and our job was to capture two bridges over the Caen Canal and the River Orne approximately five miles inland. We were under the command of Major John Howard, Ox and Bucks, and Captain Jock Neilson, Royal Engineers.

Gliders 1, 2 and 3 would land on the Canal Bridge, and Gliders 4, 5 and 6 on the Orne Bridge. Claude and I were both in No. 6 Glider - I'll bet there weren't many twins in that position that night! With blackened faces and hands we got aboard. The doors closed and then we heard the increased power of the engines of the Halifax and then the jerk of the towrope and we were off! The Gliders left at one-minute intervals into the night sky. Thirty men in each glider, five of whom were Royal Engineers.

For most of us this was our first time in action and I remember there was almost no conversation in the blacked out interior of the Glider. No lights at all were permitted. We flew at 6000 feet with fighter aircraft escort and crossed the French coast a few minutes after midnight. Tuesday, 6th June 1944. Suddenly we felt our glider being released and then seemingly in minutes we had landed with grunts and groans from both our bucking plywood aircraft and ourselves!

I had previously been detailed to check that after we landed everyone had left the glider and so I jumped out from the rear-side door, ran a few yards and flattened myself on French soil. And nobody else was there! Just a few staring cows four or five yards from me and otherwise complete silence! Where had all my mates gone and where were the other two gliders? For a second I thought I might be a one-man invasion force, and so I moved ahead of the glider and found to my relief a bunch of men kneeling by a hedge. "Scout Section," I whispered. "Shut up," came the reply. So I moved ahead and there found the others from my glider and we all moved off at a fair pace, down into a ditch, up the other side and on to a road and there straight ahead of us was "our bridge."

One shot was all we heard from the enemy and one of our men threw a smoke bomb and in the same instant we charged across the bridge. As we did that the sappers were checking for electric wires that would lead to explosive charges as Intelligence Reports had stated that the bridges had been prepared for demolition. Guns were now firing on the Canal Bridge 400 yards away - but all I heard from the "defenders" of our bridge was the sound of running feet down the towpath. But before anybody mocks, I suggest the sound of 30 pairs of British Army hobnailed boots rushing around in the darkness was enough to scare the bravest hearts! "But how far would they have gone and where to."

I went under the bridge to the water's edge and in the patchy cloudy moonlight saw a huge dark object right under the centre of the bridge. A barge filled with explosives? A continuation of single width scaffold boards had been laid through the girders into the darkness. "That's where the explosive will be." I thought. "Phew." So I called for support and lo and behold my twin brother appeared alongside me.

Apparently whilst I was under the bridge all other personnel had moved off. So we went to investigate. Crawling through the girders with rifle and backpack was no joke, and the water rushing below me was not inviting either. The "dark object" turned out to be a huge brick pier containing the bridge opening equipment and, thankfully, no explosives. They were discovered next day in a nearby shed.

Whilst under the bridge we heard running feet above us. Hopefully from the other gliders, but we weren't going to check! I put out my torch and waited and when it was silent Claude and I climbed back on to the road. It was 30 minutes since we had landed and as we got on to the road we saw the first 'paras' dropping, and then amazingly, from somewhere in the distance the "All Clear" sounded. They didn't know we were there! Claude and I made our way cautiously to the Canal Bridge, which by now had been captured, and waited for the inevitable German counter attack. But all we saw before dawn was a German Foot patrol, staff car and

motorcycle, which were quickly finished off by the infantry on the river bridge.

A sole German tank approached the Canal Bridge but that was quickly destroyed with a Piat bomb.

Early dawn saw a number of Lancaster bombers twisting and turning very low over a coastal gun-battery prior to an attack by the 6th Airborne and a naval bombardment could clearly be heard. Daylight now and we saw and learned of our casualties. One officer killed, one drowned, six wounded and one Glider (No. 4) missing. Our Glider, No. 6, had been the first to land at the River Bridge - hence my being on my own initially!

Then we saw two German naval craft cautiously approaching upstream to the Canal Bridge and we opened fire. From my slit trench I only managed to fire one round at the wheel house before my rifle jammed, had managed to get grit into and over my rifle bolt! But it caused no problems. The boat grounded and the crew surrendered and Claude went aboard to check everything out. The second craft managed to turn back but I presume would have been finished off shortly afterwards by the beach landing troops.

A little later in the morning now and we were getting problems! There were German snipers in the trees and the Church Tower and buildings were in use by German troops. The fire was becoming heavy and accurate. We had limited heavy equipment, but the Ox and Bucks had got hold of a German antitank gun together with ammunition and started to use it with some success against the Church tower. Whilst we were now getting some heavy fire on the bridge I remember seeing allied fighter aircraft flying overhead quite unmolested! Very frustrating!



A little after midday now. Then sweet music on the air - bagpipes! A company of commandos, with a piper at the head and their officer next wearing a white pullover, had reached us from the beach. What a joy for us all - temporarily. For as they crossed some of the lads were hit by the snipers. We buried one by the bridge next day. I painted his name on an improvised cross - Lieutenant Campbell. I can't recall where I got the tin of paint and the brush - probably from the cafe by the bridge.

"Himmel! I must have had too much schnapps... I'm seeing double!"

Evening now and the sky suddenly filled with a vast number of gliders and aircraft dropping supplies in the bridge area. A most welcome sight. We knew now that we had tanks, mobile guns and more comrades supporting us. A plane was hit by German anti-aircraft guns and came down in flames crashing in a nearby field. For us sappers by the Canal Bridge it now meant an all-night guard duty. It had certainly been a very long and eventful day.

On D-Day plus two a German fighter-bomber flew in low and dropped a bomb on the Canal Bridge. I was stretchered on to a French Resistance lorry and taken almost instantly to a beach First Aid Station. In due course I was told that I was to be taken back to the UK. Inside this huge Tank Landing Craft many stretcher cases arrived - I was one of the first batch delivered. I wasn't sure what had happened to Claude. I asked an attendant if someone like me, (as he was my twin brother), had arrived. "Yes," he replied, "He was in the last load aboard." Hospitalised together for a couple of weeks with plenty of humour and care from the nurses and then I was moved on alone for a further two months to another hospital and we both rejoined our 249 Company of the Royal Engineers in September.

Warning Order AGM & Reunion 2002

Norbreck Castle Hotel – Blackpool

The AGM/Reunion 2002 will once again be held at the Norbreck Castle Hotel in Blackpool. The dates are from Friday 11th - Monday 14th October.

Cost: 3 x nights (Fri/Sat/Sun) will be £139-00 per person or 2 x nights @ £120-00 per person.

The above prices will include all meals throughout your stay, and that also covers the cost of the Gala Dinner on the Saturday evening.

Accommodation available: Double/twin/single or sharing. A deposit of £20-00 per person will be required, with the outstanding balance to be paid prior to departure from the Norbreck Hotel. Rooms must be vacated by 1100 hours on the day of departure. Your deposit is to be forwarded to Mike Holdsworth and your cheque is to be made payable to: 'AEA Entertainments.'

A loose booking form has been enclosed in your December Journal and you will note that we have requested the Christian name of your wife/partner or companion.

For those members who unfortunately missed our last visit to the Norbreck Hotel (October 2000) we guarantee you will have an excellent time in friendly surroundings with good wholesome food and exceptionally favourable drink prices!

A full and detailed programme of the occasion will be published in the April edition and a final reminder or last call will be included in the August 2002 copy of the Journal.

Combat Stress

The following is a brief report from one of our more prominent national newspapers...

The US army has called in a combat stress specialist after a blockade of the road from Macedonia to Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo cut off supplies of scoopable ice cream to the base's pizza and potato bars and forced the cancellation of rest and recuperation passes to Bulgaria.

Record Parachute Jump

An RAF Falcon display jumper, Sgt Wayne Clayton, whose home is in Elvington Kent recently set a new world record jump from 25,000ft. The record breaking jump with 11 colleagues went into free fall for one minute and 50 seconds until reaching 4,000 ft. He later stated, "It was quite bizarre really, performing such a great feat at a place named after my home town."
