



# THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS JOURNAL



**Airborne Engineers Association  
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# The Airborne Engineer

April 2007 Issue No. 21

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## Chairman's Report

### **Mick Humphries**

Well, spring is almost upon us and I am looking forward to another good year for the association with the usual round of merriment. This year will be especially busy for myself as it is the 25th Anniversary of Op Corporate (Falklands Campaign) in June. Like most of you I do not have a single day left in my diary for that month and I look forward to seeing many of you around the functions in Chatham, London, Aldershot, and Woodbridge. Also in June, John Smith has organised another trip to Normandy. As many of you will know we are presenting a bench to The Airborne Museum in memory of all the Airborne Sappers that fell during that campaign. If you can spare the time please support John's trip.

Since the AGM Dave Pace has spent a lot of time developing the Association website and it is now fully operational. Please try and make use of the site and sign the guest book when you enter, if you have a comments please pass them to Dave, he needs your feedback to develop the site further. For those who are unaware the website address is as follows: [www.airbornesappers.org.uk](http://www.airbornesappers.org.uk)

The Aldershot Branch Xmas dinner was an event not to be missed this year. The branch on behalf of the association presented Rob Copsey, (representing BLESMA), with a cheque for the monies raised at the AGM. I have been at some mad parties in my life but have never drunk lager from a prosthetic leg before. Our Hon Secretary has a lot to answer for.

23 Air Assault Regt are having a Veterans weekend in June and the details are published later in The Journal, but can I remind you all that although you are all welcome, The RSM needs to know in advance who is coming. Please send your requests to me via your branch chairman.

On July 6th Aldershot Branch and your committee are going to tab 100 miles around Gibraltar Barracks training area. The answer to the obvious question of how Billy persuaded us to do it is, " I don't know anyway if you wish to join us on that weekend, please e-mail Billy. We can promise you plenty of beer on the Saturday evening.

Please all have a good spring and I look forward to seeing you all over the next few months.

## Stop Press- Discount for WWII Veterans

AGM/Reunion Weekend Harrogate 2- 4th November 2007

As you can see a booking form as been enclosed with this Journal for the above weekend. Further to this the Yorkshire Branch invite WW2 veterans of the Association to attend this weekend on half price basis, the following action is required. Contact Chairman Bill Rudd MBE if you wish to take up this offer on 01765 607898, when completing the booking form, please write at the top of the form in large print, WORLD WAR 2 VETERAN. Allocation will be on a first come basis; funds are limited so get your bid in first! Looking forward to seeing our WW 2 Vets

## BLESMA Cheque Presentation

On Saturday 20th January a cheque for £2105 was presented to Mr. Bob Copsey formally of 9 Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers on behalf of BLESMA. The occasion was the Annual New Year Dinner of the Aldershot Branch of the Airborne Engineers Association held in the Potters International Hotel Aldershot.

Paul Burns of the Parachute Regiment accompanied Rob Copsey at the dinner. Both had suffered severe leg injuries that resulted in the loss of limbs whilst on active service with their respective units.



**Presentation of the £2,105-00 cheque by Sylvia Stoddart & Trixie Doherty**

The money had been raised at the annual reunion of the AEA held in Southampton the previous October. The main organiser of the raffle was Steve Stephenson who on his own initiative persuaded the Army Parachute School at Netheravon to donate a prize for a tandem free fall parachute descent, which was won by Mrs. Sally Myatt. Readers will recall from the December 2006 edition, that Sally, together with husband Peter successfully completed the freefall 'drop'. Another star prize was a 2-week holiday in South Africa, which had been donated by a former member of the Squadron, the late Charlie Edwards. Members of the association donated a vast array of other prizes.

Much of the credit convincing members to part with their money in the purchase of raffle tickets was thanks to the sterling efforts of Sylvia Stoddart and Trixie Doherty.

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## Rogues Gallery



Rick Mogg looks on in envy as Harry Lockwood gets stuck into a cream cake



Can you help by naming the above 9 Sqn lads taken during their tour in Palestine?



Garry Dawes (former 2 Troop) about to go on patrol in Vietnam while serving with the Australian SAS in 1967



A 'Hotpot' of former 9 Sqn Chefs Tony Manley, Brian Smith, Paddy Boyce, Dave Davies & Danny Daniels



Alan (Smirnoff) Saunders



I'm sure I've got some dry clothes in here somewhere!  
Fennymore Fleck & Jim (striptease) Harrower - May 2006

## Expanding on the other Airborne Squadron's History

### Eric E. Richards (now age 81 years young)

Having read the article of Peter Stainford and Eric Booth i.e., 1st Parachute Squadron RE's "The Real Forbear of The 9th", I wish to add further information to their story. The other Para RE Squadrons that were left out of this article, remember there was the 2nd Parachute Squadron RE, that remained behind after the 1st A/B Division leaving Italy. 2nd Para Sqn RE carried on fighting in Italy, later 'dropped' in the invasion of Southern France in 1944, and later 'dropped' outside Athens, Greece in 1945, before coming back to the UK and disbanded. Also there was no mention of the 591 (Antrim) Parachute Squadron RE of the 6th A/B Division that was disbanded in 1945, I also believe that many of my own 4th Parachute Squadron RE, those who got back from The Battle of Arnhem, were posted into the 1<sup>st</sup> Para Sqn RE prior going to Norway, as the 4th Para Sqn RE was disbanded after the Battle of Arnhem.

As to the Battle of Arnhem where I dropped with the 4th Parachute Squadron RE on Ginkel Heath DZ outside "Wolfheze" on the Monday 18th September 1944. We were placed as divisional troops under 1<sup>st</sup> A/D HQ, at the "Hartenstein" Hotel. Of our three (3) troops plus HQ, troop, for our 8 days of continue fighting in 2 & 3 troops defensive position in the grounds and around the Castle "Sonningberg" on the outer perimeter of Oosterbeek. Our 1 Troop were fighting again for those 8 days in the Ommershot area of Oosterbeek until our order to withdraw to the "Neder Rhine". It was here that I was wounded en-route and later taken POW on Tuesday 26th September.

At no time was the 4th Parachute Squadron RE was ever mentioned in those areas both on all the defensive maps of that area or in all the many later books on that campaign. In both of those mentioned areas it gives and shown as the 9th Field Coy (Glider) Airborne, defensive area, as though the squadron was never on that 'operation' or ever at Oosterbeek...except in the 1st Airborne Division ORBAT. Also I wish to point out, the 4th Parachute Squadron RE was formed in early 1942 in Palestine, when all its volunteers had already fought in the 8th Army in the Western desert, so were already seasoned soldiers.

When the new 9th Airborne Squadron RE was re-formed in Hameln, Germany in 1948 it was of those Regular soldiers from the 3rd Para Sqn RE, which was then stationed in "Neumunster" base in Schleswig Holstein, North Germany. Also many of the new squadron members were Ex-Boys Service and others who had been in the Glider Field Cos, who being regular soldiers, volunteered to re-train as parachutists, as well as other RE's from outside RE units. There were only a few former 1st Squadron, a few NCOs and a few Sappers. I also believe the new 9th Airborne Squadron RE, was one or if not the only all 'regular unit' at that time in the Army - being any new national Services men in those other squadrons were posted out to other RE Field Cos, especially those who were then in 3 Para Sqn RE then in 'Neumunster', nearly if not all, the Wartime Officers had left for other units! As for my own service, after A/B Depot "Hardwick Hall" Chesterfield, then on to Ringway Manchester for my Jump Course. I was posted in July 1943 to the newly formed 591 (Antrim) Parachute Squadron RE (who were formed up in "Woodbridge" Suffolk), became part of the 6th A/B Division in "Bulford" Camp Salisbury, in early January 1944. I and several others from 591, were posted to the 1st A/B Sqn RE at "Donington" Nr Boston, in February of that year. The squadron kept a few as re-enforcements, those of us left were again then posted to the 4th Parachute Squadron RE, who were just back from Italy.

After Arnhem and POW camp and leave in 1945, I was sent to the RE Depot at Sowbey Bridge, Nr Halifax, then to Dover, across to France, then by train to Italy via Switzerland, eventually spending Christmas and New 1945/6 in a Transit camp in "Naples". I was later moved to Salerno, then on to Taranto, then by troop ship to Greece, from Athens to Patras, later back to Athens, then by ship to Salonika, then to Kavala to join a Field Coy RE part of the 4th British Division. There I applied to join 1st Para Sqn RE in Palestine and flew from Athens to Cairo, Egypt, later by train to Sarafan, after a week there joined 1<sup>st</sup> Para Sqn RE at Castina in 1946

In early 1947 I left for the UK and was posted to the then RE training Increment (Para) at Barton-Stacey in late 1947, from here I was again posted to the 3rd Para Sqn RE at Neumunster, Germany in 1948. All regular soldiers in the squadron were posted to the new 9th Airborne Squadron RE.

When the squadron came back to the UK; in which I was with the MT bringing our transport back from Hamburg docks to Tilbury, then on to Aldershot serving as Captain 'Johnny' Goddard's 2 Troop's driver.

In late 1950 was posted out the squadron to join the new 25 Engineer Regiment 3rd Infantry Division. After completion of a Cadre course I became the CRE's driver in late 1951. The regiment left for Cyprus on the aircraft carrier HMS Illustrious to Famagusta, then early 1952 we left for the Suez canal zone "Moasca" camp, during which time my posting to join the newly formed SAS came through - but was told I would have to sign on the another 3 years! Having only 6 months left of my service to do, I decided to leave the army for civilian life.

## Observations- Previous Issue

### 'Geordie' McLachlan

I would like to point out a couple of errors on page 5 issue No. 18 of the April 2006 Journal Cyprus and Suez 1956.

I was recalled on 9th August to Barton Stacey, and within 114 hours had been paid, kitted out and had a medical. We were issued with 'crap hats' but wouldn't wear them - red berets arrived the next day! These were subsequently dipped into hot then cold water to shrink to fit. The RSM was an ex RE Marine Commando who directed us to a large accommodation hut. With the usual orders and routine of the being read out to us it was noticed that the RSM's pace stick was left unattended on the table. With the aid of a couple pieces of string the stick was hoisted up to the rafters, much to the amusement of everyone less the RSM. Later the RSM's bike appeared on top of the ablutions but with the threat from the man himself to burn our red berets that had been left out to dry; the bike was quickly restored to its owner.

On handing over the parade to the CO the following morning we're not sure what was said between the CO and RSM but some very funny looks were sent in our direction.

Before leaving Barton Stacey the RSM admitted that he had not experienced such camaraderie since leaving the Commandos.

We joined the Squadron on 14th August 1956 - not October as stated in issue No. 18. I was posted into Park Troop with Sid Burrell as my Troop Sgt. Back in 1955 Sid, 'Gilly' Potter and myself made the Pegasus's which stood outside of the guard room at the bottom of Gun Hill in Aldershot. For most of my time until Operation Musketeer I was a LCpl in the RAT Pit with Stan Jones. I was transferred to 3 Troop for OP MUSKETEER; one of my jobs was to reconnoitre a bridge with 2Lt Thomas but the RAF blew it up before we got there. Another task was to clear the airfield with 3 Troop commander, a captain with a double barrelled name - White something.

I left the Squadron in November 1956 having flown back from Nicosia in an old Shackleton bomber via Idris in North Africa where we had a 24 hour delay; then on to RAF Lyneham and finally to Aldershot for demob.

The Squadron's title in 1954 was 9th Independent Parachute Field Squadron Royal Engineers Middle East Land Forces (MELF) 28 when the late A.J. Poinder was in Command.

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## Back in Gagetown, Oromocto

### Roger Howles



It was a scene all four men describe as emotional. Standing in the training area of Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Gagetown in front of a bridge four former British soldiers remember when they first came to the town as 20-year-old men.

For a little over three months in 1966 they worked alongside Canadian soldiers and spent their evenings meeting the townspeople and taking in the culture around them. Now, 40 years later Alan Brough, Roger Howies, Robert Dorrell and Malcolm Nash returned to the model town for a vacation. Although the town has changed in many ways, they agree some things remained the same. "The hospitality has been great and that was one thing we remembered about the town when we came here 40 years ago," Brough said.

### Alan Brough, Roger Howies, Bob Dorrell & Mac Nash

As members of the British Forces the four men said they were ecstatic to be deployed to Canada. "We had previously been sent to Aden, which is Yemen now, so when we heard we were going to Canada we were excited to be going to a civilised country," Dorrell said.

His recollections of Oromocto at the time are of a small community with a big heart. He recalls the social gathering spots of the day being a bowling alley, a store, pharmacy and an ice cream parlour. "We used to go to the ice cream parlour because that's where all the pretty girls were," Dorrell said. "Everyone was dressed like in the movie 'Grease.' While their nights were spent at the ice cream parlour and hanging out at the hotel bar, their days were spent in the training area helping to build a bridge. When the men talk about the bridge they speak with a sense of pride. Howles said it wasn't a bridge constructed like they are today. The

men working in the field built it from scratch using the trees they cut down to make portions of the bridge. The mortar and bricks all had to be transported and carried to the site.

"The bridge was a naturally built bridge, hand made with sweat and pride," Howles said. For his part Nash said it wasn't just the bridge they helped build, but also the road out to the site of the construction as well.

Upon the completion of the bridge the soldiers got to name their creation. They chose to name it "Webber Bridge" after one of their fellow soldiers who was killed while they served in Yemen.



Upon their return 40 years after the initial construction of the bridge, the men had the opportunity to go back to the site. Although the bridge has undergone some changes over the years, all four said standing in front of it was an emotional moment.

"We found the bridge and although it has changed the geography of the land is exactly how we remember it and it's still known as the Webber Bridge. We feel really quite honoured it has remained and kept that name over the years," Brough said.

Made of bricks, mortar, steel and wood the bridge is more than just a few years of hard work to the men, it stands as a symbol of something great to all four. "I felt, at the time we built it, that it was more than a simple bridge. I feel it's a bridge that spans 40 years, 3,000 miles and an ocean and it brought us back to Oromocto," Brough said.

While so much has changed over 40 years, Dorrell said one thing has remained constant between their home country of England and Canada. When they came here they worked side by side with men from the Canadian Forces to achieve a goal. The same types of connections continue today. "It's still the same now with our and your troops fighting side by side, shoulder to shoulder in Afghanistan," he said.



**L to R: Lt Col P. Kearney, CD (Chief of Staff), Alan Brough, Roger Howles, Col V. Jestic, CD Commander 3 Area Spt Gp, Mac Nash & Bob Dorrell**

As their 11-day stay concluded one thing all four men wanted people in the town to know was how well they were treated during their stay in the model town. Brough and Howles are Rotarians and said the Oromocto Rotary Club was instrumental in helping them enjoy the trip, as was the staff at the Day's Inn.

A lot of stuff has changed, but the hospitality of the people of Oromocto hasn't changed a bit, "Howles said. Everyone we've met has been absolutely amazing.

## Encounters with SSMs

### Bob Kennedy

Having read in the December issue the article "As I recall" by Caz Cazaly I felt as though I was there. So I thought I would put pen to paper and recall a couple of the SSM's that had the same effect on me.

1st-WOII (SSM) Colin Walker 1983 September 1983.

I had just passed 'P' Coy with a pass + as a 24 yrs old full screw 'hat'. Chuffed or what! From 'P' Coy lines we went up to Rhine Barracks to see the SSM. Had a red beret on donated by ex Sqn guy Dennis Hewitt while serving together as 'hats' in Germany. Several of us had passed and were waiting outside the office feeling well hard and very AIRBORNE.

Out came Colin Walker. "Right so you think you're real hard 'cos you have passed 'P' Coy then? Well let me tell you, your nothing in this Squadron, you \*!\*! up and you're OUT!

There ended the lesson.

2nd - Falkland Islands 1984 WOII (SSM) Paddy Denning Stan Stanley was going back to the UK on the ship "BRAZEN" after a 4-month tour. Farewell drinks were to be had in downtown Stanley.

The drinks were flowing and all were having a good time. Come closing time I gathered all the guys outside to wait for a Land Rover. Stan was thrown in the back comatose. We were all in the 'Rover ready to go. (Forgot to tell you there had been a little tiff between us and the locals.) So as the duty driver had his foot on the clutch a civilian fist came through the window straight into the face of John. As I was sitting on the battery box in the front; by the time I had got out all I managed to see was the said civilian on his rear end at the back of the 'Rover. Everyone had de-bussed and there was the Battle of all Battles going on with a lot of slow motion one-on-one fights. A couple of things stick in one's mind; loads of empty beer cans lying around. (All beers were sold in cans and the empties were supposed to be placed in the bins outside)

As fights do, it stopped and we all jumped back into the Land Rover and sped off at a great rate of knots. We got back to the "Coastel" and de-bussed leaving Stan Stanley still out of it flat on his back. The 'Provost' turned up and "nicked" him.

Now, having had more than my quota of beer I had decided to be sneaky and hid under one of the guns outside the Coastel. There I fell asleep, but what I did not know was that SSM Paddy had been woken up by the 'Monkeys' and was on the warpath shouting "Where the \*!\*! is Cpl Kennedy"

Sometime after everybody had been either nicked or gone to bed I woke up freezing! I decided that I needed to get back to my bunk, so I walked on top of the gangway, up the fire escape and into me bunk - Ah bliss!

My next recollection was a very irate "Paddy's" eyebrows in my face screaming and shouting for me to get my a\*\*\* in front of the OC. Not a pleasant experience while suffering with the head from hell.

We were all tapping the boards with the clueless Provost leading the way.

What happened next was quite bazaar. I convinced the OC, SSM & 2IC that Stan had nothing to do with the fight. Then Stan was in front of the 2IC who told him to get his kit together as HRH Prince Andrew was on his way in a 'chopper' to pick him up.

Paddy, one last thing, do you remember punching a very large matelot on the rugby field? We all stood back waiting for you to be pummelled into the earth, when he gave you the biggest KISS I have ever seen..

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## A Tribute to Syd Rooth MBE

### Ingram Murray

In Issue No. 20 of "The Airborne Engineer" it reported the death of Syd Rooth, once OC 9 Para Squadron, in June this year I am certain that I am not the only reader of our journal who remembers Syd with affection and gratitude. He was a powerful influence on me during my formative years and we were friends for life.

When, as a newly minted 18-year old Second Lieutenant, I arrived at CBS Camp just outside Nicosia in March 1956 to join 3 Field Squadron, Syd assumed the task of licking me into shape - making sure I knew my place as the only National Service Officer in the Squadron, that I was correctly dressed and that I quickly adopted the custom and practice of a unit that had originally won its spurs in the desert and had recently moved from the Canal Zone. As a detached squadron of 22 Engineer Regiment, the Engineer Regiment of 10 Armoured Division in Tripoli, 3 Field Squadron was all but independent. With his weather-beaten face and whiskers, his suede boots and natty cords Syd looked older than his 26 years and I was in considerable awe of him.

The EOKA emergency was getting going and the pace of operations was hotting up. We provided Sapper support for all and sundry and occasionally worked as infantry in the patrolling, cordon and search and sweeps in the city of Nicosia and the Troodos Mountains. As the junior officer, I tended to get sent off to do the odd jobs, particularly at weekends, some of which turned out to be quite hairy but even though as OC 1 Troop Syd was not directly responsible for me, he was a constant source of support and advice to mitigate my inexperience.

It was perhaps before the Suez Operation that Syd gave me his best bit of advice. Presumably, because I was deemed to know Egypt - my father had been a diplomat in the Embassy in Cairo and I had joined up from Egypt - when Operation Musketeer was launched, I was sent off to Famagusta with a packet of key vehicles with orders to get myself onto a landing craft.

Famagusta was like a scene from Hell - vehicles of all shapes and sizes, British and French were crammed into the port, and the staff in charge of loading were descending into madness as they found that not only had everyone adopted a liberal interpretation of their vehicle scales but that the dimensions of some vehicles had increased, rendering the loading tables which had been based on WW II shapes and sizes, useless.

As a unit we had never done a beach landing before and we had not trained at all for one - our preparation for the operation had been confined to the construction of a Class 60 floating Bailey, which we had had to build out to sea in great secrecy as there are no rivers in Cyprus (it sank in a storm!).

But Syd had done some training on a beach somewhere and it was with his advice ringing in my ears that I insisted against all comers that my Commer Tipper with its powerful winch be stationed against the ramp of the LST so as to be first out.

And so it was, with the LST absolutely crammed full with a Battery of 25 pounders of 33rd Parachute Light Regiment, HQ and A Company 1 Para, stacks of 25 pounder ammunition and several administrative bits and pieces, and my packet - the Tipper, the OC's FFR Land rover, a D2 'dozer on its low loader, an armoured half-track and a couple of 3 tonners with tools and rations - we sailed, not knowing until sealed orders were opened en route where we were destined. And although we were assured that we would be disembarking over a quay, Nasser had blocked the canal with sunken ships so that when the ramp went down in the Fishing Harbour we were confronted by a pile of shingle. The Tipper winched itself through and then to the chagrin of the Royal Regiment hauled the 25 pounders and their grossly overloaded 1 Ton Combat Trucks through the soft going. The driver of the Tipper stuck to it although the Commer was loaded with 3 tons of PE and if anything had hit him in the general racket as the Marines and 6th. Tanks came ashore a few yards away over the beach, unloading could have been terminated with a bang.

On landing, 3 Field Squadron were ordered to support the Commando Brigade, who at that stage had no Sapper Squadron. We had never met them - they had come from Malta to Port Said but again it was Syd who knew the G 3 RE in the Commando Brigade, sought him out and got us onto the right track.

The Commandos went home, 3 Div arrived and we helped build the Class 60 Bailey, which had been fished up from the seabed by someone - but all that is another story.

It was with a real sense of loss that I left 3 Squadron in 1957 to go to university but in order to do my reserve commitment I joined 131 Parachute Engineer Regiment almost immediately. And when we did our extended Annual Camp in Aden in the mid-60's to my delight there was Syd again, helping us get ourselves sorted out in the camp on the Dhalla Road.

Then when later I took over 131 Para Squadron TA, I encountered Syd in Engineer Intelligence 1 BR Corps and then as OC 9 Para Squadron, where he was obviously more at home, and contact was frequent and friendly.

Retirement eventually overtook us both but we continued to meet at the Officers' dinner; then he had to overcome illness which meant his appearances became less frequent.

Syd was the son of a WO I in the Cavalry and grew up in India. He was immaculately turned out, punctilious, self-disciplined and always courteous and helpful. For me, he was true-blue right through.

One thing I quite forgot was that he was awarded the MBE for rescue works in the Skopje earthquake.

## The Way We Were

### Harry Barnsley

According to present day restrictions, taboos and regulations on almost everything we enjoyed as children growing up between the two world wars, we should have expired at a very early age.

We were born to mothers who smoked and drank; they ate blue cheese and didn't get tested for diabetes; our cribs were covered with brightly coloured lead-based paint; we had no child proof lids on medicine bottles and when we rode our bicycles we didn't wear helmets. We drank water from garden hoses and shared one bottle of soft drinks with four or five friends; we ate cupcakes, bread and beef dripping sandwiches and cheese, and drank unpasteurised milk and soda pop with sugar in it but we weren't overweight because we were always outside playing.

We would go out in the morning and play all day except for short visits for a snack. No one knew where we were because we had no mobile phones. We would spend hours building karts out of scrap prams and then ride down a hill only to find we had forgotten the brake. After running into the bushes a few times we learned to resolve the problem.

We fell out of trees cutting and grazing broke bones, teeth and ourselves and there were no lawsuits as a result of those accidents. We made up games with sticks and tennis balls and although we were told it would happen, we never put out many eyes. The idea of parents bailing us out if we broke the law was unheard of- they actually sided with the law.

Those generations produced some of the best risk-takers, problem-solvers and inventors ever. The past fifty years have seen an explosion of innovations and new ideas. We had freedom, failure, success and responsibility, and we learned to cope with them all. We had the luck to grow up before lawyers and petty officials governed our lives with a quagmire of petty regulations supposedly for our own good. "Put something over that camera!"

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## Observations- Previous Issue

### 'Geordie' McLachlan

I would like to point out a couple of errors on page 5 issue No. 18 of the April 2006 Journal Cyprus and Suez 1956. I was recalled on 9th August to Barton Stacey, and within 114 hours had been paid, kitted out and had a medical. We were issued with 'crap hats' but wouldn't wear them - red berets arrived the next day! These were subsequently dipped into hot then cold water to shrink to fit. The RSM was an ex RE Marine Commando who directed us to a large accommodation hut. With the usual orders and routine of the being read out to us it was noticed that the RSM's pace stick was left unattended on the table. With the aid of a couple pieces of string the stick was hoisted up to the rafters, much to the amusement of everyone less the RSM. Later the RSM's bike appeared on top of the ablutions but with the threat from the man himself to burn our red berets that had been left out to dry; the bike was quickly restored to its owner.

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# The Sad Passing of Common Sense

**Steve Stephenson**

Today we mourn the passing of a beloved old friend, Common Sense, who has been with us for many years.

No one knows for sure how old he was since his birth records were long ago lost in bureaucratic red tape. He will be remembered as having cultivated such valuable lessons as knowing when to come in out of the rain, why the early bird gets the worm, life is not always fair, and maybe it was my fault.

Common Sense lived by simple, sound financial policies (do not spend more than you earn) and reliable parenting strategies (adults, not children, are in charge).

His health began to deteriorate rapidly when well-intentioned but overbearing regulations were set in place.

Reports of a six-year-old boy charged with sexual harassment for kissing a classmate; teens suspended from school for using mouthwash after lunch; and a teacher fired for reprimanding an unruly student, only worsened his condition.

Common Sense lost ground when parents attacked teachers for doing the job they themselves failed to do in disciplining their unruly children. It declined even further when schools were required to get parental consent to administer Panadol, sun lotion or sticky plaster to a student but, could not inform the parents when a student became pregnant and wanted to have an abortion.

Common Sense lost the will to live as the Ten Commandments became contraband; churches became businesses; and criminals received better treatment than their victim.

Common Sense took a beating when you could not defend yourself from a burglar in your own home and the burglar can sue you for assault. Common Sense finally gave up the will to live, after a woman failed to realise that a steaming cup of coffee was hot. She spilled a little in her lap and was promptly awarded a huge settlement.

Common Sense was preceded in death by his parents. Truth and Trust; his wife Discretion; his daughter, Responsibility; and his son, Reason.

He is survived by three stepbrothers; I Know My Rights, Someone Else Is To Blame, and I Am A Victim.

Not many attended his funeral because so few realised he was gone. If you still remember him pass this on, if not join the majority and do nothing.

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## 9 Parachute Squadron RE

Exercise **PEGASUS DRIVE** was an 8 day Live Firing exercise in Sennybridge at the end of November 2006 as part of the build-up training to assume the Airborne Task Force commitment. The exercise culminated in a 25 mile march across the Brecon Beacons, a challenge set by the Commanding Officer.

### Exercise Pegasus Fan

#### Live Firing & Tactical Training Exercise

Sgt D Jones

With little time to find my feet as a newly promoted Sergeant in 9 Parachute Squadron RE it was straight into Squadron life and off to Wales. My challenge was to Recce and organise a Squadron Live Firing and Tactical Training Exercise up to section level - And this was only the first week in my new post!

The Recce Party consisted of myself, WO2 (SSM) Mick Stewart, SSgt Zac Needham and Sgt Paul Eveleigh. My task was to organise the LFTT exercise and the remainder were to Recce the facilities provided at Sennybridge in order to bring all Squadron Personnel up to MATT level one in CBRN, BCDT, Map reading, Law of Armed Combat, and Values and Standards. Along with this we were going to Recce a route for the CO's new directive - a 25-mile Tab carrying 55lb, which must completed in 9 hours! Obviously being 9 Parachute Squadron RE and the first Squadron in the Regiment to attempt this new directive we were keen to take in some of the favourite sites in the Brecon Beacons so Pen Y Fan and Jacobs Ladder were a definite along our proposed route!

With the experiences of OP HERRICK fresh in our minds, the LFTT exercise began with a day on the Individual Battle Range (IBSR) in order to refresh individual battle skills on a one to one basis. Initially all personnel began the day by advancing up an individual CQB lane and from here all personnel progressed onto individual Fire and Movement which also incorporated a withdrawal from contact. Once this essential phase was complete the Squadron then progressed onto D Range (SENTA) to practice Fire team and Section tactics. These serials were to be enhanced with the use of a number of effects weapons kindly supplied by the Infantry Battle School at Brecon. The supplied Overhead and Flanking GMPG Fire as well as L111 Practice Grenades certainly enhanced our battle inoculation.



Covered approach to contact



Hey! I've got wet feet!



GPMG giving covering fire for the final assault



**LCpl Gloyn complete with 'battle wound'**

The fire team serial initially consisted of an advance to contact and the assault of positions, before being suppressed by a superior force and being forced to withdraw to establish a snap ambush in order to engage any follow up forces. The entire contact being supported by the Sustain Fire (SF) General Purpose Machine Guns (GPMGs) to enhance battle inoculation and practice commanders in calling for Fire Support.



The final section serials began with section level anti ambush drills from two vehicles, and then two deliberate attacks incorporating the supporting FFG and OHF SF GPMGs. With the section carrying its full complement of 5.56mm ammunition, plenty of link for the GPMG (LR) and LMG, as well as Smoke Grenades and L111 Practice Grenades the firepower that the section produced, along with that produced by the supporting weapons certainly was a formidable force to be reckoned with!

All in all an excellent Range Package and a brilliant introduction for me into how the Squadron does its business. With all Squadron Members up to section level tactics we are now ready to progress to similar LFTT exercises at night.

## 25 Miler- Brecon Beacons

### **Lt S Bennett 9 Para Sqn RE**

On the 28th of November 9 Parachute Squadron RE conducted the first of the annual challenges set by the Commanding Officer 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Assault) a 25 mile TAB with a weight requirement of 55lbs and to be completed in less than 9 hours. The Squadron was given the option to conduct the TAB anywhere in the country. So after careful analysis of previous weather reports it was decided that the Brecon Beacons had the greatest rainfall and so was selected.

We arrived at the start point near the Talybont reservoir for the weigh in, at this point the weather was holding off but as the first party set off into the darkness at 0700 the Beacons gave us the good albeit wet news.

The first checkpoint was at the base of the roman road where the only person to get on to the wagon was Barney, the OC's dog. However this is not a problem as the SSM has him booked on the January re-show.



**Cpl Dale, Sprs Galjaardt, Davison & LCpl Ragan tackle Jacob's Ladder**

The route up to the base of Pen-y-Fan was steady but quick. Once at the base of Jacob's Ladder the groups prepared for the hard slog to the summit. Jacob's ladder was not as difficult as suggested, with all Squadron members flying up its shear face as if it were an escalator. After a quick stop on the summit to soak up the views of and some food (no 'stickies') we moved on.



#### **LCpl Sargison climbs to the summit**

The route from the summit required cat like balance as the westerly wind was trying desperately to throw us from the ridge line. Due to the amount of weight carried and the pace of the Squadron, nobody was caught off balance. The only testing part of Pen y Fan was the route off where the path had turned into a mudslide. This time the quagmire claimed a few victims with a few people opting for the sit down and slides method as opposed to running!

After checkpoint 2 we headed off through the Taf Fechan Forest using the low ground, which over the past few days had become a river. Once we broke the wood line the sun began to peek out from the clouds, however this wasn't to last.

#### **Well-earned rest at the summit**

Once at checkpoint 3 we encountered two flighty horses who wished to cross our path. One of these two horses became scared at the prospect of taking on thirty paratroopers and began to panic. But just as it looked as though the horse was going to start bucking the 2IC stepped in and began whispering to tame the flighty beast, a truly amazing sight to behold! (Obviously a 'Horse Whisper' in his spare time!)

After the horses were calmed we cracked on towards checkpoint 4. The route was mainly uphill over the Bryniau Gleision, which consisted of wading through an old path that had again been converted into a sizeable stream. Once at checkpoint 4 we found the safety vehicle up to its axles in clay mud. So after some inspired ideas as how to move it without force we decided the best option was to get hands on and push. Needless to say it worked and nobody mentioned the irony of saving the safety vehicle.

After checkpoint 4 the only thing keeping the Squadron going over the final 8 miles was either a cold cheese and onion pasty or the thought of a beer at checkpoint 5 - I guess most of the Squadron opted for the latter.



#### **The downhill descent proved just as testing**

On the route to checkpoint 5 we again encountered a new river and had to follow its course to the base of Tal-y-Bont reservoir, but the end was in sight.

As we turned the corner into the pub car park the real race began as to who could get their pint in first.

After the Troop Commanders had agreed that next year the route needed to be more testing; we settled our arguments over 9 pints of Pimms!

## 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Assault)

### Veterans Weekend

23 Engr Regt (Air Asslt) is holding a Veterans weekend on 29th and 30th June 2007 at Rock Barracks, Woodbridge.

Friday the 29th will be a freedom parade where veterans and standards will march through the town of Woodbridge. This will be followed in the evening by a series of lectures on the history of Airborne Operations and the Regiment in the WOs' & Sgts' Mess which will be followed with a buffet supper.

Saturday 30th will be the Regimental 'Open Day' followed by a Regimental Dinner held in the combined mess.

Numbers and space are limited so anyone wishing to attend should contact the Association Chairman who will be basing with the Regiment over the issue of invitations. The chairman's contact address, telephone number and e-mail address are published on page 1 of this publication.

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## My First Job

14461533 (Acting Unpaid)LCpl CK Barker (Charlie)

1<sup>st</sup> AB Sqn RE based in the RE Zone Beit-ball

Palestine October 1946

"Corporal Barker, we have a Call-Out - there's a railway mine been located at Ras-el-ein Railway Station". I replied, "Excuse me Sir, on signals this week is Corporal Taylor". He was in the far corner of the tent still fast asleep. As all regular soldiers know; orders are orders - one never questions or queries them. In view of what happened shortly afterwards, all my life I wondered, without being conceited or big headed, if he would have preferred me to have gone with him in view of my age and experience, with no offence implied to Lance Corporal Taylor. At that moment, neither Captain Newton nor I realised that he had just 2 hours of his life left on this earth.

They set off in the Duty Jeep driven by Sapper Hargraves. After something like 2 hours I began to feel uneasy and then down the road came the Duty Jeep with no Captain Newton and or Corporal Taylor in the back. The driver who was deathly white pulled up and informed me that they'd both "had it!" as he put it. Holding up a piece of Captain Newton's boot the size of a Half Crown and said look at the B. In actual fact Corporal Taylor had survived the explosion but being covered by the blood of Captain Newton and being unconscious they naturally thought he was dead. When they arrived at the Military Hospital and him showing signs of life they cleaned him up and apart from burst eardrums and severe shock he survived.

Visiting Corporal Taylor after a few days I was intrigued by his face which appeared to be covered in blackheads. In fact it was the dust from the railway ballast being caught in the blast embedded in the skin on his face. Fortunately, it all worked its way out. He then told us what had happened. They had attached the pull wire or cable and heaved. It had the effect of partly moving the mine, unfortunately the cable snapped. On the way forward Captain Newton said, 'Repair the cable'. A second attempt but the same thing happened and again the cable was repaired. After removing the mine and the cable breaking yet again, going forward for the third time Captain Newton again repeated the first order 'Repair the cable' and this is what saved Corporal Taylor's life. Apparently, they had almost dislodged the mine. The last words Captain Newton ever uttered on this earth are "I think it's going to be alright Corporal Taylor". Thus breaking the Golden Rule - TRUST NOTHING - SUSPECT EVERYTHING. This cost him his life and came very close to taking Corporal Taylor's life.

When Corporal Taylor had recovered he received a lovely letter from Captain Newton's parents who lived in Bunker Hill in Lincoln. They sent him their son's writing case with his initials 'JN' on it. Incredibly, the very next day, Captain Adamson and Corporal Mills of the 9th Squadron had the very same experience. In this case, Captain Adamson inadvertently trod on the mine killing him and seriously injuring Corporal Mills. I think Corporal Mills lost an eye. I knew Corporal Mills because we were both on the same 'Cadre' course. Two days later, my Troop Sergeant Spike) Hobbs, a truly great character, approached me in his usual brusque manner. The following afternoon I was to proceed to the 27th BMH and collect the bodies of the late Captain Newton and Captain Adamson and proceed to the Ramie Military Cemetery for a full military funeral complete with firing party.

On entering the mortuary, my nostrils were assailed with the awful stench of dead bodies, which were in very basic coffins consisting of sheet metal on a wooden framework. They had name, rank and age on a little black plate. The first thing that struck me was that Captain Adamson was 28 years old and I thought that was old! When you are just 19 years of age, 28 does seem old! On carrying the coffins out to the ambulance, I stumbled and fell which made me feel an utter fool. We loaded them in the back. The smell was so appalling that we decided to leave the back doors open. There was a seat in the back, but the medics very kindly squeezed up to allow me to sit in the front. I've often thought that if fortune had smiled on me a little kinder, I'd love to have gone

back to the cemetery to visit the gravesides and pay my respects to them and all the hundreds of others who never came home.

Over the next few months I always seemed to be going on courses including one in the UK, which was cancelled on account of the appalling weather of 1947. The last 6 months in Palestine were very interesting indeed, the Arabs and the Jews in open warfare and a weak indecisive government in London.

When the Great Chief, Lord Montgomery suggested to the government that they had 2 options - to get out or restore order by military means, they chose the soft option.

A scene I shall never forget is the hundreds and hundreds of refugees trudging along the road. Tiny girls clutching a bag of rags or a couple of live chickens. One little girl was knocked down - she was just dragged to the side of the road. I've often wondered about her fate.

The last 6 months were hard work and very exciting. To be shot at without effect and blowing up all the surplus army vehicles in what we call 'Death Valley'. In the near 3 years I was in Palestine, we had landed at the end of October 1945 and sailed away on the good ship 'Samaria' in July 1948. On leaving Camp 141 and embarking on the 'Samaria' it seemed strange in a way, to be sailing away from Haifa and with Mount Carmel fading in the distance, which had been our home for the past three years.

I still cannot forgive the Jews for killing our war veterans on the eve of their demob. After the battles of the Rhine Crossing to Normandy, I still have sympathies for the poor old Arabs. These poor, primitive people who were dispossessed of their lands. The holocaust was a European problem not a Middle Eastern problem.



Greetings and farewell to all my dear friends of the Airborne Engineers.

**Charlie Barker with best friend Hallen Herbert celebrating their 3rd Christmas in Palestine 1945 – 1947**



Latest defence cuts take their toll!



MT Troop waiting to board the LST "Empire Celtic" August 1949 on their move back to the UK (Waterloo Barracks, Aldershot)  
Left hand corner: Charlie Barker, Paddy Neely, Willcocks, Tubb Stanley, Law, J. Andrews, Ginger McLaren - too many to list them all

# Nostalgia

Den Healey



## Kayaking

When I left the Squadron and the Army in 1961 I became a PE teacher during the decade which saw Britain, become the second fattest nation on earth. Not entirely my fault. However, quite soon into my new career I began to work in "Outdoor Pursuits", as it was called at the time, and worked my way through various qualifications in canoeing.

In 2002, I started coaching a youth group in Watchet Harbour on the Somerset coast and found that my old certificates had lapsed so I am now going through the routine of re-qualifying. The British Canoe Union is pretty well organised with training and cover skills and safety very thoroughly, which was far from the case when a corporal from 2 Troop and a lance corporal from Plant went to sea a few months before the aforementioned demob date.

In March 2 Troop and three of us from Plant went to Mallaig to widen a cliff path into a track suitable for a Land Rover. Fred Gray had taken his lath and canvas double kayak and by the end of a hard, wet month of seven day working we had a Sunday off in early April, and he had a chance to use it at last. It was a beautiful day. We wore KF shirts, denims and gym shoes and headed out from the little bay below the field in which we were camping, towards a village called Inverie, thereby breaking at least six of the British Canoe Union (BCU) rules on safety.

All kayak or canoe journeys on rivers or at sea should be made with a minimum of three boats. All kayakers and canoeist should wear a buoyancy aid. In tidal waters a passage plan should be made which will make best use of the direction of tidal streams and possible "escape routes" if weather, damage or injury forces a change of plans. The latest weather forecast should be acquired. Food, hot drink, spare clothing, first aid kit, and a means of signalling for help should also be carried. Before departure your ETA should be left with someone who can notify emergency services if you are overdue.

So the bulldozer driver and the demolitions man paddled out onto the calm waters of the Sound of Sleat towards Loch Nevis. Close on our starboard side were the cliffs, which Fred's merry men had been blasting to bits for Paddy Rogers, Ivor Slane and I to shovel over the edge of the track. The snowcapped Cuillins of Skye towered over the little harbour town of Armadale about three miles to port. Beautiful.

At that time I did not know that had we capsized we would have lasted about half an hour at that time of year in that water. I was also unaware that basking sharks frequent that area, and although they only feed on plankton they do so by swimming slowly on the surface with their mouths open, about three feet across, and about two feet of dorsal fin showing. The image of me passing a brick springs to mind, but luckily there was none in sight that day.

An hour and four miles later we arrived at Inverie in Knoydart, a huge forestry estate with four tiny settlements linked by a coast road that leads nowhere. We carefully lifted the fragile kayak up the beach and walked to a farm. The usual squaddies' question was greeted with a smile and the news that the nearest pub was back at Mallaig, but he gave us a drink of milk, cool and creamy, and probably a lot more use to us then with a four-mile paddle back. My North-West Kayaker friends tell me that progress has arrived at Inverie. There is a pub, a B&B, a campsite and a bunkhouse, but you still have to get there by boat or a very long walk from the outer edge of Scottish civilization.

## Hankley

Before the Squadron became acquainted with Hankley Common DZ we used to drop into Frensham Common from time to time. A pleasant enough place if you avoided the pine trees at one end and the pond at the other.

Round about 59, Plant was given the job of, or should I say, "tasked with", undoing all the hard work our predecessors had done to deny Hankley as a DZ for the Wehrmacht. Benny Benson, Ivor Slane, Barry Massingham and I, ably directed, from a distance, by Rick Mogg, spent a hot summer with some of the civvy War Dept, plant ops filling up all the ditches and levelling off the banks to give the lads of today the Bowling Green surface they deserve.

Barry liked it so much he spent a couple of weeks with a tent and compro rations living on the job, and spending most evenings in a pub called "The Pride of The Valley". I used to ride in on an army motorbike with a jerry can of diesel lashed onto one pannier, which made cornering interesting.

### **Waterloo East**

Fred Gray's interesting piece on the hardships of Waterloo Barracks East, and the mention of no TV reminded me of a Stan Marley incident. Some barrack rooms chipped in to hire a TV and the great favourite at the time was "Popeye". The first snag was that the aerial was one of those things with two antennae sticking out of a hemispherical base which worked best if someone held it about chest high and a couple of yards to the side of the set. The second snag was that "Popeye" started before the end of the working day, about 4pm I believe.

These snags were overcome in true Squadron style; one hero always volunteered to hold the aerial and endure an oblique view of the programme, and the "Popeye" addicts just skived off a bit early. The third snag was insurmountable, we thought. Captain Wade was 2IC. He was walking along the top veranda looking in the empty barrack rooms when he gate crashed the "Popeye" party. Half a dozen sappers sitting on beds with Stan Marley standing with the Aerial. His unexpected entry left everyone, even Captain Wade, speechless for an interminable split second. Stan whipped the aerial onto his head and said, "Take me to your leader, Earthman." Apparently Captain Wade remained speechless for a couple of nano-seconds, threw the door wide open and screamed something about a hurried departure might just reduce the size of the list on OC's Orders, at which the spacemen returned to space in a blur.

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## **Putting the records straight!**

**John (Tommo) Thompson**

I have been either stood at the bar at a reunion, sat in a branch meeting or listening to the endless after dinner speeches when statements have been made about the formation of the Airborne Engineers Association. Or should I say miss statements! The last occasion was at our monthly branch meeting. We were sat having lunch in the old Officers Club, since refurbished and renamed Potters International Hotel, which is now the location for the meetings of the Aldershot Branch - which is a fantastic location. (Many thanks to all who made this possible!) During the conversation, I said that it was quite amazing to be back in the Officers Club as this was the location of our first reunion. One member sat at the table said, "I would have joined in the beginning, but it was just a drinking club and so badly organised!" (A statement that I disputed quite vigorously!)

In was back in 1989 that Joe Houlston, the then Administration Officer of the Squadron, contacted former 9 Squadron guys in the local area. It has been said that a few ex Squadron guys were drinking in a bar and decided to form an association - this was not the case. The first meeting was actually held in a room in the same building as the Squadron bar, but as the Squadron were away at the time we could not even get a drink! There were seventeen attendees: Joe Houlston, John Thompson, Bob Ferguson, Moss Metcalfe, Norman Penny, John Ebbs, Tom Ormiston, Satch McVetis, Chris Chambers, John Barrie, Wally Clift, Lofty Aldridge and Bob Sullivan, (now this where my memory fails me slightly, so if anyone can name the other attendees; would they please let me or Fred Gray, our historian know.)

Joe Houston explained that the officers had their own association, so why not set up an association of airborne sappers with an all-ranks membership. Joe was so enthusiastic about it that in no time our minds were buzzing with the thought. Joe had done a lot of the groundwork, but after a few meetings we soon found out our ineptness at the task in front of us. Bob Ferguson had volunteered to be the Chairman, Moss Metcalfe the Membership secretary and myself as the Association secretary - (I was the only one with a pen and paper on the night!) Our first problem was to name the association and I can quite honestly say that I was not aware of the number wartime Airborne Engineer Squadrons until Fred Gray brought it to our attention. After much debate we came up with the 'Airborne Engineers Association'. Our next task was a constitution. I obtained a copy of the local Parachute Regiment Associations constitution and Joe got the Royal Engineers Association constitution. Joe and I sat for many hours going through both of them. We then presented our version to the committee for fine-tuning. We had a few disagreements and lengthy discussions deciding on the term to use to describe the eligibility for membership.

Moss Metcalfe started to put together membership lists in geographical locations and of any known ex airborne sappers who might join the association. 131 Squadron in Birmingham already had a thriving association called the Airborne Sappers. We decided to make contact to see if they would come under our umbrella and Bob Jones made the initial contact. Moss Metcalfe went up to Birmingham to convince them. The Aldershot Branch was the first to be formed, formed, but soon there were requests from other geographical areas. Comprehensive sets of guidance notes were put together to assist anyone wanting to form a branch. All this took time, energy and extensive phone calls between the then members and committee.

We then formally wrote to the Royal Engineers Association for a liaison with them. The word came back that we could become a branch of the Royal Engineers Association but never an independent association. I phoned the then secretary of the Royal Engineers Association to give us a viable reason for this. He became rather agitated and doubted that we would ever become an association.

From the beginning we had stated categorically that we were not a charity, but that we would channel any potential member with financial or medical problems in the right direction. However as the association grew, the committee decided that it would be to our benefit to have charitable status. Bob Ferguson took this under his wing and spent many hours rephrasing the constitution with, I believe, Eric O'Callaghan MC, (of Arnhem notoriety!) who assisted us tremendously?

Instead of sending out the minutes of the meeting I put forward to the committee that I would start a Newsletter. It was decided to put together a comprehensive Newsletter and produce it on a six monthly basis. Fred Gray assisted me with many interesting submissions.

We had started off in a "Blaze of Glory," a statement by Bob Ferguson, but not without many problems. The Squadron were out of station for a good period of time, and we had to look for another meeting place. 'Brummie' Harper (ex-squadron) was running an Aldershot pub called "The Army and Navy" and he kindly allowed us to use one of his rooms for a couple of the meetings. Perhaps the story of the drinking club came from that!

Jan, wife of Chris Chambers took over the role of setting up and running the Association's shop. Largely due to her enthusiasm it went from strength to strength. We had meetings about the design of blazer badge and the design of our Standard with John Vickerman becoming our first standard bearer!

Soon branches were established in Aldershot, Birmingham, Chatham and Ripon. Later these were to be boosted by further branches with the Southwest, Northwest and Edinburgh.

Moss Metcalfe stepped down after doing a tremendous job as membership secretary and Fred "Diplomatic Bag" Gray took over the membership secretary role. He put all the membership on a database. It had been said that Fred slept with his computer, but Betty said, "No, Fred is a computer!" The late Charlie Edwards volunteered as entertainment's officer, but we insisted, '**No peas on toast for any branch buffets or association dinners'**.

We were into our second year and going from strength to strength! I was a very good friend of Taff Pratt, the secretary of the local branch of the Parachute Regiment Association. Taff had a small maintenance company and helped look after the Aldershot Officers Club. Ex RSM Shannon of 3 Para was the then secretary. I had previously attended a brilliant dinner and dance with the Parachute Regiment Association and thought it would be a terrific idea to have a reunion there. I put it forward to the then committee who said lets go for it, apart from one who said, "What do you want to have wives there for!" I had a great deal of help from Taff and ex RSM Shannon. The night was a terrific success with over 200 persons sat down. A first class meal with a live band - we had arrived! Of course the Birmingham lot complained the dinner portions were too small! (only joking lads).

With our membership steadily rising, Major General Mike Matthews C.B. stepped forward to become our first Association president. Potential members now started coming out of the woodwork. At the time I was working for a very large construction company and making use of all the facilities e.g. envelopes, photocopying the Newsletter etc. However, when it got around the three hundred copies mark my secretary admitted she was 'wetting her knickers' and could no longer offer assistance. It was at this time that Peter Bates took up the baton of producing the newsletter for the next few years. Fred Gray also started to put together a "Roll of Honour" of Airborne Sappers who had died since the onset of Airborne Forces. Eventually, as the membership got ever stronger, Colin Parker took over the printing of the Newsletter and did a sterling job when he arranged it in an A5 format. Then some 8 years ago Dave Rutter became our editor and is now responsible for the Journal of the Airborne Engineers Association. Dave has carried on the tradition in an excellent way.

Our first welfare case was a member who had an amazing career. He had served with the Squadron then went to America and joined the American Airborne. After serving a period of time with them he came back to the UK to join 23 SAS (TA). It was during a shooting holiday in the USA when he had shot and killed a deer but as he and a friend were skinning it, a deer tick bit him. Through this bite he contracted a debilitating disease of the spine. He was living in a flat three stories high and had to let his National Health Service wheelchair down by a rope out of the window then go down the stairs on his bottom. The committee decided to firstly contact the Airborne Forces fund, which I did without any success. I then contacted Tanky Smith who ran the SAS welfare fund. Once again no joy so I approached the committee with the bad news, in good old Airborne Sapper fashion we set about finding the funds ourselves. Wally Clift did an amazing job running various raffles and in no time we had raised sufficient funds to buy him a lightweight wheelchair. However, I must say that more recently the SAS welfare association have provided our colleague with a new electric chair.

After serving four years as the Association Secretary, I had to step down due an illness and Ray Coleman took over the office and did an amazing job. Each time someone has had to step into the breach they have brought their personalities and ideas. At every AGM we grow from strength to strength and are now an extremely thriving Association and still growing. Keep it up guys! What a terrific drinking club!

**"UNIQUE et UBIQUE"**

## 'Fergie' and Me and a Few Others

**Brigadier J H Hooper OBE, DL**

*Readers may recall the article written by David Brooks published in issue No 5 dated December 2001 entitled Exercise Gobi - Sinai Peninsula January 1953 which relates to his recce across the Sinai to St Catherine's monastery.*

The trip (recce) was, again, at the instigation of (then) OC Maj Ian Lyall Grant.

"Following the 1958 rebellion in Iraq....the Jordanian Government requested British assistance against a perceived threat from Baghdad. At first this looked like vindication of an initiative Semple had taken in 1953 to find a route across the Sinai peninsula to Al-Aqabah but - in the event- 16 Parachute Group including his squadron was flown out to form a defensive position across the approach to Amman" (Obituary -Brigadier R F Semple MBE MC in Dec 2003 Royal Engineers Journal)

Well it was not in 1953 but 1952 and in July when it was extremely hot in the Suez Canal Zone and probably a lot hotter on the Sinai and the Red Sea coast. Someone decided that it would be a good idea to recce a route down the escarpment from the Sinai plateau to a natural harbour on the West side of the Gulf of Aqabah. The natural harbour was called Kah Harbour. I have a strong suspicion that Ian Lyall Grant, then OC 9 Indep AB Sqn, was the brains behind this wizard notion and the instigator of this proposed excursion. Ian had lots of bright ideas I can tell you. But it fell to Fergie to lead the recce. Anything, I suspect, to get him out of the Sqn 2 i/c's office for a breath of fresh air.

Me? What had I got to do with this? Well, I was just a lad, a 2 Lt, trying to keep 3 Para happy with the able assistance (close supervision more likely as 2Lts need careful watching) of Sgt Eric Blenkinsop and Corporal Busty Linham and a few others. I spent my time trudging around the 3 Para worksite in the heat and the sand trying, amongst a few other jobs, to erect a Nissen hut that 2i/c 3 Para had found on a scrap heap somewhere. Not the easiest of tasks when the bits were warped to hell and half the bits were missing anyway.

Needless to say, the problem was compounded by 2i/c 3 Para needing it by yesterday and not having liberated any form of lining for the hut. He informed me that Major Nissen DSO RE had invented these huts to be put up in two days. As the bits he had found were probably from the 100,000 originally sent to France in 1916 I was not overly impressed by this claim. While this was going on, Fergie sat in the relative comfort of a proper office in Moascar. Between you and me, I was quite happy with my lot as it kept me away from the OC with an MC the 2 i/c with an MC and even more importantly the SSM with an MM, one Bill Powell, who normally ate 2Lts for breakfast. Authority and I had a reconciliation problem in those days and it took some time to sort it out. (About 35 years and six months, actually, of the 36 I spent in the Regular Army. I think I got the hang of things eventually and a further nine years in the Reserve with R Mon RE (M) were spent most happily out of range of retribution.



As far as I could make out, the Sinai recce was based on the idea that if trouble brewed in Jordan 16 Para Bde Gp could parachute in while the heavy vehicles crossed the Sinai, got down to the sea somehow, embarked on some form of landing craft and would be duly ferried across to the port of Aqaba thereby avoiding crossing Israeli territory where the natives might not be too friendly. Great idea? Yup, that's what I thought. Snag one. How the hell do you get large vehicles down an escarpment several thousand feet high to the water's edge? Even the goats had second thoughts about going down the escarpment and the sheep. Forget it! However the answer to the conundrum was " Try 9 Sqn" Easy peasy!

**Fergie and a few others**

As fine a force of a dozen fighting men as you have ever seen was assembled and in due course the party in four Jeeps set off from Moascar down the Treaty Road to the ferry across the canal at Kubri and into the Sinai desert heading East. Fergie was in one of the Jeeps; I was in a Jeep driven by Sapper "Gangle" Watson. John Gisby was in a third Jeep and although I know Sappers Mills and Ward and Corporals Bracken and Jennings were in the party I cannot recall the other four. We were all armed with pistols and Sten guns for personal protection and Gisby says we had Brens on one or more of the jeeps but I did not have one on mine anyway. All was going extremely well and we must have looked a fine force travelling at speed across the gravel plains, echeloned to avoid each other's dust and with pennants on the radio aerials flying. LRDG eat your heart out!

I was having a little personal problem as I had decided that this was a splendid opportunity to stop smoking and had deliberately not brought any cigarettes with me. As there were no shops within a hundred miles of where we were going it would be impossible to buy any cigarettes and I would be forced to give the wretched things up. Wrong, yet again, Hooper. Gangle had plenty and by the end of the trip I owed him at least two cartons but more of that anon as they say.

As I said, all was going well until we reached a desert fort which protected an important pass on the East West trans Sinai route and featured in some of the Arab/Israeli wars as a paratroops objective. Once we were within small arms range the occupants started shooting at us. No orders were required for as a 180 degree turn as you'll ever see as we went West to think about this uncalled for and unexpected assault.

I was all for skirting the fort out of range and going on with the job but a wiser head prevailed, i.e. Fergie, and he went forward bearing as white a piece of material as we could muster, as a flag of truce, to negotiate.. The conversation was a struggle but in essence it was more or less: Fort Occupant: "Where do think you are going?" Fergie: "We're going East to the Gulf of Aqabah" FO: "I forbid you to do so"

Fergie: "But we have permission to do so".

FO: "Who gave you permission?" And, as ones does on these occasions, Fergie played his ace. Fergie: "King Farouk", he replied without a blush. Only to have his ace trumped by the chap in the fort who shouted back FO: "No more King Farouk, General Neguib now boss man' Collapse of stout party as they used to say.



**Cpl Brackan stirs the 'all in' stew**

When we had left the Canal Zone, Farouk was the boss man and we had never heard of Neguib. In the few days or so we had been travelling out of touch with civilisation, Farouk had been kicked out and Neguib plus the more formidable Nasser were in charge of Egypt. Somehow Fergie talked his way out of it and we went on our merry way.

It was shortly after this that I got my first experience of the fatalism of the desert Bedouin. We had stopped for a short break when a seriously scruffy figure materialised from the sand and gravel. Had we been downwind of him I am sure we would have had an early warning of his approach but there he was totally unexpected and unannounced. He carried, tucked under his left arm, a completely empty goatskin and it became clear that a drop of water for his parched throat would not come amiss. He had his drink, we filled his goatskin with water and off he went without a word of thanks.

As far as we knew there was no water within miles of this spot so how long he had been without water and when, had he not met us, he would have got more goodness only knows. Having spent quite a while with Arabs since I quite understand what was going on. Allah had provided the water and no doubt he would be thanked at the next prayer time. We were merely God's agents in providing what our Bedu friend was totally confident that Allah would provide. It's a great way to live.



### **Not all Wadis lead to the sea!**

In due course we arrived at the top of the escarpment and were able to see what a challenge we had to find even a goat track down it, let alone a route which could be made into a road, however primitive, to allow vehicles to descend. We had aerial photographs and eventually found something which looked like a goat track. It was decided that we would send a four man recce party down the escarpment the following day leaving at first light to enable much of the journey to be made in relatively low temperatures. The day after that we would send another recce party down another possible route and so on until we had the answer required.

The first four man party was Fergie, Corporal Bracken, Sapper Mills and myself. Apart from a serious amount of water we carried various bits of survey equipment and small arms: in Fergie's case and mine a pistol, while Mills and Bracken had Sten guns..

As we made our way down we dropped off full water containers for our return journey which would be in the cool of the evening. We also made sketches, took photographs and measurements of the route. With the best will in the world it was going to be a pretty hairy route despite the huge amount of work which would be required to create a road to permit any vehicles to get down.



Having reached the beach at Kah harbour we relaxed for a while and then, as a fully paid up member of the Squadron water-polo team and thus assumed to be able to swim a bit, I was expected to recce the actual harbour. Kah was a perfectly natural harbour with quite a deep entrance from the Red Sea, steep sides to a useful depth North and South and a shelving beach on the landward side. I put on fins and some form of snorkel mask and discovered that, had it been man made, Kah harbour could not have been much more suitable for what was in mind. It was while cruising up and down charting the whole thing that I got a monumental fright.

### **Kah Harbour**



Gazing down through the crystal clear water I observed a very large sack attached to a long piece of rope. It took me a while to realise that the sack was being pushed by the rope and not towed. After a little more observation and thought it crossed my tiny mind that what I was looking at was a huge ray. I was probably ten yards from the water and well up the beach before I stopped swimming. OK, OK OK. Yes, I know we have all swum with mantas but remember, this was fifty plus years ago and very few had heard of Cousteau, demand valves and all that. I did go back in when I had recovered my nerve and enjoyed the experience of seeing a very large ray at close quarters but, thankfully, minding its own business. I am afraid I could not tell you what it was but it was no manta and therefore of dubious domesticity. I was also in very close proximity to lionfish, which caused me a certain amount of distress being a new boy at the business.

### **Skinny dipping at Kah Harbour**

I must have spent most of the several hours we were all at the water's edge actually in the water while the other three remained on the beach in the very, very scant shade afforded by an acacia. This immersion was to be the saving of us but I did not know it at the time and in due course I completed what I had to do and as the evening approached and the temperature cooled a little we set off up the track to the top of the escarpment. I am sure most of you know that the Red Sea area can be pretty hot at the best of times and in July seriously hot and you will also know that evening is very short and night falls quickly in those parts. We were about to find out the effects of such heat and darkness.

We left the beach by the track we had approached it and tramped steadily but slowly up the escarpment. I have no idea how far we had travelled but it was by now pitch dark and although the stars, as ever in that part of the world, were bright there was no other source of light. It became apparent that we were no longer on the track by which we had come down. We assumed that whatever track we were on we would eventually reach the top of the escarpment when we would be able to locate our base camp. The snag was that the water we had left to resupply us on the return was not on this track. In anticipation of a water resupply I suspect that we had treated ourselves quite generously to water during the day. To add to our problems it was clear that some of the party were starting to suffer. Mills was distressed and Fergie was feeling the effects of sitting behind a desk for too long.

We trudged on. Mills started to hallucinate and informed us that "I've seen the light" You can imagine the hilarity this would have engendered under more favourable circumstances but now it was a clear indication that Mills was getting beyond distressed and suffering from pretty serious heat-exhaustion, or heat-stroke, or both and he had no water. But, he definitely had hallucinations. Fergie was also having the greatest difficulty in keeping going. I do not know what the rules are these days but then one drank only the water one carried and not anyone else's. I have no idea whether Fergie had water or whether Bracken had water but I knew I had at least one full bottle having drunk hardly any having been in the sea and thus kept cool most of the afternoon.. Giving my water-bottle to Mills was not an option. Mills was in no fit state to even attempt to struggle on despite having a clear view of "the light" as he kept telling us. Fergie was physically exhausted but still in full possession of his wits. Sensibly, he decided that he would stay with Mills while Bracken and I would keep going to get help and water. It was the right decision as Mills could not be left on his own and Fergie would hold up Bracken and myself, not that Bracken and I were going to break any records for climbing up escarpments. Even fully fresh, it would have been a challenge as it was a case of three steps forward and one or two back as we slipped on the loose shale and sand and were frequently forced to crawl on hands and knees. We had definitely picked the wrong track to ascend.

Bracken and I plodded on and were reduced to counting the steps. "One hundred paces and we will rest" which all too soon became "Twenty paces and we'll rest" Even this became too much for Mick Bracken and he sat down, not to get up. In a funny way I was quite relieved as this stopping and starting was getting to me. My mind set was "A hundred paces and I will rest" but at the hundred mark I would say "I'll just keep going for another hundred and then rest" and I just kept cheating myself by not stopping. Work that out you psychologists or, more likely, psychiatrists! Having to wait for Bracken was doing me no good at all. Off I went on my own and was quite soon down to counting to ten only.

I cannot remember too much, if anything frankly, about the rest of the trip but I got back to our base camp and alerted the rest of the party and promptly fell asleep or collapsed but certainly took no further part in the proceedings. A small party set off laden with water to rescue Fergie, Bracken and Mills. The next thing I knew was that I was awoken to be informed that the rescue party could not find our stranded heroes. It was now daylight. Either they had gone down the right track and I had forgotten to tell them that Fergie was not on the right track, or they had not gone far enough down the track Fergie was actually on. Quite possibly they had found yet another track. In any event, I dragged my weary body off to show the rescue party the way.

Needless to say, apart from my personal water bottles, I was carrying nothing this time! In due course we found Bracken and left him nursing two lovely full water bottles while we carried on down to find Fergie that we did. By this time Fergie had fired off all his pistol ammunition and Mills' Sten gun ammunition (same 9mm) trying to attract attention. By now, of course, it was getting pretty hot again. I had not expected Fergie to fall on my neck sobbing with gratitude but neither did I expect to get a serious Fergie type rocket. I had not brought salt tablets with the water. But a rocket is what I got and it wasn't as if I had forgotten the tablets but whoever was in charge of the rescue party kept very quiet about it. I can assure you I have never again been short of rehydration electrolytes despite spending years in the desert one way or another.

Oh, and about Gangle and his cigarettes! As soon as we got back to Moascar, Gangle got demobbed and left the squadron before I could pay him back his cartons of cigarettes. Four years passed during which time I left the Squadron to go on some time wasting at Shrivenham and other courses. I then rejoined the Squadron and ended up in Cyprus with it in 1956. Chasing Grivas was great fun but Suez was looming.

The Z Reservists appeared in the Squadron ready for Suez and who should appear but Gangle whom I got back as my driver as fast as I could. And Gangle got his cigarettes. Incidentally he had an interesting way of saving money. I noticed one day that he was clutching a piece of string, which disappeared into the petrol tank of the Champ. I asked him what he was doing "Filling my lighter," he replied. Oh well ask a silly question etc. At the end of the string was his lighter totally immersed in the Champ petrol tank. When ignited the lighter gave off sufficient smoke to screen a small man of war! If anything was calculated to put one off smoking Gangle's lighter was and I stopped.

Headache? Nausea? Hallucinations? Here, have some of my electrolytes.

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## Recognition from the December 2006 Edition

Bill 'Geordie' Wheeler



L to R: John Logan, Alfie McLean, Frank Clark & Bill Wheeler (All Sappers (no stripes) in 2 Troop.

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### Character assassination:

John Logan was laconic, life was always a dry laugh.

Alfie McLean bought a sheep skin coat which hadn't been cured properly, which meant with his Tom Tom drum, even if you couldn't see him, you could smell him and hear him. Frank Clark was always asking Sgt Stan Jones to be selected for the football team. "No", said Stan, but eventually he did play and scored 5 goals in his first game. Me (Bill Wheeler) I was the snorer - and when we were in tents I had the honour of keeping the whole Sqn awake. I was also the David Beckham of my time, only more handsome!!

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### Wishful Drinking

Archie Menzies (a former Royal Engineer)

How I'd love to see you in a glass  
A lovely frothy top.

And underneath so clear and brown,  
The goodness of the hop.

How I'd love to hold you in my hand-  
Just now, I wish I could-  
Especially if I knew that you  
Had come straight from the Wood!

But you have not - you're NAAFI stuff,  
That's cost the NAAFI price -  
Still "Bottoms up" - I'll close my eyes  
And kid myself you're nice!

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## Eternal Thanks

*The following letter was received by Dave Pace following the launch of the Association official website:*

Dear Sir,

With this letter I would like to thank you for fighting for our freedom! I have such great respect for men like you who fought for our freedom during WW2. Going so far from home, risk your life and make such sacrifices for people that you don't even know is such a great thing to do. Thanks to men like you we have our freedom. I am a 25 year old young man and I live in the Netherlands. I'm a 3rd year student; I study Communications on the University of Diemen, which lies a few kilometres from Amsterdam.

Since I can remember I am interested in the World War 2. And that's why I've read books about the war and the campaigns, seen documentaries and visited several museums. I always listened with the most respect to the stories that my Grandparents used to tell me about how they survived the war and stayed out of German hands.

The actions that took place in Holland and information about the Airborne Divisions are very interesting. I guess that that explains my interest in Operation Market Garden as well. That is how I came in contact with David Pace from the Airborne Engineers Association.

I want to say Thank You for what you did more than 60 years ago! British soldiers fought so brave, us Dutch people will never forget the sacrifices that were made.

I wish you all the best and if you would like to contact me I would be very interested.

May God Bless you. Warm Regards,

Marc van Rooijen, Manillastraat 5, 3404 ER IJsselstein the Netherlands marc\_blackbelt@yahoo.com

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## The Pingat Jasa Malaysia Medal

### **Background**

In 2005 the Malaysian Government approached the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to seek approval to present their new medal, known as the Pingat Jasa Malaysia, to British veterans and others who served in operations in Malaya/Malaysia between August 1957 and August 1966. This was not a matter for the Ministry of Defence. On behalf of the Government, the FCO are responsible for administering the policy relating to the acceptance and wear of non-British awards by British citizens. They arranged for the matter to be considered by the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals, (known as the HD Committee). This is a non-political, inter-Departmental committee, Chaired by the Cabinet Secretary, which advises The Queen on such matters. The Committee considered the matter of the PJM in the light of the rules governing the accepting and wearing of non-British awards and made recommendations to The Queen.

As a result, on 31st January 2005 the Minister for Trade, Investment and Foreign Affairs, Mr Ian Pearson made a Written Ministerial Statement to the House of Commons as follows:

"The Pingat Jasa Malaysia (PJM) is a commemorative medal which the Government of Malaysia would like to award to eligible British citizens, for their service in Malaya or Malaysia between 31 August 1957 and 12 August 1966. The Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals (the official committee which advises Her Majesty The Queen on matters of honours policy) has recommended that an exception to two of the long-established Rules governing the accepting and wearing of foreign (including Commonwealth) awards be made, to enable the Malaysian Government to present the PJM. Her Majesty The Queen has been graciously pleased to approve this recommendation. This exception to the Rules means that all of the many thousands of eligible former members of the Armed Forces, Veterans, and others, may receive the PJM. This will be in addition to the British General Service Medal (with appropriate Malaya/Borneo clasp) that many veterans will have been eligible to receive for their service in Malaya/Borneo. Permission to wear the PJM will not, however, formally be given. It is long standing Government policy that non-British medals will not be approved for events or service:

- a. That took place more than 5 years before initial consideration, or in connection with events that
- b. Took place in the distant past e.g. commemorative medals) if the recipient has received a British award for the same service

However, Her Majesty's Government welcomes, and believes it is important to recognise, the generous gesture by the King and Government of Malaysia, and their wish to acknowledge the service given by veterans and others in the years immediately after Malaysian independence. The exception recommended reflects this and our strong and important relationship with Malaysia.

The Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals reviewed the 5-year and double medalling rules, and considered that, while there were sound reasons why they should be retained, there will be occasions when specific circumstances require exceptions to the rules to be recommended. When such exceptions are contemplated, the Committee will consider each request on a case by case basis, taking into account any special circumstances at the time. The fact that a similar request has been approved in the past will not mean that permission will be granted in future cases.

Applications for the PJM, and its subsequent distribution will essentially be a matter for the Malaysian authorities, in collaboration with the relevant British Government Departments. Large numbers may be involved. It will take some time for the applications to be processed and for the medal to be distributed. The Malaysian High Commission and the relevant British Government agencies will work together to determine eligible applicants. Veterans' organisations and Service and Regimental Associations will also be involved."

### **Applying for the Medal**

The Ministry of Defence does not have lists of veterans who served in Malaya/Borneo between August 1957 and August 1966, or indeed for any other overseas deployments, so people who wish to receive this medal will have to submit applications individually, through an appropriate veterans' organisation. Individual applications should not be sent to either the Ministry of Defence or the FCO.

In the first instance you should approach your own veterans' organisation and ask them to assess and co-ordinate applications on your behalf. You should supply as much information about your service in Malaya/Borneo as possible, including your name, present postal address, telephone number and e-mail address if available. Assessment of entitlement to the medal should be possible if you supply your Service Number, the Ship, Regiment, Corps or Squadron in which you served, the years you were in Malaysia and whether you have already received a British General Service Medal with an appropriate clasp for service in Malaya or Borneo.

The National Malaya & Borneo Veterans Association (NMBVA) has agreed to co-ordinate and collate applications on behalf of its members and, in addition, applications from Malaya/Borneo Campaign veterans who are not members of any veterans' organisation, or association. The NMBVA will assess the entitlement to the PJM from the information provided by the applicant, stamp the application as approved and pass lists of successful applicants to the Ministry of Defence for endorsement and despatch to the Malaysian High Commission in London. Any individual applications that have not been cleared by an appropriate veterans' organisation will be sent automatically to the NMBVA. No verification checks will be carried out by the Ministry of Defence.

If you are member of the NMBVA, you can obtain an application form by visiting the Association's Internet website: . If you are not a member of any other veterans' organisation or association and wish to claim the medal, it is recommended that use the NMBVA's form. Completed application forms should be sent to the following address:

Mr Fred Burden  
Membership Secretary  
National Malaya & Borneo Veterans Association  
44, Meadgate Avenue  
Great Baddow  
Chelmsford  
CM2 7LQ  
Tel No. 01245 495238

If you have been given a copy of this information and do not have access to the internet may write to Mr Burden for a form. We are advised that the medal will be issued posthumously to next of kin.

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## A Senior Moment

### **Fred Gray**

Guess who.... Recently a member of the association was sunning himself by the crowded hotel swimming pool whilst on holiday in foreign parts. After a while he decided that he would like a swim and without any further thought stood up and dropped his shorts. His horrified wife pointed out very quickly that he had forgotten to put his swimming trunks on under his shorts and he stood there in all his glory. No charge of indecent exposure was brought against him as very little of any significance had been exposed. In fact, none of the ladies around the pool even raised their eyes to have a look at the spectacle of a naked Brit in their midst, although not a few of the men had a crafty glance.

Although I do not wish to identify this person who had an "elderly moment" he was a prop in the Squadron rugby team when Dennis Scott was the other prop and Charlie Edwards the hooker.

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## Airborne Sapper Portraits

Brig JH Hooper OBE, DL

I would be most grateful if you would allow me to thank, through your columns, all the people who contributed to the AB Sapper Portrait Fund. The Fund is now closed and the balance in the Fund, £166.32p, has been passed to the AEA Treasurer. The rather odd amount is because I paid the donations, as they arrived, into an interest-earning account.

The individual donations varied from £5 to £750 and, of course AEA contributed £1,000. I have a list of all who contributed but have no intention of publishing the amounts contributed by individuals as for some it was as easy to donate £500 as it was for others to contribute £5. Many of the contributors were not airborne Sappers but other members of the Corps and relatives of Eric, Fergie and Johnny. It says a lot for the high regard in which airborne Sappers are held.

The portrait of 'Fergie' Semple hangs in the Officers' Mess of 23 Engr Regt (Air Asslt) in Woodbridge. The portrait of Johnny Humphreys is in the WOs' and Sgts' Mess and that of Eric Mackay is in RHQ outside the RSM's office. (To inspire the naughty boys to behave themselves in future I expect).

I have had a very nice letter from the CO thanking everyone for their efforts.

I am really most grateful to all who made a contribution to the Fund and to Richard Wills for his generosity in reducing his fees to an achievable level. He is so taken with Sappers generally, and airborne ones in particular, that he has agreed to go to either Iraq or Afghanistan or both to paint Sapper operational scenes. I am working through the Corps and MOD to see if we can take him up on the offer. I suspect he will find C130 travel a bit different to 747-business class with or without a parachute and equipment!

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## Sincere Thanks

**Jan Chambers**

I would like to extend my grateful thanks to the Association membership for the lovely presentation that I received at the Gala dinner night of the Southampton reunion weekend in October. I was absolutely speechless (which does not happen often). The gold Pegasus was beautiful and is something I will always treasure. My most sincere thanks to everyone and I hope to see many of you at future functions.

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## Farmers Fearful over Proposed Tax

**As published in the Baglan Courier January 2007**

Windy cows have become the latest battleground in the fight for the green vote, with farmers fearing they could be hit by a new levy - dubbed the f\*\*t tax.

Last month the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) announced a £750,000 investment in research on how changing animal feeding habits could cut levels of bovine emissions - which now account for around one million tonnes of methane a year in the UK.

Now Whitehall officials are preparing to invite bids to analyse the financial benefits of a scheme, which would see farms buying, and selling "credits" for the amount of gas their herds produce.

It comes in the wake of a similar proposal in New Zealand in 2003, which was ultimately abandoned after opposition from farmers who dubbed it the "fart tax".

A Defra spokesman told the Post a range of measures was being considered, including the agricultural emissions trading scheme. Ministers could set limits on methane emissions and farmers polluting beyond their allowances would be forced to buy credits from those who pollute less than their cap. Defra research suggests "substantial methane reductions" could be achieved by changing livestock feed.

But it also claims in the longer-term it "may be technically feasible to directly reduce emissions" by genetically modifying herds.

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## OPERATION VARSITY- The Rhine Crossing

Trying to trace Four Royal Engineers

### Dennis Moyse

Two of the 60 gliders that took off from RAF Woodbridge on 24 March 1945, numbers 285 and 286, carried a bulldozer and two Royal Engineers. My uncle piloted number 286.

When he landed at Hamminkeln, Germany, one of the soldiers was shot and killed. My uncle (now 83 years old) and his co-pilot became POWs, and probably so did the other soldier. They never saw each other again.

My uncle's co-pilot died in 2004, but I have traced and we have met the two remaining members of the crew of the Halifax bomber that towed them to Germany.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission have given me a list of Royal Engineers who were buried in Reichswald Forest War Cemetery, in Germany, who died on 24 March 1945, of whom 19 were from 591 Para Coy and one from 286 Field Park Coy (two of the four RE units in Operation Varsity whose soldiers died on this date), one of whom is probably the soldier who was shot. Their surnames were Bean, Davison, de Watteville, Dobson, Eaton, Field, Harbord, Hobson, Job, Jones, Keyworth, McHugh, McManus, Parrack, Rogers, Sach, Sparrow, Steel, Stobie and Watkinson.

Can anybody help me trace the soldier who survived, or the relatives of both soldiers, and the two soldiers (or their relatives) from the other glider (as all four soldiers may have known each other)? Alternatively, can I trace next-of-kin from a service number, is there a record of POWs anywhere, or is there a record of the address to which the War Office would have sent the telegram stating, "killed" or "missing" "in action"?

If you can help in my quest in any way, please contact me either by letter or by telephone:

Dennis Moyse 63, Oriel Road, Portsmouth, PO2 9EG Tel: 023 9247 6806 (evenings or weekends)  
Mobile: 07810 494630

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## Airborne Initiative

### John (Tommy) Tucker

This is an account of an event, which happened during my 'Pre-Para' course with 9 Para Sqn prior to selection for "P" Company during the winter of 1957/58 while based in Waterloo barracks in Aldershot.

The Pre-Para troop were ordered to parade on Friday afternoon and were then given a briefing on a series of events for the weekend.

An outline of the main points of the briefing were as follows:

1. A list of tasks and locations was issued to each member.
2. Departure would be at 1600 hours today and all members were to be back at first parade 0730 hours on Monday.
3. Transportation throughout the weekend would be by using one's own initiative.
4. Dress: Working dress, beret, para smock and carrying ID card, water bottle and poncho. (Our poor equivalent of today's Gortex bivvy bag)
5. Individuals could expect to be pursued

Briefing over, we were loaded on to 4-tonners, which were totally enclosed to prevent us from seeing where we were being taken. We initially tried to establish in which direction we were travelling; taking note of each right or left turn, but after just a few minutes gave up on this idea. When comparing our tasks and locations we soon discovered that each member had been given a different set of instructions, which meant we would each be left to carry out individual tasks.

After some period of time the truck stopped and a member from the back of the truck was ordered off. This process continued until it was soon my turn. Before being left, a member of the DS staff searched me and relieved me of any money - then checking to see that I had my ID card the truck disappeared into the darkness. Checking my watch I noted that it was now 1715 hrs - meaning that we had been driving for approx. 45 minutes thereby taking us quite some way from Aldershot.

Checking out my surroundings I found the area to be sandy heath land with partial fire woodland. I remembered coming to a similar area as this when on a family picnic in my younger days to an area called Frensham Pond. I spent some time walking round the area but could not find the pond, (later in my time in the Sqn I jumped at Frensham pond which is a fair expanse of water surrounded by trees and shrubs - but that's another story). I soon realised that this was not the area of Frensham, so I must now try and find out where I am and more importantly find means of transport to get me to my first task site. Finding the road I hoped to find some sign of habitation from where I could enquire of my present location. With no sign of life I was pleased when a lorry stopped beside me - 'Oh! No! This is too early to be caught by the DS - but luck was with me as a friendly trucker offered me a lift. Informing him that my first location was Stockbridge, I was alarmed to learn that I was travelling in the wrong direction and that my current position was next to Long Valley between Aldershot and Crookham. The driver told me I should head for Hartley Witney and head Southwest. Leaving the vehicle and travelling on foot, running, jogging and marching, I had just passed through Fleet when my next lift arrived. The driver was heading for Salisbury and he would drop me off at my first location in Stockbridge.

My first objective was to recce a masonry arch bridge that spanned the river Test for demolition. My recce was completed using my belt as a 3-foot rule and my size 9 boot as a 1-foot ruler. Noting the roadway width at 21 feet, bridge span at 30ft and depth of masonry at 16 inches, I produced a simple demolition plan for its destruction.

My task complete it was time to move on - it was now 2130 hours and Devizes was my next objective. The next phase of my journey involved more marching/jogging and a most welcome lift from 5 miles outside of Salisbury through to the A360 at Rollestone, which was where I was once again on my own two feet. It was dark, silent and cold as I made my way across Salisbury Plain and the time is now 2345 hrs. A barn owl, white and eerie appeared out of the darkness then suddenly veered away - time to smooth down the hackles on the back of my neck! Eventually I reached Gore Cross where I discovered a bicycle leaning against a garden wall next to a house. ABI (airborne initiative) immediately kicked in, and having previously raced in 25, 50 and 100 mile time trials, I was soon (without lights) racing down the road towards Devizes. Depositing the 'bike outside of the town it's now 0050 hrs and feeling extremely tired and hungry I made my way to the local police station requesting a place to 'crash out' for a few hours. But it was a case of "No room at the Inn" however; I was treated to some coffee and a sandwich.

With a replen of a hot drink and nourishment I extended my appreciation to the staff and set forth for my next location, which was a series of locks on the Kennet & Avon Canal. On reaching my next task site I attempted to get a few hours' sleep. By 0630 hrs I was up and set to work to consider the task ahead. This involved the proposed destruction of 20 locks in series covering approx. % mile and descending 250 feet with the objective of flooding an industrial estate downstream.

Each lock was 50ft x 20ft with a depth of 12ft of water and containing approx. 36,000 gallons of water. The destruction of the 20 locks plus the intermediate water, I estimated that the total demolition would produce somewhere in the region of 1 million gallons of water - more than enough to flood the industrial estate.

My demolition plan involved the use of Plastic explosives made up in 5 lb (2kgs) charges and strategically placed on each of the lock gates. Time to move on and as I made my way past the industrial estate a factory worker showed interest to what I had been doing. A quick explanation and a further gratefully received replen of coffee and a sandwich and directions to my next task in Portland, I was soon on my way jogging down the A361 and then on to the A350.

At Westbury the offer of a ride in comfort with a gentleman and his wife is not to be sniffed at. During our conversation I discovered that the gentleman was in fact a naval commander, and that after dropping off his wife in Wimborne Minster, would be travelling on to Portland (lucky or what - I should have done the football pools that day!) Arriving at his wife's drop off point at a friend's house I was invited in for a cup of tea and cake. I felt scruffy and was unshaven and in need of a shower; like some hippy, but at this stage I didn't care. The niceties over the commander and I moved on to Portland, where after showing my ID card the commander took me aboard a corvette and into the wardroom to meet the other officers. One of the officers offered to take me for a tour of a submarine, which was berthed alongside. The craft was a 2-man submarine, which was very cramped, full of levers, valves and wheels, an explanation although very interesting was extremely claustrophobic and I was pleased to get back out into the fresh air.

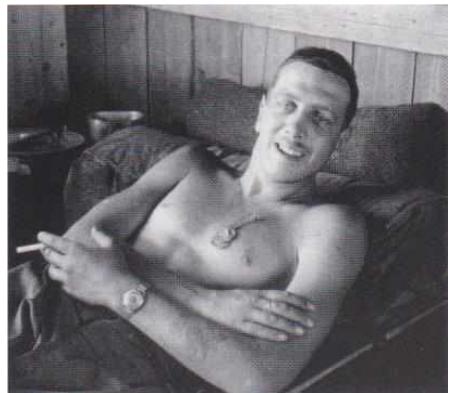
From the time we had entered the Portland harbour, as part of my final task, I had been making a mental note of the sentry posts, roving patrols and other security aspects within the establishment.

Time was marching on and at 1630 hours I decided to make my exit. The commander very kindly dropped me off on the outskirts of Weymouth leaving me to 'hitch', walk or jog my way home to Hayward's Heath in Sussex.

I spent Sunday looking up old friends - not many of them about now, either married or left the area. Bidding my parents farewell it was time to return to Aldershot. With money in my pockets (thanks mum) I could afford to let the train take the strain eventually arriving back in barracks at 1945 hrs Sunday evening. Uniform pressed and a bit of spit and polish I was ready for parade in the morning.

At 0730 hrs Monday morning the Pre-Para members paraded (all present and correct) and our reports were collected. We were individually called in front of WOII (SSM) Reg Orton, (what a great man to be associated with, I was saddened to hear of his passing some time ago). Well it appears that not all members were going forward to "P" company - I was one of the lucky ones and was ready for the onslaught ahead!

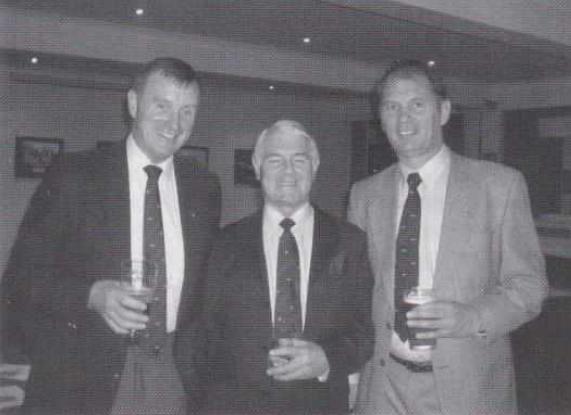
There must be other interesting activities undertaken by previous Pre-Para initiative exercises - so let's hear about them!



**'Tommy' Tucker takes a well-earned rest after a hard days' work on the pumping installation at Amman airfield Jordan (1958)**

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## Retirement Party

	<p>Well over 50 retired/serving officers and SNCOs were in attendance; these included 4 former OCs of 9 Para Sqn plus Major Kevin Copsey the current officer commanding the Sqn.</p>
<p><b>Bob Matthew &amp; Baz Bassett</b></p> <p>With a combined service of over 70 years, a party was held in the WOs &amp; Sgts Mess Brompton barracks on Saturday 24 February to commemorate the completion of their term of engagement for Lt Cols Baz Bassett BEM and Bob Matthews.</p>	 <p><b>Maj Kevin Copsey &amp; Capt 'Fitz' Fitzsimons</b></p>
	
<p><b>Colin Walker, Peter Kershaw &amp; Baz Bassett</b></p> <p>Much credit for the organisation of the party is attributed to Lt Col (retd) Colin Walker OBE who not only booked the venue but also arranged overnight accommodation in the mess and a curry or roast chicken supper.</p>	<p><b>SSM Mick Stewart (above) and John Ferry (below)</b></p>
	
<p><b>Keith King &amp; Pat Neal</b></p> <p>Much 'lamp swinging' filled the conversations as serving and retired members exchanged yarns of current and by-gone days.</p>	<p>The "Pipers", John Ferry and the current 9 Sqn SSM, Mick Stewart, provided in-house entertainment as they individually and collectively played a medley of tunes with the finale being "Wings".</p>

A malicious rumour is being whispered through the corridors of 'Rock Barracks' that Mick Stewart is the most handsome SSM in the history of the Sqn! Could it be that he started this rumour himself?

At various stages throughout the early hours the party attendees gradually faded away into their accommodation - although Harry Lockwood only just made it into his bunk before first light!

A great occasion in excellent company, superb entertainment from the 'Pipers' and Sgts Mess beer prices - Need one say more?

## War & Peace Show

**18-22 July 2007 at The Hop Farm , Paddock Wood, Kent  
25th Anniversary of the largest Military Spectacular in the World.**

4,000 military vehicles from all over the world.  
Breathtaking battle re-enactments in the purpose built arena.  
30 acres of authentic living history camps.  
Exhilarating tank action.  
1,000 traders displaying a diverse range of military related products.  
Live music, dance and fashion from the 40's.

Day visitor admission prices:

Adult: £15-00 (in advance £12-00)  
Seniors & Children 3-15 years £12-00 (in advance £9-00)

Book your tickets in advance online [www.thehopfarm.co.uk](http://www.thehopfarm.co.uk) or call the Booking office on 01304 813945

**Check out the website on:**

[www.thewarandpeaceshow.com](http://www.thewarandpeaceshow.com)

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## News from the Branches

### Aldershot

#### **Betty Gray**

Since our last report in the December journal; life has been relatively quiet. Without any fuss or bother we have settled into our new meeting place in the Potters International Hotel. We are not surrounded by our own photographs and memorabilia as we were in the Squadron, but life is very comfortable and convenient for lunch after the meeting has finished.

Our membership continues to grow and since our last report three new members have joined our ranks. We welcome Frank Menzies-Hearn (the Association Piper), Brian Hubbard who jumped at Suez in 1956 with 3 Troop, and Mick Leather, the Association Secretary. We are also targeting Ron Sands who also jumped at Suez and now lives in Church Crookham. he joined the association this February.

Our annual Christmas Dinner was held in the Potters Hotel and we used the occasion to present a cheque on the behalf of the Association for over £2000 to the BLESMA organization. Bob Copsey a former member of the Squadron who had suffered severe injuries on active service with the Squadron accepted the cheque on their behalf. A further report appears elsewhere in the journal.

Regrettably we have lost one of our most charismatic members. Charlie Edwards passed away in his adopted country of South Africa. His body was flown back to the UK and the service prior to his cremation was held in the Garrison Church Aldershot. Frank Menzies-Hearn preceded the coffin into the church playing that wonderful tune "Highland Cathedral". Don Doherty carried the Association Standard and Charlie's coffin was draped with the Union Flag. Thirty members of the AEA joined with family and friends after the service in the International Hotel for the traditional buffet and dispersal.

We look forward to seeing our President Colonel Dennis Eagan, back in the chair after his forced absence of six weeks and also Jerry Hicks who has been through a difficult time in recent weeks. Harry Evans is now back to his fighting best and able to join us again in our activities and also enjoy his own pleasure of yommping around the countryside.

Our next meeting will be held in the Potters International Hotel, Aldershot on Sunday 29th April, 1100hrs for 1130hrs start. Anyone who would like to join our branch or attend as a guest is more than welcome

Please note that Mrs Betty Gray is now the Secretary of the Aldershot Branch. Her e-mail is: [b.gee33@ntlworld.com](mailto:b.gee33@ntlworld.com) or home address: 65 Westover Road, Fleet, Hants GU51 3DE.

## Chatham

### Eric Blenkinsop



After the Southampton reunion, home once again in our own back yard. It was not long before we were able to swing into our Christmas luncheon, which as always turned out to be a happy family party.

Our "Lone Ranger" Steve Collins did a great "Round Up" job and we were pleased to have so many guests and hopefully some new branch members present. So we must name the fame: Bob & Helen Matthews, Mark & Sherra Cunliffe, Chris & Jean Gosling, Colin Walker & Tracey, Louis Gallagher, Paddy Boyce and finally, Adam & Liz Argent (newlyweds). As usual the Gibsons and O'Connors had a great family presence.

The raffle was better than ever with a few of the prizes arising from our good fortune at Southampton and a supreme effort again by Steve Collins

in producing a table full of cuddly toys. Rumour has it that he had the whole ward working on them whilst he was hospitalised. Finally, to the event organisers Bob & Pam Seaman, thank you for a smashing party and a splendid raffle.

Now we must look forward to our next event, The John Rock/Falklands Dinner at The King Charles Hotel, Gillingham on Saturday 23rd June 2007 (19.00 for 20.00 hrs). This will be a formal dinner, men in suits or dinner jackets as preferable and miniature medals at choice. Ladies dressed appropriately. Regrets - but no children. Our Guests of Honour will be Colonel Chris & Jenny Davies MBE and our Association Chairman Mick Humphries with his wife Christine.

A warm welcome and invitation is extended to all members of the Association and their ladies who wish to join with us on this memorable occasion. The cost of the four-course dinner will be £20.00 p.p.

All applications accompanied by a cheque should be submitted to the Chatham Branch Treasurer to arrive not later than Thursday 7th June 2007. Cheques should be made payable to AEA Chatham Branch and forwarded to our treasurer Mr R Seaman at: 68, Rolvenden Road, Wainscott, Rochester Kent ME2 4PG.

The King Charles Hotel provides B&B accommodation at a reasonable price. Tel 01634 830303.

#### Footnote.

The RE Museum will have an enhanced display of Falklands War memorabilia on throughout June. Veterans are requested to dig deep in their lofts and consider gifting or loaning artefacts and photos. Any queries should be directed to the Museum Curator on 01634 822261.

So come on lads, let's make sure that the Red berets are well represented in the display. Any veterans willing to take part in a "tell a story event for local schools in June would also be most welcome.

For further update on the branch events and our "sick bay" please refer to the Association Web Site — [www.airbornesappers.org.uk](http://www.airbornesappers.org.uk)

We are all in good spirit and looking forward to meeting many of you at the John Rock Dinner in June.

So on that note, farewell and best regards to you all.

## Yorkshire

### Bill Rudd MBE

Our Annual Xmas Dinner was held in the Unicorn Hotel in Ripon, which was attended by 60 members, wives and family friends who enjoyed an excellent Xmas lunch with all the trimmings. Well-done 'Ginge' Goodfellow for organizing a superb raffle. Nice to see Lou Gallagher, who is a permanent fixture in the Yorkshire Branch activities.

Our AGM was held on the 24th February in the WOs/ Sgts Mess at Strencott, a very good turnout with 28 attending and 16 apologies, we welcome two new members to committee, Bill Braniff (216 Para) as our new membership secretary and Noel Ward as treasurer. The Branch continues to increase in numbers but at a very slow pace.

We look forward to a busy and exciting year ahead commencing with our Annual Dinner which will be held in the WOs/ Sgts Mess on 31st March 07 - to date as this goes to press we have confirmed numbers of 90 attending, many travelling from Aldershot, Birmingham and the S. West. Watch this space in the next issue, Lou G has promised me some photos!!

Branch members will be attending the Wales weekend in May; this will be followed by our annual pilgrimage to Normandy on the 2nd - 9th June 07. This we look forward to for many reasons, but most important we will be meeting up with our Dutch friends Ed-van-der-Lann plus his Dutch Commando pals, should be a good trip! Oh yes, just as important on the 5th June we will meet up with the Aldershot boys and girls to attend the dedication service of the memorial seat at Pegasus Bridge Museum.

We look forward to our planned weekend at Woodbridge which we are invited to by 23 Engr Regt (Air Assault) on the 29th July 07 to join their Freedom Parade and functions. Lastly our Association AGM weekend in Harrogate is well into the planning stages and we do hope many members will attend to support the Yorkshire Branch in this most important event of the Association year.

## Annual Golf Tournament- The "Fergie" Semple Trophy

TO BE HELD AT: RIPCITY GOLF CLUB

ON FRIDAY 2ND NOVEMBER 2007

TEE OFF - 1100 NOURS

COFFEE AND BACON ROLLS AVAILABLE ON ARRIVAL, EVENING MEAL ALSO AVAILABLE IF REQUESTED.

COST OF GOLF: £20 (ALTHOUGH A £10 DEPOSIT IS REQUIRED)

ALL INTERESTED PLEASE CONTACT:

JOHN HUGHES

8, OAR AVENUE, ELLUGHTON, BROUH, EAST YORKSHIRE HU 15 1LA OR PHONE: 01482 666140

PLEASE FORWARD DEPOSIT WITH REPLY

## Membership Report

**Steve "Billy" Morris MSM - Membership Secretary**

It has been a promising start to 2007 with our total membership (less those departed) now standing at 1,270 as at 4 March 2007. Gentlemen, keep spreading the word and assist me recruit some of the hundreds of former airborne engineers that are still unaware of our existence.

Please note change of e-mail address: steve.morris5968@ntlworld.com

**We welcome to the "Airborne Engineers Association" the following new members:**

George Anderson	9 Indep Para Sqn RE	1960-62
Derek Pudney	9 Para Sqn RE	1980-84
Lt Stuart Bennett	9 Para Sqn RE	2006 - still serving
David Nichols	51 Para Sqn	2002 - still serving
Paul Eveleigh (Sgt)	9 Para Sqn RE	1996 - still serving
Rodney Gallaway (Rod)	9 Indep Para Sqn RE	1965-70
Jugsy Unsing (Maj)	9 Para Sqn RE	1979-2005
Roy Sands	9 Indep Airborne Sqn RE	1953-56

## Sports Club

100 MILE CHALLENGE 7 JULY 2007

**Billy Morris**

It was proposed at the AGM in Southampton that a charitable challenge would take place in the form of a 100 mile run/tab. This will be broken down into 10, 5, 1 mile stages and even 100 meters, so that members of all ages and standard of fitness can take part.



The date for this event will be on the 7 July 2007. I have made contact with 3 RSME, Gibraltar Bks, to hold the event within the confines of the camp. I have asked for accommodation and meals from Friday evening to Sunday morning with the event taking place on Saturday.

It is hoped to have a social event in the WOs' & Sgts' mess during the Saturday night. Further details, costing, timings to follow via Branch Secretaries. Sorry for the lack of information at this stage.

It will be a good opportunity to dust off the trainers and run in that maroon top once again, whilst raising money for this year's charity.

**Winners of the 1 mile relay event held in Bahrain 1962**

**Harry Lockwood, Alan Saunders, Gary Dawes, Wally Clift,**

**Bob Waddell, Geordie Wilkinson & Bruce Bissett**

## Aldershot Branch- Annual Dinner

### Rob Copsey

Becky and I were invited to attend the Aldershot branch of the AEA for the annual dinner, which was to be held on the 20th of January 07. They asked me because as well as being a BLESMA member, I was also a new member to their association. They had raised some money for BLESMA through various events and because I was a member of both, I could represent BLESMA and accept a cheque on their behalf.

Unfortunately, Becky had her shifts changed at the last minute (NHS Staff Nurse) and could no longer come with me. So, I pondered upon whom could I take as a guest. "Ah ha" I thought, "I know just the chap". He lives near Aldershot and he is also a BLESMA member, Paul Burns! He is always up for getting his mug in the BLESMA MAG, and if things go well, he may even make the AEA Journal. So, just before I left sunny Dover, I gave him a call and luck was with me; he could make it. Then I divulged to him that he was to be the replacement Becky. "Oh! Do I get to wear the dress?" he said. Well typical!



We arrived at the Potters International Hotel, Aldershot for 7pm with Paul and I proudly wearing our BLESMA ties. We wandered into the splendidly set dinner hall where I spotted a gentleman who looked like he was in charge of proceedings and introduced myself. His name was Mick Humphries and he was from the Aldershot branch. We had a quick chat and moved off to the bar area while the other members and guests arrived. I explained Becky's absence and introduced Paul as an ex-PARA and BLESMA member.

We chatted about BLESMA and our experiences and explained about how we had both become amputees. They talked about the AEA and how they were expanding and gaining new members with a vigorous recruitment campaign. Then it was time for the main event, the presentation of a cheque to BLESMA.

Paul and I were asked to stand and wait by the reception area. The other members gathered around and Joe Stoddart MBE gave an introduction and speech about the fund raising and why BLESMA had been chosen. I was most pleased to accept a cheque for the sum of £2105.00 from Joe and thanked the branch for their efforts and for choosing BLESMA as the recipient. I then

presented a BLESMA plaque to the AEA in recognition of their support.

Then it was into the dinner hall for a super meal. Our table turned out to be the lucky table because when the raffle started, I found to my surprise, that I had won four of the prizes and Paul scooped two more. In fact, in total our table picked up a whopping 12 prizes.

There were calls of "fix" but all in good humour of course. Time was getting on and after toasts to the fallen and the Queen, people became less formal, to the extent that Paul decided it was time to remove his false leg and make another toast. Mick Humphries nabbed it and promptly marched to the bar and had it filled with lager! The leg was then passed round the table for all to enjoy.



The evening was a total success and I would like to send my thanks to all from the AEA Aldershot branch, in particular Mick Humphries and Joe Stoddart, for making us most welcome and for their continued support to BLESMA. It goes to prove that the airborne spirit is still alive and kicking in Aldershot!



## Passing of an Arnhem Veteran

L/Cpl Arthur Hendy -13 Jul 1918 - 18 Feb 2007

1st Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers 1942 -1945



Arthur Hendy enlisted into the Royal Engineers in 1937.

He completed his Basic Training and was posted to a Searchlight Regt and then to a Training Battalion as a physical training instructor as he was a promising amateur boxer.

In 1940 he was with the British Expeditionary Force in France serving with a Searchlight Unit. Unable to reach the main force at Dunkirk the ever resourceful Arthur made his way to Calais and made his own way back to the England. He served as a PTI with a Chemical Warfare Training Battalion and in 1942 was posted to a Bomb Disposal School.

He volunteered for Airborne Forces in 1942 and following the completion of his parachute training he served with the 1st Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers in the battles in North Africa from January to April 1943, the invasion of Sicily, the sea-borne landing in Italy and the

Battle of Arnhem, September 1944.

Arthur's exploits at Arnhem are documented elsewhere, however it is important to record here that he was one of the men to reach the objective and was tasked, with others, to hold the school at the north end of the ramp. This they did with great distinction taking many casualties whilst doing so. Arthur was eventually taken prisoner at Arnhem. Bloody and with his uniform badly burnt he was issued with a Russian Army uniform, which almost had dire consequences at the end of the war.

He managed to get into a number of scrapes during captivity. One involved an attempt to smuggle twelve bottles of beer into the prison camp under his greatcoat, following a work detail outside the Camp. Another involved representing his fellow prisoners whilst working in a German coal mine. Food rations had been reduced, and the prisoners decided that 'if they did not get more food they would stop digging coal'. Arthur explained the situation to the Commandant who after a moment's thought decreed that if they stopped digging they would be shot. Arthur's reply to his fellow prisoners intimated that they should continue to dig coal.

His repatriation was also a little unorthodox. When the guards finally deserted the prison camp in fear of the advancing Russians, the prisoners started to head west to meet the advancing Allies. A Russian column soon overtook them and spotting Arthur in a Russian uniform they assumed that he was a deserter from the Russian Army. He was put up against a wall where he fully expected to be shot; fortunately there was someone who spoke Russian who was able to explain the situation.

Having got back to the Allied lines and reported into a centre to be debriefed he found that the authorities were 'too busy to see him at that time'. Arthur wasted no time and went to an American Airbase; got talking to some pilots and thumbed a lift to England in order to see his girlfriend, subsequently his wife, Madge. He stayed in England for about two weeks and then got another lift back with the Americans and was finally repatriated in the normal way.

Arthur had a fund of stories and has would regale all who he met with his stories of his military escapades, always humorous and always with a slightly different version.

Arthur left the Army in 1946 and in 1948 married Madge. He joined London Transport working as a Bus Driver in London where he also resurrected his boxing career representing London Transport over a number of years.



On his retirement in 1983, Arthur and Madge moved to Spalding and Arthur joined the Spalding Branch The Parachute Regimental Association where his enthusiasm and hard work proved of enormous support and benefit. He would be present at most of functions organised by the Spalding Branch and was always available to assist in any Fund Raising ventures, which were undertaken.

## Obituaries



### Charlie Edwards Charlie passed away on

Friday 19 January 2007 after a very short illness in his adopted home of South Africa.

Charlie joined 9 Squadron as the cook corporal in the early fifties and soon became known as one of the great characters of the Squadron. With his broad Lancashire accent, his experience in the Merchant Navy and having played professional rugby league for Bel Vue Rangers prior to his Army service, he was nobody's fool and was a great asset to the Squadron.

Along with Rick Mogg and Denis Scott as the props they formed a formidable front row and helped the rugby team to many successes during the late fifties and early sixties. Off the field Charlie, Rick and Denis became firm friends and that friendship lasted for over fifty years. Together as a team they sometimes sailed very close to the wind in their money making projects but it was always done with a sense of humour that was unique to the Squadron.

One of Charlie's most famous exploits was when he, with two other Sappers sold the "Sevastopol Bells" to a local scrap merchant. The three bells (one weighing seventeen hundredweights and the other two ten hundredweights each) had been brought back from the Crimea in 1854 had hung safely in the Cambridge Military Hospital bell tower for over sixty years. 3 Troop had removed them in 1957 prior to the expected demolition of the hospital and stored them in what was thought to be a safe place in the Squadron MT garages. After weighing up the possibilities of not getting caught the three would-be salesmen sold them for £30. Needless to say they did get caught and had to buy them back. It wasn't a straightforward matter of paying the scrap merchant the £30 as by this time the police had become involved. Only by the intervention of the OC and 2i/c of the Squadron were the police persuaded to drop the charges against the intrepid three. After the return of the bells life returned to normal. The incident did not seem to affect Charlie's military career as he went on, many years later, to achieve the rank of WO1. After he left the Squadron he was posted to 7 Parachute Regiment RHA and later to BAOR where he continued with his rugby playing and money-making schemes. On leaving the Army Charlie first went to work for the Gas Board in the catering department, and later he managed a social club in Stains. He then went into business for himself and opened a sandwich bar in Egham not far from Heathrow Airport. During those years his very popular wife Dorothy tragically died after a long illness. Sometime later Charlie sold his business and moved to a Lydney in Gloucestershire. After a few years he was on the move again. Whilst on holiday in South Africa he saw a farm that he liked so he bought it and went to live there on an alternative six months in the UK and six months in SA. Whilst there he was able to meet up with his brother who lived in Zimbabwe and also his great friend Denis Scott who settled in neighbouring Namibia. Charlie will be very much missed by Michael his son, Kath and Trish his daughters and by his grandsons and granddaughters as well as his many friends that he made during his twenty-two years Army service. He will be sadly missed by us all.

### Bill Irving MM

Bill Irving MM died in Scotland on 12th November 2006 a month before his 85th birthday. Scottish by birth he joined 3 Para Sqn RE early in 1943 as Sapper. By the time of the Normandy invasion he was a Sgt in 1 Troop, and like many others in 3rd Para Brigade was dropped several miles away from the intended DZ and was one of the group of Royal Engineers who were on the Jeep driven by Maj Tim Roseveare DSO, who made the epic journey through Troarn to destroy the road bridge beyond the town. Afterwards along with the rest of the Sqn, fighting as infantry, he helped defend the ridge along the bridgehead perimeter at Le Mesnil and Breville. It was during the battle of Breville (Parachute Regiment Battle Honour) that he was awarded the Military Medal.

Following Normandy, he took part in the Battle of the Bulge (Ardennes) and on the Sqn's return to the UK in preparation for the Rhine Crossing he was sent to Officer Cadet Training Unit (OCTU). On completion he was commissioned into the Black Watch as an Infantry Officer. Later he was seconded to the Parachute Regiment and served with them until the re-organisation of the Airborne Forces when he re-joined the Black Watch.

He spent some time in Germany and took part an active part in the Berlin Airlift during the 'Cold War'.

Leaving the Army in the early '60s he joined an industrial company in the Midlands as a management trainee. By the time he retired he was Managing Director of a subsidiary company. Shortly afterwards he and his wife moved to Spain and bought a house in the Costa Brava area where they enjoyed a very happy time until failing health compelled them to sell up and return to Scotland in February 2006 to be nearer their families.

Bill never forgot his time spent with 3 Para Sqn, and even though he retired to Spain, was a frequent attendee at the 6th Airborne Division annual dinner and the Normandy Pilgrimage.

**Mike Payne** former Officer Commanding 9 Indep Para Sqn RE during the period 1974-76 passed away 29 November 2006

**Lawrence Redington** passed away November 2005

## Journal Format

Several members have suggested that we should consider updating the cover of our publication. The Aidershot branch members have already put forward several constructive suggestions. These have also included ideas for amending certain aspects of the publication itself. It is hoped that even more constructive ideas will be forwarded by our readers. Your comments or ideas can be forwarded through your local branches or by simply sending them direct to the editor.

Your comments/ideas will be discussed during the next committee meeting, which will be held in July.

It should be noted that with the continued spiralling cost of postage/printing and stationary, the committee will also be discussing the cost of the Journal subscription. So, if you have any ideas of how we can offset the cost of our publication please let us know.

## Association Shop

Ray Coleman

Description	Price	P&P (UK Post Rate)
<b><u>Ties</u></b>		
Association Ties (Pegasus logo)	£15.00	£1.00
Anniversary Ties (Wings & Pegasus logo)	£15.00	£1.00
9 Para Sqn Ties (Wings logo)	£15.00	£1.00
Bow Ties (Pegasus & wings logo)	£9.50	£1.00
<b><u>Badges</u></b>		
Association Blazer Badges	£14.00	£1.00
Lapel Wings - Blue Enamel S/C	£3.50	£1.00
<b><u>Clothing</u></b>		
Association Jumpers (sizes 38 - 48) Maroon or Blue with Pegasus logo embroidered 'Airborne Engineers'	£25.00	£3.10
Association Sweatshirts - Maroon with blue logo - Small/med/lge or X large	£16.50	£3.10
Association Polo Shirts - Fred Perry style - Maroon or blue with Pegasus logo - small/med/lge or Xlge	£15.50	£2.50
Association T Shirts - Maroon with logo - small/med/lge/Xlge	£9.00	£1.80
Association Shower proof Maroon Fleece -with embroidered 'Airborne Engineers' logo - Med/Lge/Xlge	£28.00	£3.00
Baseball Cap (in blue or maroon) - with combined Pegasus & Wings crest	£7.00	£1.00
<b><u>Miscellaneous</u></b>		
Association Shield	£18.00	£2.00
"The 9th " (1787 - 1960) by the late Tom Purves	£7.00	£3.80
Association Cuff Links (slightly smaller than lapel badge)	£8.50	£1.60
Silk Cravats (Wings & Pegasus logo)	£17.50	£1.00
Association Cummerbunds (Wings & Pegasus logo)	£17.50	£1.00
Ladies Association long Polyester Scarves (Pegasus logo)	£15.00	£1.00
Association Directory	£5.00	£2.50