



*Life of a  
Post War  
Career Soldier  
1929 to 1999*



*Autobiography by D H Newman*

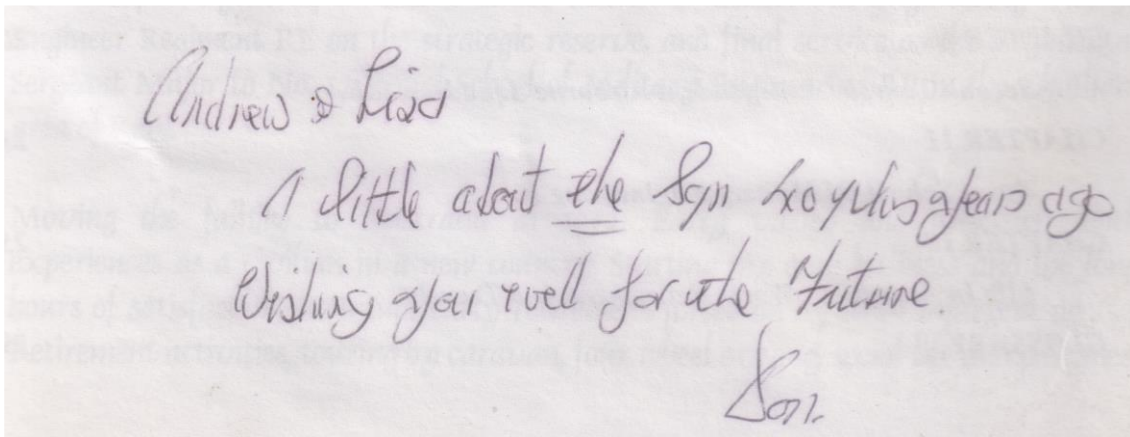
# FOREWORD

## "WHAT DID YOU DO DAD?"

*And having decided to write my answer to that as an autobiography I took up the pen.*

*I have read a few books over the years, but throughout my life during my travels through childhood, early teenage, young adulthood and army service and in pursuance of a livelihood in Australia to retirement, I have always preferred the open air to a desk. Two autobiographies, "The Life of Weary Dunlop" and one by Michael Caine captured my attention and I was intrigued by all the intimate detail, how could one remember so much over such a long period of time in some cases in such minute detail? But having now started on a nostalgic trip throughout my own life I am amazed at my own ability to bring forth memories of so many years past, each thought triggering another. So many, that a process of elimination has taken place to omit those thought not to be of interest to a potential reader.*

*Having put my life's activities into what I hope is an interesting format I have included some photographs to illustrate and add to revelations, travels and the experience gained may interest the armchair voyager. Life in Australia, the varied types of employment at which I tried my hand, the obstacles and hurdles, running a family business, retirement and activities, regrets are few and memories many.*



## Contents

Introduction .....	4
CHAPTER 1 .....	6
Life And Schooling Pre World War II.....	6
CHAPTER 2 .....	15
The Years Of World War II .....	15
CHAPTER 3 .....	23
Post War Years To Age 20 .....	23
CHAPTER 4 .....	31
Royal Engineer Training .....	31
CHAPTER 5 .....	42
3 Years In Egypt 35 Regiment R.E. (16 Squadron).....	42
CHAPTER 6 .....	79
Germany 1954-1957 26 Regiment R.E. (29 Squadron) .....	79
CHAPTER 7 .....	105
The Special Air Service Malaya - 'D' Squadron 1957-1960 .....	105
CHAPTER 8 .....	145
1 <sup>ST</sup> Tour, 9 <sup>th</sup> Independent Airborne Squadron R.E. (1960-1962) .....	145
CHAPTER 9 .....	161
Permanent Staff Instructor 299 Para Squadron RE TA .....	161
Instructor Combat Engineering 36 Engineer Regiment RE .....	161
CHAPTER 10 .....	168
Second Tour 9 <sup>th</sup> Independent Airborne Squadron RE.....	168
CHAPTER 11 .....	196
Royal School Of Military Engineering RE.....	196
CHAPTER 12 .....	209
Life In Australia Work, Retirement And Travel .....	209

## Introduction

*The story begins approximately five years prior to World War II and is told through the eyes of a young boy, my own eyes, depicting life as it was in the Kentish country area from the mid 1930's onwards, a rather backward area lacking basic amenities, tap water, gas, flush toilets and electricity.*

*Childhood memories are happy ones, even the outbreak of War in 1939 did not appear to affect the way of family life. We always had enough food to fill our bellies, clothing and footwear of sorts to cover and protect us, warm beds and caring parents throughout.*

*I've written what little bits of the War I saw and/or experienced as a young teenager with the vivid memories I still have of those times, of the post war years, our social life and early work experience and other things that affected a young adult to the age of twenty, when I joined the army.*

*Joining the Royal Engineers in February 1950, I record the early training of a recruit and military trade training, service in the Suez Canal Zone in Egypt with exercises in the Sinai Desert; four years of very active life in Germany, selection for and service in the 22nd Special Air Service Regiment in Malayan jungle; adventures, travel and work with the 9th Independent Airborne Squadron of the Royal Engineers and as instructor with its counter Territorial Army Regiment 131 Para RE; almost ten years as a parachutist in the Persian Gulf, Bahrain, Kenya, Cyprus, Libyan desert and Europe in general; time as a senior instructor in Combat Engineering with 36 Engineer Regiment RE on the strategic reserve, and final service as the Regimental Sergeant Major to No. 12 Royal School of Military Engineering RE in the Chatham area of Kent.*

*Moving the family to Australia in 1972. Early varied and unsettled work experiences as a civilian in a new country. Starting my own business and the long hours of satisfaction. Eventual early retirement forced on by work injury at age 59. Retirement activities, touring by caravan, four wheel driving, social life and pastimes.*



THE AUTHOR AS SERGEANT NEWMAN (CENTRE OF SECOND ROW)  
29 FIELD SQUADRON RE  
SQUADRON OFFICERS AND NON COMMISSIONED OFFICERS (NCO'S)

## CHAPTER 1

### Life And Schooling Pre World War II

Extracts from my birth certificate state I was born in the sub-district of Wye in the county of Kent on the 14th October 1929 at Riverview Godmersham Rd named Donald Henry. Father's name George Henry Newman, an engineer at the GPO, mothers name Violet May Newman (formerly Hobden) registered on the 8th November 1929 and now recorded at the General Register Office Somerset House London. My brother was born some thirteen months later on 27th November 1930, at some other later undisclosed date another baby boy was born, very big overweight and all trussed up, he died at birth.

My father was one of seven children - five boys and two girls. My mother one of three - two boys and one girl - so it might be suggested I was born into quite a large family, but only four families emerged from the earlier generation producing eleven children. I think, you'll see later why I only think.

At some stage prior to my infant school days the family moved to Bilting about a mile away. The name Bilting came from the very early days. I read somewhere in the fifth century of the Christian era; the area was the settlement of the sons of Bilt. Like Godmersham above, this it was said, was the home of Godmer in the Celtic population. Just a little bit of history that the whole of Kent is soaked in.

In the fields at Tenterden  
(Sydney sitting on Mother's knee)



Dressed in homemade clothes at an early age

Early school years were difficult times for most parents not too well off I guess. I started school some five years after the great depression of 1929 around about April or May 1934 so I was told. I started school at the age of four and a half years at the school at Godmersham that catered for infants and up to the age of eleven.

There were two teachers. Mrs. Reynolds a middle aged lady with grey hair and lots of wrinkles who rode one of those 'sit up and beg' bicycles. She was the senior teacher who taught the older children, and a Mrs. Williams, a younger person a little rotund, who looked after and encouraged the tiny tots. The school was a very old building with one main large room that was heated by a central iron coke fire with a big guard around it, and a smaller room where the tiny tots scribbled, played, screamed and slept. The latter was the routine each afternoon for about an hour.

The boys and girls were separated, having their own cloakrooms, playgrounds, lavatories and washrooms. All the children came from round about the area, and public transport as such did not exist in such a small rural population. Cars were by no means popular, ownership of course being beyond the reach of most people at that time, and so the only means of getting to school was by 'walkies.' I along with others living at Bilting had just over a one mile walk to school in weathers fine and foul, winter and summer with no mummy or daddy to

walk us there and back.



**SILVER BIRCHES FROM KING'S WOOD, CHALLOCK WERE PLANTED BY GODMERSHAM SCHOOL CHILDREN TO COMMEMORATE JUBILEE YEAR**

We lived in an old farm labourers cottage that had half an acre of garden ground. A well provided us with water. We had a bucket-type lavatory that was about six yards from the back door across a paved backway and path. There was no gas or electricity just oil lamps, oil stoves, a Primus and coal/wood fires. Located just inside the back door was a large wood fired copper and the laundry washing pot and all washing was done by hand. Thought I might just mention that. The back door was also the entrance to the scullery as we used to call it where firewood, water, vegetables, potted jams, preserved eggs and fruit were stored along with flour, rice, pans, cake tins, saucepans, roasting trays, buckets, brooms mops etc. All had their places on or in hooks, nails, cupboards recesses and comers. Light cooking was also done with the Primus and the oil stove on a table there.

At the end of the scullery was what we called the little room, where mum and dad kept their bikes. It was cold, damp, and dark. Carrots, parsnips, beetroot, sugar beet and possibly other vegetables were stored in piles of wood ash over the winter months. Potatoes stored in one corner under sacks required two or three sessions per winter removing the fresh white shoots.

Almost everything required was delivered to the door; bread, milk groceries, meat, papers, coal, oil and fuels in a lot of cases, fishmongers, fresh fruit and veggies for those who could afford to buy rather than grow. Periodic salesmen came round selling brushes everything from tooth to backyard bristle, clothing and fabrics, firewood, millers delivered flour and also com for chicken feed. Such was the country scene, with family cars very few and far between.

Mother made most of our clothes, we also had hand-me-downs from friends round about and shoes were mostly second hand. My father was very good at shoe repairs, a skill he passed down to me.

One of my earliest recollections of a grand occasion was the Coronation in 1937 of King George VI. I still have some keepsakes and the invitation card sent to all families in the area to attend at the mansion, Godmersham Park the home of Lord and Lady Tritton, to celebrate and voice ones loyalty to the new King and Queen.

Races, games, music, prizes, eats, drinks were all available free. It was all the more memorable for me since I fell into a bunch of stinging nettles and apparently yelled for some time. The mansion was a large whitish yellowish building in a very large open park bordering on the banks of the River Stour. Dancing for the grownups was organised. The estate employed a large number of the villagers, including a game keeper named Feakins, who years later caught me poaching on the wooded part of the property, but I was let off with a caution. I believe this was because I went to the same school as his daughter Stephanie.

Dad maintained that he grew all his own vegetables to last throughout the year. In fact we, my brother and I, helped from about the age of eight picking up potatoes and weeding etc. As each year went by the workload increased until around fourteen and fifteen years of age we did all the digging and hoeing. Dads health was not too good by then, asthma, influenza, he always appeared ill as my memory serves me. We had an excellent garden producing all the veggies mentioned previously plus three types of apple trees, one being codling (mind we lived right on the corner of a varied fruit orchard), one green gage tree, one Victoria plum tree, blackcurrants, redcurrants, blackberries, loganberries, although I've never required the knowledge since, I still remember the pruning of currants, done annually, with red cut out all the new wood, with black cut out all the old wood — just a snippet of information that could have been useful. We also grew large strawberries, rhubarb gooseberries eating and cooking as we described them, tomatoes, lettuce, marrow, cucumbers, peas, radish, runner beans, cauliflower broccoli, various types of cabbage red and green and Brussel sprouts that should be frosted to taste better as Dad said. Dad had a sizeable flower garden which was his pride and joy, he looked after all this side, saying you can't eat flowers and you two do most of the eating.



The Family

(with Mick the Whippet) Standing in a recently cut field of oats adjacent to our house.

Note: The oats are stooked for drying

Family pets, we always had a dog and cat, always thought to be necessary and useful, cats to scare birds off the fruit in the garden and to keep the mice and rats at bay. Dogs either as good gun dogs or rabbit catchers and also the family listening ears around the house, the watch dog. We also kept a couple of ferrets who really earned their living, all were fed on scraps from the house nothing was bought special for them - maybe the cat had a few licks of milk now and again. A few chickens were kept mainly for eggs and perhaps a reserve meal, but chicken was a Christmas dinner for us in those days.

Chickens ate all the boiled peelings and maybe stale bread that had gone too far. We scrounged com for them, raking up after thrashing machines had done their rounds. Fine grit was also part of the diet (stones ground up very small) something to do with making good egg shells.

Tame rabbits were often kept - Old English and Belgium hares - to help keep us, the boys, out of mischief. They were fed entirely on the various plants growing wild; sow thistle, dandelion plantain, certain grasses, clover and chickweed to name a few. This was topped up when available with carrot tops, worm eaten carrots, parsnips and swedes and maggoty chestnuts or apples in season, very little if anything was wasted. They turned out bigger and fatter than the wild ones, and earned us a fair bit of pocket money.

Scheme water was later brought to the cattle drinking troughs in the orchard and fields next to our little group



of houses, but oh no, this was not for the local residents. We did not own, or rather my parents did not own, the house we lived in, rent was eight shillings a week. They could have bought the house for eight hundred pounds, but that sort of money was not available we were told. Most of the houses in the area were rented out being originally built as farm labourers cottages, wood cutters cottages and road council workers. I guess we were rated amongst the poorer class of the day, albeit hard working types, as were most in the hamlet of Bilting. A hillside garage three quarters of a mile away was handy for Mum and Dad's tobacco requirements, petrol for his motor bike when available and also fuel for oil stoves, lamps and Primus. The accumulator got charged there to run the wireless set.

A rag-and-bone man used to call in his pony and trap which was an early form of recycling I guess. His familiar call was heard long before he appeared, shouting, "rags and bones, rags and bones." Our man used to call out "rags and bones, rags and bones, rabbit skins, sheep skins any old woman's skins" and if you asked him to shut the gate, he would retort "bugger the gate giddy up Ned." A funny man by his very nature. Bones were used to make glue at a factory in one of the villages not far away, animal skins were used in clothing, rugs and furnishings and rags. I'm not sure but I could say a lot of country people used to wear them. They would also collect various types of metal, brass and copper, tins, in fact anything that might be useful. A few pence changed hands but rarely more.

Godmersham village corner store (a general store also served as the local news agents and post office) was the tuck shop for the local school children, well those that had money to spend on such things, and I wasn't among them. Up a bit from the store and across the main road we collected chestnuts. The wood served us for many years as the source of some evening snacks of baked and boiled chestnuts cooked on the old coal wood fired cast iron cooking top oven, that served as the main heating for the living room come kitchen. The Cottage, it was known as "The Cottage" was a double storey with two bedrooms up. My brother and I had to pass through our parents room to get to our own bedroom, living room as just described and a front room downstairs with the scullery built on one side under the main roof. The front room was rarely used except when Grandma came to stay or Auntie Vie when she lived with us for a short while.

There were four cottages down the bottom of the lane, all with similar facilities. Opposite our house stood "Napoleon Cottage," so named with a small statue of the famous sailor in his period service dress standing on top of the protruding front door porchway. I guess the statue stood two feet six inches to three feet high, it was colourful and created interest for the many visitors that came that way as the lane crossed the double railway lines. The bottom of our garden was adjacent to the railway and we were quite accustomed to the steam passenger trains that seemed to travel very fast to us then. The Goods trains, as they were referred to, were much longer and slower but very much valued as a mover of all things across the country. The lane continued on to a public right-of-way which was little more than a cart track towards an old (so they say) Roman bridge known as the swing bridge to all round and about. The timber footway was supported on two large chains from brick and concrete towers either side of the River Stour which flowed from east to west with several deep parts that provided places to swim, bathe and/or relax with a line in the water. Fish were quite plentiful and fair sized pike could be caught. In fact Dad taught us an unusual way to catch pike with a rabbit snare which we were quite accustomed to for snaring the furry ones. Pikes will often doze or sleep or whatever it is that they do in the warm sun. With a little bit of practice and stealth it is fairly easy with a steady hand to slip a snare on the end of a stick over their heads and behind their gills and then 'snatch' and you got him.



The Cottage Billing

Cottage is now covered in ivy and is minus well and garden shed (taken in 1995 by my son Wayne during his UK visit when he was shown around by his Uncle Sid)

Mum and Dad taught us to swim with the help of reeds under our chests which were gradually removed when we were about eight plus years old. Beyond the old bridge the public right-of-way continued on to Olanteigh road, which wound its way up, down, over and round many comers passing hamlets, leading through the many small villages and the delightful countryside to the coast of the south east, perhaps more to the south of Kent.

Back to the old bridge, just a hundred yards up stream was situated Olanteigh Towers, the residence of a wealthy country gentleman, located in a very well kept private park. The river Stour had, in years gone by, been diverted or part of it had through the stately grounds and exited back into the river via some stepped waterfalls. People could often be seen sitting on the waterfalls in the hot summer months. Many of my friends and I crossed the water to take a peep at the beautiful lawns and gardens in the strictly private grounds that were surrounded by a band of woodland next to the river. We spent a lot of what spare time was available down by the river, almost as soon as we had learnt to swim well enough, this as mum said, was as good as a bath especially later on when we were given soap, say after harvesting.

In the years prior to the Second World War the winters were very harsh with long, cold, wet and frosty periods. When wet we had the continued flow of liquid down the lane that acted as the local drain for the area. I say liquid as there was a farmyard located further up the lane, where animals, particularly cows, were brought in for the winter. Pigs were kept in sties and between them they produced a fair old brew that, when diluted in the heavy rains, ran down the ditch at the side of the road to the pond. This then overflowed and discharged its brown juices down both sides of the lane past our house. It smelt awful, and dispersed along the railway lines below. We had wooden barrels, water butts we called them, to catch the rain water around the house, which mother preferred for washing, both hair and clothes.

When frost, 'Jack Frost' came 'twas really cold. Thick ice appeared on the inside of the bedroom windows. The 'Gerrys' 'Pos' which were bedside chambers, call them what you will, froze under the beds. Perhaps I'd better explain; having an outside bucket toilet as was the fashion in the area at the time. It was most inconvenient to don clothing and trip out into the winter nights to relieve oneself. It was therefore acceptable, the done thing, to have a large China pot, 'Po' or 'Gerry' to pee into (urinate), or a number two if that was urgent although the latter was discouraged for obvious reasons.

Vegetables and stored fruit were venerable and had to be adequately covered/protected. The other main problem in the prolonged very cold periods was the outside bucket toilet, the contents of which froze solid. However Dad, being the solver of all problems, always managed with instructions if not the labour. Water was no problem since we drew it up from the well, there were no pipes to freeze up. Yes, we had hot water bottles which were china square shaped crockery things which did the job. The bed warmer was a large copper container with a long handle and the remaining contents of the family fire were put into it before retiring and then moved

up and down in the bed to warm the sheets before climbing in. I can't recall this being used or what happened to it. Sounds like too much bother - think about it.

I remember two occasions when we were snowed in, that is to say, Dad couldn't go to work, we could not go to school, the baker, butcher, milkman, grocer and coal man were all prevented from making their deliveries (by nature's deep white drifts) to where we lived. The snow was hedge high, the hedges acting as barriers held the wind-drifting snow to depths what must have been six feet. I'm not sure how long these periods lasted for. Of course we didn't really care about having an extra holiday from school at that young age. A serious reminder was mumbled to us, that we would laugh alright when we had fried snow for breakfast. Eventually, even at that age, we had to play our part at snow clearing working on the premise I guess, that every little helps. I must say I never remember going hungry Mum being the manager she was there was always something stored away for the rainy day she often referred to. Those lessons have stayed with me ever since.

Sunday school started at an early age at Godmersham church, the origins of which date back to 1066. Situated next to it was, we thought, the haunted house, a onetime home of Thomas a Becket. Our religious instruction continued to age fourteen plus.

Canterbury has been a magnet for tourists since Archbishop Thomas a Becket was murdered in the church by henchmen of King Henry II in 1170. The church was expanded to accommodate the throngs who came to visit Becket's tomb and the pilgrimage was the basis for Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales

The Archbishop of Canterbury is the spiritual leader of the Church of England and the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Working on the farm began around the age of nine or ten years, whether it was to make us useful, or make use of us, or to keep us out of trouble and mischief we did not really know or even consider at the time. It was all arranged by mother working on the adage that it's not 'what you know, but who you know.' At the time she was working as the farmhouse cook and of course had contact with the head gardener, a Mr. Dunster, the game keeper a Mr. Senick, who was generally known as 'like see' since this was his common constant phrase in conversation, then there was the farm foreman a Mr. Andrews all of whom had some authority. However we made a start during school holidays getting three pence an hour that increased to four pence at the age of twelve years. My highest pay was five pence at age fourteen/fifteen. (Note: part time women seasonal workers received sixpence an hour.) At that time there was two hundred and forty pence to the pound, so five pence an hour working say forty hours a week would equal two hundred pence — sixteen shillings and eight pence as there are at the time of writing just over two dollars to the pound therefore a week's wages would have been one dollar and seventy five cents roughly. Things were obviously much cheaper then. A few examples that I remember are a two pound loaf of bread cost four and a half pence. Cigarettes, which we were often sent to buy, were ten for four pence or twenty for eight pence for the cheaper brands 'Players' 'Weights\*' and 'Woodbines'(neither my brother or I smoked until our early twenties). A pint of beer was eight pence or so depending on one's favoured drink.

Now what, you may ask, would a ten year old do working on a farm to prove his worth. We would have been cheap labour and must have proved our worth to be able to continue on. Many boring hours were spent thistle pecking with the use of a long handled hoe, hoeing out dock weeds, wild parsley and other plants not supposed to be growing in the young crops of wheat, barley, oats etc. We cut down nettles, long grass and weeds around the farm buildings with brush hooks, even cutting back hedge rows, thinning out various root crops to leave one plant every eight inches (twenty centimetres) in their rows. We fed the fowls, ducks, geese and collected their eggs, cleaned out pens and stables and helped the foreman, who was also the shepherd during lambing season, with tail docking and castrating the young animals. At harvest time we helped the men make stooks from sheaves of com cut and bailed up by the binder, eight sheaves to a stook, in neat rows for the purpose of drying. Shire cart horses were used for ploughing, harrowing, seeding and pulling the various carts around the countryside. We did potato picking, brussel sprout picking, varied fruit picking and dung spreading. You name it there was much that young boys can do to be useful on the farm.

In the summer months at harvest time maids from the farmhouse would often appear with large flagons of cider and cakes for the workers to enjoy a late afternoon break. When the crop and the weather was right workers were asked to work on until dusk in order to get the harvest in quickly whilst the good weather lasted. The binders went about their business cutting the ripe crops just four inches (ten cm.) from ground level, as straw

itself was a valued product, leaving the neatly tied sheaves in its path.

Cutting usually started on the outside of the fields, going round and round as they worked their way towards the centre and, in so doing, all the wild life was driven to the centre. All and sundry kept their eye on the progress of the cut and appeared just before the last cuts were made. The gamekeeper came with his dogs, the farm foreman with his, the odd worker brought along his pet and we, who were there to make up the stooks, armed ourselves with stout sticks. As the cover for the wild life was cut down the animals made a break for it. Rabbits, hares and rats confused by all the commotion made a run for freedom, their normal tracks blocked by sheaves of the crop and barking dogs. The sticks were lashing as we chased them but quite a large number of them never found their freedom, finally finishing up on someone's dinner table, rabbit being very much a cheap favoured dinner for the farm worker families. Hares, one might describe them as larger breeds of rabbits and much faster at moving, were game to the gentry who hung them. As the saying goes, they are hung until they are going off, we would say rotten, before they are dressed and cooked. The same was the case with pheasants and both are considered a delicacy. Mum told us she often used to prepare them but never fancied them herself, I suppose it's an acquired taste.

Once the stooks of com had dried sufficiently they were carted to a location where large stacks were constructed. Larger than the average double storey house of the day and about the same shape with sloping roofs. On completion the stacks were thatched with straw for waterproofing to await the services of a visiting thrashing machine months later. Thrashing machines were used to separate the wheat from the chaff as it was, or the actual seed of the crop be it barley, oats or wheat. The straw was retained and stacked for use in the barnyards, wintering pens and stables, in fact general use for poultry and farmyard animals. The modern replacement is known as a combine harvester. Thrashing machines toured the countryside farms sometimes months after the harvesting and were hired on a contract basis. They appeared to me even then as rather primitive machines driven by very large belts attached to a steam engine some eight yards away and resembled the old steam rollers used in road construction. Sheaves of com were manually fed in at the top by pitchfork, the grain was delivered via hoppers at the rear end into bags, the straw and chaff were ejected. The whole activity was very labour intensive and a dry weather job only. Vermin, in particular rats, were attracted to these un-thrashed corn stacks around all farms. Farm workers pay was comparatively low, but most seemed very happy in their work and of course there were perks such as cheaper veggies eggs milk and firewood and in some cases fruit.

I have already mentioned about the harsh winters, but adding to that there were a couple of > ears when the River Stour overflowed its banks to the extent that swing bridge field was completely flooded. Normal river overflows were controlled by a system of dykes, but in the two years mentioned they could not cope and the flooding was followed by severe frosts and snow. The area then became very popular for ice skaters, many we were told coming from London, which could have been fifty miles away? News must have travelled fast the area known for its sporting attributes in severe types of weather, most people came 2 the Lane Bilting and the gaily coloured, red, yellow, blue, white woollens and all ..'ours between which were worn to ward off the cold will long remain in my memory g ether with the hats, scarves, gloves, mittens and leggings worn by ladies who never wore trousers then.

On the upside of our home were the sloping hills and tracks leading across farmlands to Kingswood, a very large woodland some eight miles in length and an average width, I'm guessing now, of approximately three miles. Weekly visits and sometimes more were made by a lot of the locals with homemade carts and barrows to collect the very necessary firewood. We had a cart Dad made very early on. Taking us to the woods as youngsters we would ride on top of the load which was all downhill on the way home. Later we were trusted on our own to bring home the firewood, often giving rides to two local sisters, Jean and Gwen, who lived at Well Cottage just forty yards above us in the lane. Their father was our adopted Uncle Bob who took us a couple of times to the seaside, a rare treat. Uncle Bob never returned from RAF Service during World War II so we were helping the family out with firewood as well. Coal at eight shillings a hundredweight was considered dear and delivered once a fortnight, a bag a week was a luxury and even that wouldn't last in winter. Often trips along the railway lines would supplement the home supply of coal having dropped from the passing steam trains.

The hill slopes down from the woods provided another attraction during winter snow time. Homemade sleds, and the odd professional toboggans, would appear with well wrapped up rosy cheeked children. More often than not sheets of corrugated iron with the front bent up and a looped towing/hold rope attached served as an

ideal downhill fun sled ride for the local ruffians which I guess my brother and I could be labelled as. Later on as skills developed with age we made our own versions of toboggans and wheeled trucks for summer fun.

A lot of memories from infant school are still very clear bearing in mind we stayed in the same school up to the age of eleven. The process of learning, unlike today with the TV, calculators, computers, videos, recording machines, modern books and techniques, the teachers were our only means to become clever or remain a dunce. I like to think I was somewhere in between or though I failed the eleven plus examination to go to the grammar school which was considered the better source of education for the better off. This was not always so as some of the local lads managed to pass.

Dad appeared fairly well educated and had a good all round general knowledge gathered from my more learned later observations in life. Mum on the other hand was rather simpler in that sense, although very knowledgeable in the womanly and motherly homemaker skills. She was very good at handicrafts, sewing and knitting (we were taught the basics of each). Her cooking was generally exceptional and she had employment in the local farmhouse as cook for Earl Drax and his family and often friends. Mum also worked earlier in local eating and bakery establishments.

The 'three R's' (reading, writing and arithmetic) were rarely discussed and, to my present day knowledge, never taught at home, although elementary living skills were, some I've mentioned previously. Basically we learnt to look after ourselves; cooking, cleaning, even painting and doing small repairs on footwear and woodwork, gardening obviously and the use of all sorts of handyman tools. I did at one stage have an artistic flair so Dad said, he saw me copy from and enlarge a drawing of a photo of one of my cousins. I did not follow this through but always got good marks for anything connected with drawings and diagrams.

As soon as we were able i.e. strong enough (I keep repeating we - meaning, my brother and I) we took turns at emptying the lavatory bucket. This was buried in the vegetable garden, as the rural Chinese still do I believe, I being a little older also started drawing water from the well which was a cylindrical brick wall lined hole about four feet across and thirty feet deep. A four gallon bucket was lowered on a rope from a long wooden reel with a large metal handle, the whole structure was supported with suitable timber which had door type lids on hinges to cover the well when not in use. This for me was really heavy work that often caused blisters on the palms of the hand and eventually a pad of hard skin where the fingers join the palm. The wooden roller on the handle had long since gone prior to my introduction to the task. The well became very short of water in the summer and muddy containing worms and newts, the latter a type of small water lizard, consequently the water had to stand in a large galvanised bath and allowed to settle before we could scoop off the top clear water to drink. I'll always remember a health inspector who called one day and was rather surprised at what he saw, "of course Mrs. Newman, you always boil the water before use don't you" he said, "oh no," replied mother "if the boys want a drink they just dip a mug in." Many other words were spoken beyond our little ears the gist of which later on we were told was that we were courting disastrous health problems and possibly life. Mum reckoned as we had been doing it for years we carried on as usual on the premise that it hadn't hurt us as yet. As you will read later on, I had formed an opinion that my early childhood life had given me some immunity.

Bathrooms as such did not exist in our type of country house nevertheless we did bathe, sometimes as much as once a week, depending on how dirty we were I guess. A large four foot long narrow galvanised bath that normally hung around by the backdoor was brought into the living room/kitchen and placed behind the well-scrubbed pine dining table (kitchen table we called it) on the floor on the opposite side of the room from the fireplace. Three large cast iron cooking pots with lids would have had been heating up since mid-afternoon. These were then poured in with a suitable amount of cold water to make it bearable resulting in maybe four inches of water which became almost five inches by the time you got in to it. The same water was used for two baths and we took turns in going first. Its further use was to soak the weekly wash of clothes overnight before the placement of most in the copper. All washing was done by hand after a boil in the copper then rinsing in cold water. I've seen mother in agony several times during winter as she hung out the washing in freezing weather, coming indoors with her fingers under her armpits walking up and down to warm up. It may be interesting to note that I did not leave home until turning twenty and the bath behind the kitchen table was still normal routine. On two occasions we lived away from home whilst Mum was in hospital for reasons little boys were not told, no I just do not know, and Dad carried on with his working life. The first time we brothers were separated Sid went to live with Uncle Bob and Auntie Doris, Ammon and their family, and I went to my mother's Uncle Joe and Aunt Annie's farm, 'the highlight of my early years.' I don't remember going to school whilst there so assume : must

have been in the school holidays for the six weeks or so that I stayed. I guess I was around eight or nine.

It was a small farm with four milking cows which all had names two of which come to mind. 'Four Legs,' and 'Pharting Fanny' - I'm not sure if he spelt it that way! There were three young calves and I was shown how to teach them to drink from a bucket. They were fed on skimmed milk and I had to place my hand in the milk, insert two fingers in the calves mouths, and hold their head with the other hand until they got the idea. They then lapped up the milk alongside the two fingers. A couple of fattening steers were also kept. The pig sty contained a couple of old sows and several young ones which were being 'evened' for the market. A few tame sheep had the run of the fields around the farmhouse, as did chickens, ducks, geese and a couple of turkeys.

A very large placid well trained shire carthorse was kept that ploughed, tilled and rolled the cropped fields. Often when released from the implements of its labours it would be given a hefty smack on the rump and told to go home and would do so to be found patiently waiting at the stable doors when Uncle Joe and I arrived somewhat later having attended to other chores. Early on in my stay I was seated on this monstrous beast, as I then thought, to take him back to the stable. I was tugging on the reins getting the horse to head towards a small wooden bridge over a dyke (the way I always walked back to the farmhouse) when I heard Uncle Joe yelling "no, no, not that way, let go of them bloody reins." On letting go of the reins, the horse turned up along the dyke and over a stone filled pipe, I now know to be a culvert, and back down the stony road towards the stable stopping on route at the water trough for a drink almost tipping me in. At the stable doors I lowered myself down whilst clinging to the harness and let old 'nobby' in to be greeted with almost immediately "you bloody idiot, if you'd taken him over the bridge you'd have smashed it, the horse has got more bloody sense than you have." Being told off by Uncle Joe really hurt.

The farm certainly was a busy occupation for Uncle Joe and Aunt Annie who had no children at that stage He had retired from the Merchant Navy and had a bad ulcerated leg that needed a daily dressing. Aunt Annie made butter from a wooden chum, that was weighed and patted into one pound chunks (the skimmed milk going to the calves). This was sold down the local village along with fresh eggs, fruit in season, vegetables, potted jams and homemade wines etc. A seven day job but all part of rural life at the time. I really enjoyed those days and times, and often envisioned myself with such a property later in life. A year or so after my visit I was told they were blessed with a son, a young Joseph Hobden, whom I have never met but must still be around. During the war years I understand the farmstead was taken over by the authorities for use as a military airfield which also happened to Joe's brother, my great Uncle George who was also a retired Merchant Seaman.

My second period away from home was with my brother. Mothers health was the reason again. We lived at Ruckinge with a Mrs. Judge (I think) and went to school at Ham Street. I do not remember much about this stay except when my brother broke the window of the local hardware shop whilst waiting for the school transport. At this school we had 'Horlicks' instead of milk which I didn't like. The days passed and we returned home to Bilting. Nothing exciting happened and little remembered.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Years Of World War II

World War II started on the 3rd September 1939, some six weeks before my tenth birthday whilst I was still attending the infant school. I do not know of any initial implications it had on the family, but being able to read quite well and kept abreast of all that interested a ten year old at the time via the "Daily Herald, "Ashford News" and "The News of the World" papers we were getting then. I started a scrap book cutting out all the war pictures, after Dad had read the paper I might add.

Dad joined the LDV (Local Defence Volunteers) and was one of the first that owned a gun, the uniform consisted of an armband only, they were the forerunners of the Home Guard. He spent many nights away from home with his double-barrel shot gun. Volunteers were placed at strategic points on guard. It was thought that an invasion would take place at any time by the Germans. Dad also had a smaller four/ten single-barrel shotgun that I used a lot when after rabbits and birds when I was out on country walks with him. It was always left at home when he went on duty because both Mum and I knew how to shoot with it and Mum felt safer. I've no idea if they were licenced, possibly not, that's if a licence was required then I really don't know. It was a very long time before the LDV were issued with rifles, and even then on a limited scale, one between two. Dad said with ammo, being very scarce, men actually went on duty with big sticks and pitchforks etc.

Thinking back about it all, I can only assume that they were observers on the end of a telephone line, however I can clearly remember seeing the LDV unit on parade at Chilham Castle square with sticks and pitchforks and the odd guns in the uniform of an armband orange with black letters). A little later on a point two/two cartridge rifle appeared at home, that I was allowed to use for rabbit shooting when Dad was not using it. Sid and I had been brought up with guns, we'd had air guns and pistols all the time the bore size of me latter was point one seven/seven. Sunday mornings were quite often spent, weather permitting, with little shooting competitions, using the garden fence alongside the lane as a resting point whilst shooting at small targets on the timber garden shed just seven or eight yards away. We used coloured air gun darts that were removed with special pliers and Mum often joined in, but only for a short while because Sundays were her home cooking days. Otherwise we all used the air guns for shooting rats and birds attacking fruit in the garden. Later on I bought my own two/two air rifle.

At some time in the early part of the war all members of the population were issued with gas masks, properly fitted and instruction given with many practice runs at school for immediate use if required. The mask itself was a round metal container, containing the filters I guess which were positioned in front of the nose and mouth rather like a pig's snout. It was held in place by soft contoured rubber that fitted to the front of one's head around the face very snugly by four adjustable straps. Once adjusted to a comfortable air-tight fit they were left that way and put in place by stretching the rubber face mask. The masks were kept and carried around in a cube-like cardboard container that had a longish cord which was slipped over the head and rested on one's shoulders. Gas attacks were obviously expected having been used in World War I just over 20 years earlier with devastating effect against soldiers.

The first bombing of UK by German planes, date unknown to me now, took place at Penny Pot Woods, Kent. It must have been in reasonable cycling distance because I went there with friends and dug up nose cones of parachute flares and magnesium bombs, small ones about three inches diameter or so. We collected some small parachutes which were kept for many years as souvenirs. It is interesting to note that the bombs had been manufactured in 1937 as the imprints stated thereon.

Later large bent telegraph poles, as we referred to them, started appearing in all the open flat fields as anti-glider landing obstacles. Concrete pillboxes were being constructed at strategic positions and everywhere blackout curtains were ordered. Sticky tape crisscrossed the windows of shops, schools and offices in built up areas. Rationing of food commenced, meagre amounts like, two ounces of butter, margarine, cheese, tea, bacon, four ounces of sugar and tinned meat per person per week and all sorts of other things that escape me just now. I don't think bread was on the list but the two pound loaf was reduced to one and three quarter pounds with the price remaining the same. People everywhere were advised and encouraged to grow vegetables, in the cities allotments sprang up, lawns were turned into cabbage patches and railway embankments were growing veggies.

Metal garden railings, gates and metal gate posts were removed everywhere to be melted down. Scrap metal dumps were set up for the war effort, I think perhaps our first bikes may have originated from these scrap metal collections. Dad was very good at putting bits and pieces together. As already stated we grew our own vegetables and rabbits and fish caught locally were a source of meat, so we never suffered the shortages experienced in the bigger towns and this virtually remained so throughout the war.

Later again German bombers were crossing the south coast quite blatantly at regular intervals, in large formations in waves at different heights, sometimes quite low en route for London in broad daylight.

Dad was medically unfit for service but still worked for a living as an engineer for the General Post Office. He was a keen motorcyclist and used his bike for work until petrol rationing made this impossible, despite his efforts to make the meagre allowance go further by mixing in paraffin I think, it produced a very smoky exhaust.

As the bombing started on London children and some adults moved to the country. Mum and Dad accepted evacuees, two boys, into the family. One a Georgie King who was the son of a wealthy businessman, as I thought then. The other was Dennis Lane who was an ordinary boy like ourselves. They were the same ages as ourselves. Their older sisters were Violet King and Joyce Lane who billeted with the Turner family living fifty yards from us on the other side of the railway line.

George's father and mother made regular visits in a big flashy car, he always had sweets and chocolates even though they were on ration and gave his son plenty of pocket money. At first we wondered why Georgie didn't like and wouldn't eat vegetables but he ate bubble and squeak, fried well until brown and crispy on the bottom, which of course was really a left over meal of potato and cabbage mixed, fried in fat saved from roasted meat etc. with perhaps an egg added. He eventually came to eat veggies, not sure how Mum did it but I think it had something to do with her stories of rosy cheeks, being able to see in the dark and getting rid of pimples. They stayed with us for what seemed a long time, the King family leaving the area first.

Dad was born in 1900 so obviously not old enough to serve in the First World War (1914- 18). He rarely spoke of that war but certainly had an outspoken anti-German attitude, often repeating that the only good Germans were dead ones. Despite his ill health, his work having been transferred to some military establishment at Dover and now unable to use his motorbike, I remember him leaving home at four am in cold freezing weather to push bike to Canterbury nine or ten miles away to catch a train to Dover to get there for his start time, and then reverse the procedure at the end of the day arriving home at seven p.m. Quite a suffering for someone with breathing problems.

From our view point we literally had a front line seat regarding the Battle of Britain. Often watching the aerial combat of opposing fighter aircraft and experiencing the whistle of empty machine gun and cannon cases as they fell to the ground around us. We watched pilots as they bailed out of their shot-up aircraft from both sides being used as target practice by their opponents as they slowly descended in their parachutes. As Dad said "all is fair in love and war, a man who lives to get away lives to fight another day" one cannot afford sympathy in warfare.

On one occasion German aircraft flew alongside our school at Ashford, shooting at trains in the shunting yards. We were ordered to get under our desks but being on the top floor and peeping out I had a good view of the planes so low with guns blazing about three hundred yards away. On another occasion whilst at home, a badly shot-up Hurricane a wooden and fabric single- seater fighter plane was heading straight for our little group of houses but it veered off very close and very low, the pilot waving to us (the watching locals) close enough to see his young features, as he headed towards his death. Obviously fighting to maintain height he crashed into the river near our favourite swimming spot. Some of us rushed to the site where he had been thrown clear and lay still in the water as Sood swirled away from his head. We arrived just before some soldiers recently stationed in Olantigh Park; they turned us away. Some days later we visited the crash site and clambered over the almost intact wreckage and with the help of one of the older grammar school boys removed a machine gun with belts of ammo. On our way back towards his home property, 'ol' Gal Turner' saw us and reported us to the police. The trophy had to be handed over thus eluding us the prospect of getting it to work. Within a few weeks a German fighter plane nose-dived at great speed just one hundred and fifty yards from where the Hurricane came down - right opposite on the river bank where we swam. Little was left of this although I did pick up a boot with a foot still in it before the military once again arrived on site and ordered us away. Many years later I heard the engine



had been recovered some fifteen feet down in the soft river bank mud. Despite my parents views I did not think it fair to shoot at a defenceless airman in a parachute.

The next couple of paragraphs or so are a re-write. I previously wrote about a thousand words on thirty-odd families that lived in the area of Bilting which was almost everybody except the greyhound breeding and training establishment and the mushroom farm. Their little stories that I know are not relevant to my own, apart from the fact that I knew them as neighbours and friends in the district. In fact I have amazed myself with the detail of my memory, things and happenings came to the fore that had no reason to surface since their original occurrence but had been stored and now triggered by thoughts of passing time and my youth. The more I thought the greater the detail and the increased detail produced a volume of words to the point of irrelevance. Suffice to say that the knowledge of the area in which I was brought up and the people that lived in it were all known to me and vice versa I guess.

We had the run of the whole area and there appeared to be no objection to our playing on or crossing fields and walking through woodlands. We as children and older were brought up to respect other people's property and belongings and always reminded each other of the facts concerning the closing of farmyard gates and taking care when climbing over fences or through hedges, or upsetting livestock. We were encouraged to take an interest in nature, even the local vicar from Godmersham (we were in his parish) laid on slide evenings for us about wildlife to be found in Kent and he provided us all with a cup of hot 'Oxo.' I had quite a large collection of wild bird eggs (blown) and a butterfly collection, knew where the badgers lived in their holes, or the den of a fox, good fishing spots, where wild fruit and nuts grew, mushrooms and even holly and mistletoe.

I have not since experienced the know-how of any area that I have lived in and certainly not known more than a dozen neighbourly types, that's discounting members of clubs and associations to which I have belonged and lasting friendships that have continued over very many years, some of them quite distant at opposing ends of the world.

On the other hand I feel it worthy to mention those who served in the forces, in particular those who paid the highest price i.e. their lives. There was a Mr. Woodbridge a youngish family man, I think, one of the very few that I did not know too well, called up into the army and never returned. Our adopted Uncle Bob who joined the RAF and did not come back, leaving his wife, our 'Auntie Doris,' to bring up son Derek and daughters Jean and Gwen. The eldest girl and boy about the same age as myself and brother. Mum remained friends with them up to the end. Ernest Harling, a career sailor who went right through the war and retired as a chief Petty Officer a few years afterwards. He was the father of Douglas a friend of mine and he gave me much advice on service life. Len Haywood, about four or five years older than I, went to the Grammar school and later joined the RAF during the war becoming a pilot flying Dakotas, the old transport war horse, come bomber, paratrooper. He survived but was lost to myself in the mist of time. Several of the old timers of the area fought in World War I or had spent time in India and various places. Other details of personalities will have been exposed, or will be by the time I am through with this.

The war had started a year since and months later I prepared for and eventually sat for my eleven plus examination which was the supposed test that set our path of destination in life. Roland Haywood, the lad across the road, held my hand so to speak in getting me to the grammar school on the dreaded day and was rewarded the princely sum of six pence by Mum for his efforts. Later, to my parents utter disappointment, I learnt that I had failed and applied for entry to the Ashford North Central School for boys. At the age of eleven, or thereabout, I started attending some two hundred yards from the girls school of the same name. We travelled to school in a double-decker bus and segregation still applied with the boys upstairs and the girls down or the other way around. The bus meandered en route picking up its load, myself being one of the first to get on and last to get off a.m. and p.m. respectively, the first turn around point and pick up being Godmersham one mile beyond. Generally we left home at eight in the morning and returned at five, thus seeing very little daylight weekdays at home during the darkest winter months.

It was a very modern school, and uniform although not compulsory, was complied with by approximately ninety per cent. Black leather polished shoes were expected and the school colours were black and orange, a black cap with an orange band and coloured button and an interwoven A.N.C.S. badge central above the peak, black and orange banded knee length grey socks and grey pullovers banded around the waist and neck, a striped, coloured tie for those that wore one, which was encouraged in the higher grades, school blazers were also available.

The school boasted large woodwork and metalwork workshops, science laboratory, arts and craft centre and very large well-equipped gymnasium that had a stage one end and a high viewing gallery at the other. The gym was used daily for the school assembly by all pupils and staff for prayers maybe a hymn and any briefing prior to school work. The playing of musical instruments was encouraged for those so inclined but did involve at least twice-weekly after hours attendance. The normal subjects of math's, english, history and geography were all taught in their special classrooms set up for same. Classes revolved around the workshop centres, classrooms, gym etc. at the ringing of bells. Gardening was also a subject to get involved in, algebra, logarithms, and geometry were instructed under the heading of math's subjects but I never had reason to use the former two at any time in my life.

Note: I went to inspect and look over two schools some forty years later prior to my own son's attendance in Australia. Although in the introductory age of computers and calculators etc. and the most modern available we were told, they were sadly lacking in the type of facilities that I had had at school.

As an academic I was never bright, achieving only average and sometimes lower when progressing beyond the basics of the subject within the required grade. Having said that I might add the pupils were graded on entry and placed in one of three streams, either A, B or C and if you were in the top two or three of your age group class, i.e. B or C within a school term, you moved up to the next grade and of course the opposite took effect. If you were bottom of class you would be down-graded. I started in the B grade and after a year or so moved up to the A grade where I struggled somewhat maintaining the grade until the end of the fourteenth year when most left school and those who remained moved up into the fourth form. I eventually finished up making above average progress helped along I feel because I excelled in sports, physical training and field events in athletics, arts, drawing, painting and gardening as my school reports show. As in most schools, and still in existence today, all pupils were allocated to one of four houses as we then called them. At my school it was Athens (red), Corinth (green), Sparta (yellow) and Troy (blue). It did, and it still does, provide an open arena of competition, rivalry and teamwork. On reaching the fourth form or soon after I was made a school prefect, having gone through the vice prefect stage. Discipline was strict with physical measures taken to enforce the verbal instructions, raps on the knuckles and clips round the ears were quite common. The unruly were caned on the palms of the hands. If the wrongdoing was thought to be really bad they had to bend over and were caned very hard on their backside for a certain amount of lashes depending on the offence. The Headmaster usually had an involvement in the latter. High on the list of offences was disrespect for adults and in particular answering back to teachers, whilst stealing and wilful damage was not tolerated. Looking back I would say the treatment, or the threat of it, did us more good than harm. I was, by the way, introduced to the cane etc. as an older boy at the infant school.

At the age of thirteen I joined the Sea Cadets, an after school activity not attached to the school. Even at that age there was a selection procedure, the requirements of which I must have obviously met. A scaled down uniform was issued to all members but correct in all as the Real McCoy' - the enlarged over hanging collar, the black silk (attribute to Nelson if I remember correctly), a white square-necked shirt, short sleeve for summer wear and navy blue woollen square necked long sleeved pullovers for winter wear. The latter worn under the pull-on, close fitting top name of which I have forgotten. Bell bottomed trousers and black polished shoes completed the outfit, with of course the standard round caps still worn today by the lower ranks. The uniform was said not to be complete without the trained use of a hot iron, that is to show the seven alternate horizontal creases in each trouser leg, and the well ironed silk and collar all of course brushed free of flicks.

I learnt a lot, much of which was useful to me later in life; knots and lashings, splicing, use of pulleys, leverage, anchors, how to do whipping and all other things applicable to basic seamanship, which also included drill and weapons training. Signals are a very important part of the service, semaphore and Morse code both by lights and buzzers were taught as were the symbols of other communications, each with its own message via Balls Flags and Pennants. An annual camp was arranged each year involving, sometimes service on active Royal Navy Ships.

One such venture is still very clear in my mind. It was in the English Channel aboard a minesweeper actually engaged on active service minesweeping, a paravane being deployed on either side of the vessel on long cables that cut mines free from their moorings, which floated to the surface and were then sunk by gunfire. This was an activity that we as cadets also took part in under close supervision.

Being subjected to food rationing back home we found no such restrictions on board ship or none that were

apparent to ourselves.

I left the unit after four years and some months having attained the rank of leading seaman and a couple of other proficiency badges. I think this was because I failed the chief petty officers examination for entry as an officer cadet in the Royal Navy. My interest then turned to the merchant service, hoping to follow in the footsteps of my Great Uncles Joe, George and Roland, all brothers with the surname of Hobden which was my Mother's maiden name. My Father would not hear of it having jurisdiction until I reached the age of twenty one in those days. He no doubt had his reasons with my best interest in mind as he disclosed many years later to me.

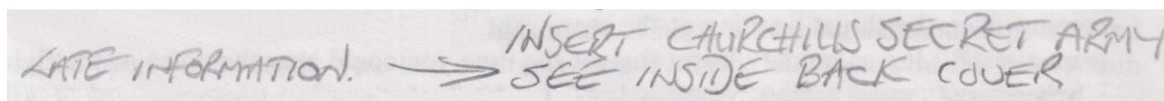


Sid and I with friends Roland Hayward and Jim Andrews  
Down by the River Stour



Clothing Coupon  
Issued to entitled persons during the war

About halfway through the war, maybe a bit more, when I was fourteen or fifteen, I with others located an underground hideaway in the bottom of what we knew as the 'airship hole.' I guess it could have been a hidden anchorage for an airship during the first World War. It lay in a valley between wooded slopes and had the shape of pictures of airships that we had seen. The hideaway we found was obviously a very much more recent addition, in fact it was a storeroom well below the bottom of the airship hole full of boxes of ammunition of all sorts; small bombs and rockets and parachute flares. I cannot remember breaking locks or anything to gain entry and we kept the secret and made several visits to the site. I had already told my father about it. The nearest soldiers were about one- and-a- half miles away and were a small group, most of them in Scottish uniform, staying at the 'Garth' at Bilting. What their purpose was we did not know as they had nothing to do with the small Ack Ack Units of the Royal Artillery dotted about the countryside with their search lights and anti-aircraft guns. However on our last visit to the airship hole, and it was our last visit until after the end of the war, the lot of us (six or seven I forget now) were caught. As we walked/half ran down the wooded slopes, which had a lot of pine trees amongst others, we were suddenly surrounded by armed soldiers dropping out of the trees and rising up out of the ground. After brief questioning we were taken back to the 'Garth.' After quite some time they handed us over to the civilian police where we were questioned again and our parents notified. The airship hole and the surrounding area became a forbidden area, and we and our parents were given strict instructions. I do not remember hearing about the incident afterwards.



The wartime period gave us a lot of extra interest that would not have otherwise existed. Quite a lot of us at one stage had improvised boats, all metal, that we had to cut a recess out of in order to sit inside, the underside was completely rounded. It was a rather precarious craft to handle until one got the hang of it, they were in fact discarded aircraft fuel tanks. I've an idea thinking back that they were long range fuel tanks fitted to US army fighter aircraft, the name Thunderbolt comes to mind? We did in fact have the US army Eighth Airforce stationed

not too far away. I can remember speaking to the great big Negro pilots and many other Americans. The US servicemen were on very good pay compared to our own soldiers, with them the saying was "a pound a day while you are away", whilst the British 'Tommy' received four or five shillings a day. (Note: one pound equalled a little over two dollars, and five shillings about fifty cents to give you a comparison in 1994.) Getting back to the discarded fuel tanks, they were also put to many other uses i.e. dog kennels, chicken coups, sidecar bodies for motor bikes.

Aircraft spotting became quite a hobby and many papers and magazines printed silhouette pictures of all aircraft we were likely to see, both enemy and friendly. The Germans made night bombing raids escorted by fighter aircraft and the drone and throbbing of heavily laden aircraft was nearly always heard before seen. Big groups of German bombers covered the skies as they crossed the southern coast of Kent, having crossed the English Channel twenty two miles wide that separated European and British soil, on their way to bomb London. Resistance appeared rather sparse in the early stages. It must have been a formidable task to our 'Battle of Britain' pilots to receive orders to intercept when totally outnumbered but they did, at great cost, as is recorded in the history books. This prompted Winston Churchill, our wartime prime minister, to utter those immortal words "never, in the field of human conflict, was so much owed by so many, to so few." I witnessed many engagements to the tune of roaring engines, burping canon guns and the short splutter of machine runs. I think I read somewhere that the English fighters, spitfires and hurricanes only had two to three minutes of actual firing time before all their ammunition was expended.

As wartime progressed AA (anti-aircraft) batteries were spread far and wide in the paths of possible targets. Searchlights and barrage balloons were employed to detect, or deter as the case maybe, on the outskirts of large cities. Daylight bombing became night time bombing as the defences increased.

A fairly large petroleum dump located about three miles as the crow flies from our family home, was being sought out as a target on one very dark night. We heard the planes and the associated Ack Ack fire and saw the very bright lights floating down from the sky, so prior to daylight Dad took me along to investigate and we retrieved two very large parachutes, bigger than those used by the fighter pilots, attached to large burnt out canisters. We had to avoid some soldiers who were also out searching. Dad reckoned 'Gerries' were looking for the petrol dump at Wye but they missed by over a mile and the dump survived the war. Mum made use of the silk-like material (perhaps it was silk). She made dresses, blouses, bed covers, and put aside what was not used. Various uses were found for the very strong silk-like cords for many years after the war.

At a later period flying bombs which became known as 'Doodle Bugs' were launched against the cities and towns of Southern England and London. Actually they were all meant for London and were launched from ramps in German occupied France. Pilotless, they were set to fly at given altitudes on set courses and were jet propelled with flames coming from the thrust opening at the rear. They had a distinctive noise quite different from aircraft. It was quickly learnt that all the time you could hear the noise of the flying bomb jet you were reasonably safe but, should the jet engine stop, you had to take immediate cover because this meant that the bomb would crash and explode in a very short space of time. If you happened to be within fifty yards of the impact point there was little chance of survival.

These early bombs were known as the V1's. Fighter aircraft were employed to shoot them down as were the Ack Ack batteries. About this time the first jet aircraft appeared on the scene, invented by Frank Whittle as I remember, they were faster than the propeller aircraft and more suited to the task of destroying the 'Doodle Bugs' which were comparatively fast. Some pilots became so skilled in such engagements that they actually tilted the bombs wings with their own, turning them back out to sea. We heard (there was often cloud cover) or we heard and saw the 'Doodle Bugs' daily for weeks on end. At the same time as the attacks continued a search was being made to find the launching ramps, or so we read in the papers, the idea being to knock them out at their source. This was a difficult task since it was found that many ramps were in fact mobile ones that constantly changed location. Bombing eventually decimated their numbers.

A new superior flying rocket bomb, the V2, then appeared on the scene with devastating results. It flew too high too fast and much further if required to even attempt the defensive tactics taken against its predecessor, bombing the launching ramps appeared to be one way, however they stopped in the end which was eventually achieved somehow. I do in fact have a chart produced by the "Kent Messenger" newspaper showing where every flying bomb struck, with other vital statistics. The attacks started on the 13th June and continued until 1st

September 1944. A total of 8,000 were launched towards their London target in eighty days. Over 1,000 were shot down in the sea, 1,400 shot down in Kent and another 1,000 fell in Kent failing to reach their target. Over 2,000 failed or were shot down in Sussex and a further 2,200 were reported to have hit their target causing much damage and many casualties in London.

As many who have studied the history of World War II would know, 'D Day' took place in 1944, so the whole of South East England was in state of preparation for war activity and this may have been the main reason for the estimated seventy per cent success rate against the 'Doodle Bug'.

For reasons we did not know at the time, large numbers of soldiers began moving into the surrounding areas between Ashford and Canterbury. Nissen huts, the half round corrugated tin huts as they were referred to at the time, began to appear in woodland areas or dips in the ground covered by large trees. Those that were in the open were covered with camouflage netting. Many farm buildings were taken over and big camouflaged tents and marquees were erected all appearing to happen within a couple of days. Military vehicles of all descriptions except tanks could be found everywhere, I say found because as a young lad full of curiosity with mates we went looking and were allowed to mix and chat with all the men in khaki who carried rifles and machine guns, some with revolvers and daggers in leather pockets on their belts. At some places we were told to scarp or get lost where soldiers were acting like policemen over a couple of weeks or so - it could have been rather less. We watched various activities going on including fitness training when they went running in groups morning and evening, sometimes in white vests, blue shorts and gym shoes, other times in full dress with packs and pouches all over them and wearing tin helmets. We watched engineers building Bailey Bridges over the River Stour at night under the trees, whilst others built bridges made of hessian sacking suspended on wire out in the open. Metal roads were laid over soft ground. Little did I know at the time within five years or so I would join the Royal Engineers myself.

I guess they had little time for recreation but we did see some guys that we guessed were off duty much to our surprise. They were swimming stark naked in the river, but more to our surprise there were two local girls with them also stark naked. We knew them well, one was about two and a half years older than I and the other about three years older. They were in an area quite open to view some fifty yards from the main A2 Ashford to Canterbury road in front of Thomas a Becket's old house, the one mentioned earlier on the banks of the River Stour next to the church, we were very naive then and unaccustomed to such sights.

Back in the areas where the soldiers were staying, we watched them queue up for meals, they all had their own metal plates and big china mugs with knives, forks and spoons. The meals were served and they sat out in the open where ever there was space to eat keeping their guns with them all the time. I had previously begun to collect army badges and at school we exchanged bartered and bought those we didn't have. With this sudden influx of all sorts of army types we managed to scrounge many new badges. The collection is displayed today on a felt covered chipboard within a frame and now has its resting place in the bottom garden shed.

One morning we awoke to find all the troops had left overnight, except the usual Ack Ack units and those who were previously stationed at the Garth at Bilting. A lot of things were left behind Nissen huts with furniture, curtains, dartboards, glasses, empty crates, piles of good timber, dustbins and wooden boxes. We were told these were never collected by the army but eventually dispersed amongst the local people. The Nissen huts, some of which had concrete floors and coke stoves, remained until long after the war and were by then in a battered state.

There was one particular occasion that a lot of people will never forget. One day the sky was alive with our own aeroplanes in large formations one after the other, and the noise of hundreds of engines all propeller aircraft straining under their loads. There was a large number each with a glider in tow, twin engine and I'm sure there were four engine planes taking part in this great armada obviously laden to the hilt. We had learnt the difference by the tone of the engines of laden and unladen aircraft long since. The great fly past went on for what seemed a very long time, my father remarking that "there is something really big going on and there are a lot of poor buggers up there who won't be coming back." We heard later of the airborne drop at Arnhem which is a story in itself.

We met many enemy prisoners of war, both German and Italian, they were brought out to the local farms in buses every day with their armed British soldier guards during the busy season when extra labour was required. The women's land army had long been established to take the place of the men who had been called up into the army, but even so there were still labour shortages. I remember swapping a football for a commando knife from a German prisoner, my father often wondered how he got it and more importantly how he managed to keep such a weapon. I kept that commando knife for many, many years as a proud possession, having found out it was a 'dinkum' Brit commando knife as issued during the war, not too common as it had a distinctive wooden handle. The POW's that worked on Earl Draxe's farm, the Germans thereafter, played football during the lunch hour and mixed in well with the locals. I do not know what happened to the POW's at the end of the war, whether they had the option to stay in UK or what, except to say that one of the local girls married one and they lived in the district where he worked on the farm. He later died in a tractor accident that rolled over onto him.

After all the British army had left the district, the Americans followed suit. Rationing of food continued, the evacuees returned home or ours had, we continued on with schooling working on the farm as required. Catching rabbits and fishing were still useful hobbies as a source of cheap food. My brother and I did at one stage go around door to door selling our surplus catch to earn a bit of extra pocket money, having by the way used Dad's strawberry net to drive the fish into along the River Stour. At one stage I also, although the memory is a little dim on this score, went deer shooting up in Kings Wood. Venison was a highly prized meat and easily disposed of, the butchering done in the woods and the remains buried. The other lads in question had a three ton truck at their disposal but I only went on the night time venture once.

I continued on with my wartime scrap book. Dad liked to listen to the wireless set every night, including the broadcast of 'Lord Haw Haw' a German propaganda program. TV's as such to our knowledge did not exist. We followed the progress of the allied armies in Europe North Africa and the Far East, Dad emphasising and explaining the why's and wherefores. News of the Russian front, though far away, was all important as was the hatred of the Japanese army. Air activity continued over southern England, as did the thuds of guns and the thumps of larger explosions some said to be from shipping out in the English Channel. As I explained earlier we were some eighteen miles in land.

Eventually the 8th May arrived 1945, VE day (Victory in Europe) and with it I learnt a few lines that have stayed with me ever since.

*World War II started on 3rd September 1939 and finished 8th May 1945,  
duration of which was five years, eight months and five days.*

There were celebrations all round, large in the larger towns and small in the villages and hamlets. All included fireworks and bonfires, drinks and refreshments of all types were shared and consumed. At that stage my friends and I were not old enough to be adults and yet too old to be considered as children, so I guess we did our own things and mucked around generally probably annoying others. I was fifteen and a half years old and my brother almost fourteen and a half years.

VJ Day (Victory in Japan) was not so very long afterwards, soon after the very first atom bombs were dropped on Japan, the first time that they had been used in warfare and then similar celebrations took place to that of VE Day.

## CHAPTER 3

### Post War Years To Age 20

Although many of my childhood friends at some stage or other worked on the farms, most went their separate ways to other occupations on leaving school. My brother Sidney (thirteen months younger than I) both left together. We were cherry picking at the time earning good money. Dad always said "all money was good, the main thing was to make sure you earned enough of it." Our parents intention was for us both to remain at school until the age of sixteen. Generally most left at fourteen to contribute towards a living, however the above activity of cherry picking was during the school holidays. Dad had not enjoyed good health for many years and it was at this time that he had a long illness spell. He had been off work for many weeks so my brother and I decided that we should not return to school work which was very much against Mothers wishes but I do not recall my father's concern. We lived a very simple life and there were always comments of not being able to afford this and that and, on that basis, I think Mum lost the argument.

I was fifteen and a half then and one of the first things I did was to go out and buy myself a brand new Raleigh trigger operated four speed bike. It was said to be a racer but was far too heavy by today's standard. It was modern in all aspects and cost fifteen pounds, which at that time was three months wages for a young bloke leaving school and getting the average job.

As said previously, I was well beyond the school leaving age and about average amongst school mates in my age group at work. Sid, on the other hand being that much younger, would most certainly have benefited from further study. The decision was made and we both carried on until the end of the fruit picking season. Pay was on a piece work basis, so much per container, so the greater the effort the more pay earned. To this day I still believe that some sort of incentive should apply in ones working life.

Sid went to work in a butchers shop in Chilham and I for a short while went to work at a fencing factory making chestnut pile fencing. Pay was again on a piecework basis- eight pence a roll of twenty five yards, or it could have been thirty yards. (Note: eight pence then was about seven cents). I did not stay there too long as pay did not match the effort involved and the hours put in and was a big reduction on fruit picking.

Around the age of sixteen I started work in a bakery, Alfred Joint Stock at North Street, Ashford in Kent. The original intention was to learn the art of production so night shift was my starting point working forty four hours per week for twenty five shillings (approximately two dollars fifty Australian). My transport to work was by push bike travelling five miles each way which was sixteen kilometres a day in all weathers. I had various jobs including the dough/bread bench, pie making on a machine, sponge making, cake making and the everlasting cleaning up. The inevitable accident happened when retrieving large trays of jam tarts from the oven. The idea was to insert a long-handled wooden spade like thing under each tray (I'd done it before) and with a quick backward motion the tray would slide up the handle into the operators gloved hands. Yes, I missed, the whites we had to wear gave some protection but the hot jam nevertheless did slither down my chest. First aid was immediately on hand, the place was a buzz with people and I got off lightly it could have been worse.

As I had for some time been a member of the Sea Cadets and had been very interested in its training, I had since my new occupation been unable to attend the training evenings. I therefore asked that I be transferred to the day staff delivery side of the business which was approved by the general foreman who was a strict no nonsense man. On the delivery side there were four electric vans that ran on batteries and needed a minimum of eight hours charging each night, these were used for the local town deliveries, as were the two horse and cart/vans still used for door to door. There were five motorised vans for the surrounding countryside deliveries and two other trucks that had their various uses. Deliveries were made every second day either on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, or Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, hence each vehicle had two rounds to attend to. At that time the standard loaf of bread, of which there was half a dozen variations, cost four and a half pence in the shops and four and three quarter pence delivered. There was so much to learn and remember with all the varieties of breads, cakes, buns, sponges, meat and fruit pies and who has what and when on which days and where to leave it if they were out. Bread at that time was stale after one day and became very firm, each van had its allocation of stale bread to clear that had been left over from the previous day. Some customers actually asked for it, bread and butter puddings being one reason, but we actually had to fob some off to unsuspecting customers.

I had a go at the horse and cart vans, these animals worked like a dream, pulling their carts up the centre of the road working on voice command only, the driver and mate running backwards and forwards to the rear of the cart. Whilst riding between streets and areas seated behind the horse and a little above, it was a daily occurrence to watch for any tail movement as this indicated that great big puffs of flatulence would be released, which on some occasions were big dollops of good rhubarb growing material. I often wondered if it ever flavoured the van contents, it was certainly something to put up with and embarrassing in the early stages for any one starting the job.

Once I was working with a chap recently demobbed from the RAF who had an entirely different attitude to work and life in general. Always pleasant and cheerful he had a smile for everybody and a laugh for most. He is etched in my memory for a reported comment he made to a customer, for which he was severely reprimanded by our no nonsense man. An old white-haired lady called out across the street, "baker have you got a small brown one" his reply was instant, almost automatic being very quick to catch on, "yes madam — have you." I guess our laughing intensified what happened to be an offensive remark to her. but that's life. Funny how certain things stick in one's mind. I had my turn on the electric vans and the country motorised ones.

Baker's assistants, as we were called, did not appear to stay long in the employment. I eventually stayed with one driver who had two long country runs for my remaining time with the firm.

Whilst on one of the country rounds I came across a customer with the name of Hobden, my mother's maiden name. He was a farm worker with four or five children. I think, there could have been more. They lived in a small village or hamlet, well there were a few houses around about, rather an unkempt property which somehow to me spelt dirt, grime and laziness. The children were hardly clothed, scraggy and dirty as they always will be if left to their own desires. The lady was a little on the plumpish side and rough and ready in appearance. I had never seen the man before or thought I hadn't, relating the story to mother. She said it was a pity that I had to find out that way but it was in fact my Uncle Albert's family, her brother. She was ashamed of him and his wife; the poor kiddies knew no better as she put it. They didn't have to live that way, you can be poor but you can still be clean, water cost nothing and there were plenty of agencies catering for the poor regarding clothing, giving it away if the need was there.

As the baker boy I never let on as to who I was, just rather observant as I delivered the bread and my driver did not even know. I saw my Uncle Albert when he came to visit Grandma who lived with us in her final days, his mother of course, but he was Uncle in name only saying hello and cheerio on his visits. Mum said he only came because Grandma gave him five shillings each time. Brother and sister obviously did not get on and it was much the same with my Uncle Norman, mother's eldest brother. Neither of my Uncles would have their mother to stay with them to give my mum a break, so I was told, mum happened to be the little sister of the family.

My cousins of course would all be much younger than myself and I did not see or hear of any older ones. They faded out of my life almost the same way as they had faded in. Uncle Norman never had children, marrying late in life to a woman he had been courting for very many years. She whilst single, at one stage lived with us as a member of the family at Bilting and was known to Sid and I as Auntie Vie, the only Auntie real or otherwise who bought us Christmas or birthday presents. She had a baby to a soldier during the war who was unknown to us, probably her as well thinking back about it. The little boy was adopted out and not heard of again.

Many years later, forty nine years in fact, I played host to a young couple who spent part of their honeymoon here in Western Australia. The groom was the son of a friend of ours, Jean and her husband Ken Town, who had been out here to stay with us herself. Andrew the groom, and his wife Carol, were a pleasant young couple and during my time with them it transpired that they knew a cousin of mine who lived in the same village as Carol. He was an ex-coalminer by the name of Hobden who knew about myself and my brother and where his Auntie May, our mother, lived in Folkstone.

I wonder?

Having been with the firm for twelve months I had anticipated a pay rise. Pay rises in most places came with one's birthday in the teenage years or with the length of employment at the place of work. After some disappointment, but a courage backed up with some of the driver's insistence, I asked the foreman for a rise. He took me into his office and, with me standing in front of him, seated at his desk with a stem look, frowning. I felt



guilty - what had I done wrong? After some talking about my progress, ability and attitude there were a few pats on the back and then the vital question, "what did I think I was worth?." Having previously been told what to say by these insisters I blurted out, "at least five shillings extra a week" Mr whatever his name was (it has eluded me since). There was some comment about he would see what he could do as I was told to report back to my waiting driver. Five shillings of course would have been a twenty per cent pay rise but it means little on little amounts. I had been, by the way, paying my mother twenty shillings a week for board and keep, as did my brother. I don't think we were paying tax at that time although there were some small deductions on the wage packet. However the following week, full of expectations on payday, I received an extra three shillings and sixpence. I am not sure how or why but I gave notice and just over a week later I was out of work.

It was mid-winter the fields and hedgerows were snow covered and the dykes and ponds were frozen over. I had some savings, mother had seen to that, but they would not last long. Whilst looking for another job I spent many days rabbiting - catching rabbits to sell to my brother's boss the Chilham butcher. Rabbits, as those brought up in the country will know, feed early mornings and late evenings and spend the daylight hours in between snoozing in their "seats" often located in tall tufts of grass or like growth. Their tracks in pastures/grass fields are easily detected by those taught to look for same, and with snow on the ground the task is so much easier, being able to tell the difference between fresh, recent, this morning's, last night's, and yesterday's tracks. All that was needed was a sturdy stick, a stealthy approach and a quick hit. The winter had been particularly bad and the rabbits were on the lean side to say the least. The butcher reckoned in some cases they had given themselves up and accordingly would only pay me one shilling and sixpence each and only one shilling and three pence for some instead of the usual one shilling and nine pence to two shillings each. Even so for the short period of two or three weeks that I spent out of work I earned more than I did as a baker's assistant.

Entertainment and pastimes around that time consisted of the sea cadets which had been taking up two evenings a week. During my time with the cadets I took up boxing having been introduced to the sport at school. Towards the end of my time with them I was representing the unit in my age/weight group but I more than met my match against an RAF cadet who gave me a hiding as the saying goes. My father said I was fortunate as very few get anywhere and it's a mugs game anyway. Mother was pleased after that fight that I had decided to give it away. With injured pride I consoled myself that I had learnt a noble art of self-defence as our instructor had put it. I thought I had put on boxing gloves for the last time but alas it was not to be.

There were two picture houses in Ashford, the Odeon and Cinema, I did not attend on a regular basis as the seats were around four or sixpence. Several of us young 'uns from the local area also went roller skating at a venue known as the Com Exchange and I became quite confident and would attempt and could do most things that all tried to do. About once a week I played football for the local team at Wye, mainly in the second team.

My first sighting of the photo when sent to me in 1999 (a late inclusion in the story).

A remark in the accompanying letter states that with the exception of Don Newman and Tony Austin, the remainder are now deceased - a jolting reminder of passing time!



**Wye Football Team**

Dennis White, Alfie ?, Jim Andrews. Tony Austin. Don Jordon ? Hughes, Mark Bodiam. Don Newman. Ted Barnes. Bill Allard

Matches were at weekends either on Saturday or Sunday. We travelled to away matches on the back of a three ton truck supplied by Denne the Millars. We had to pay a few pence per match to cover expenses and on Saturday evenings there was the local dance in the village hall which was always a well-attended affair. Soft drinks, tea, coffee and homemade cakes were available at the bar. Local public houses were not far away and many of the young men pumped themselves up with 'Dutch courage' prior to entry at the dance. Dances started at seven thirty and there was a break at nine thirty to nine forty five when there was a rush to the local for a quick fortification before they closed. Official closing time for all pubs was ten p.m. (unless you were resident of course). Many a white lie was given in the cause of a late drink, anyhow the dances always finished at midnight as entertainment was not allowed to intrude into Sundays, the day of rest or holy day. Six days shalt thou labour and on the seventh do all your odd jobs. I think that applied to most and still does to this day except that they only work four and a half days or maybe five.

There was always something for the youth of the day to do which altered little depending on the season of the year. Cricket went with swimming and fishing, football went with snow sports and Christmas festivities, pictures, dances, roller skating. Rabbiting with ferrets or shooting were all year round for poachers although shooting did have an in season for the gentry for whom we often went beating, that is driving the birds, pheasants and partridges, small game mainly hares, towards their positioned hideaways behind which were the gentlemen farmers with their guns and retriever dogs. Deer shooting was sometimes organised in the woods.

In season there were mushrooms to gather, or large wild strawberries to pick on the railway embankments, watercress in the dykes, or hazelnuts and chestnuts from the woodlands, and for those who knew where to find them, sloes, damsons, crab apples, and odd plum trees growing wild. Mistletoe and holly were also in demand at Christmas times and there was plenty when you knew where to look for it. Having been born, bred, schooled and grown up in the area I guess I had a very good knowledge of all around and about.

Having passed seventeen years of age, my next job was back to the rural scene, well as good as, I applied for and had been accepted as an assistant Pigman at the Pig Husbandry Research Station for the Department of Agriculture at Wye College in Kent. This was about five miles away from home and still my only means of travel was bicycle. Work at that establishment was comparatively hard compared to my previous occupation and as one would expect 'smelly' to say the least. I was working with animals on various research projects (experiments) and this created some interest not only for ourselves, ourselves being the foreman a Mr. Glen Stevens, his wife who did a little of the lighter duties part time, a young research manager Mr. Dunkin who worked under the direction of a professor Cooper from New Zealand, and the many visitors that we had including students at the college who came at regular intervals to receive on site talks/lectures and practical demonstrations on the handling of animals and progress of the many research projects some of which started before my time there and went on after I'd left. I was there for three and a half years.

As stated the work was laborious and involved attendance for seven days a week. Officially I was working every second weekend. Work at that time was still five and a half days a week and the forty hour week as such had not been introduced, not around the local area at any rate. My hours were, start at seven thirty a.m. with a fifteen minute tea break and thirty minutes lunch break. There was also a fifteen minute afternoon tea break finishing work at five p.m., which was an eight and a half hour day Monday to Friday and then four and a half hours on a Saturday. I know the working week was forty eight hours at an early stage and it gradually reduced to forty four hours over a period of time. We were covered by some regulation or other but it meant little to us as overtime was always required to feed the animals at weekends.

Prior to starting this employment I had become involved with the local football club at Wye, whilst still employed at the bakery job. Luckily I had an arrangement with the foreman Glen Stevens (I got on extremely well with him) and I was able to continue with my games with the second eleven, he being a firm believer in the saying "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." I had previously played for the school eleven and was thought to be a useful halfback, not too bad I guess considering there were close on three hundred boys at the Ashford North Central School. Our coach come referee/organiser and sometimes driver for away matches was a Mr. Alf Richardson who put in a lot of effort for the local lads, and was an unpaid local volunteer but his interest was in the game one hundred per cent and I'm pretty sure his hobby.

I was surprised to find out how intelligent pigs really are, or perhaps it would be more true to say how well they react to training especially when food was the incentive. In one experiment for example we had twenty

baconers, as we referred to them, young pigs three to six months old they were all the same age but fed until six months on special diets. They were housed in a large yard with individual feeding pens at one end, each pen was marked one to twenty as were the animals on their backs. After some two weeks hectic training it was the normal procedure to place each animal's food in its pen trough then move into the yard and raise the trap door to number one pen and number one pig would enter, number two trap door and number two pig would enter and so on right up to number twenty. It was done quite quickly as anyone who has had dealings with pigs would know they are more than anxious at meal times. Up to two weeks it was a two-man task twice a day thereafter one of us could manage, although in the third week there was the occasional mad individual rush that had to be blocked. Each animal was weighed weekly and recordings made. As the weighing pens were similar to the feeding pens little encouragement was needed, thus a suitable diet was found:

- a) to prevent scouring
- b) put on the best weight maintaining health
- c) without affecting the flavour of the product

Since the latter it was found, that if an animal was fed on say, too much fishmeal for example, the flesh had a fishy taste. There were many arguments for and against the various feeding products; weight gain, costs, storage, preparation, availability, plus all sorts of housekeeping remarks. Many would argue that pigs have been kept for hundreds of years so what's new but there must have been a reason for the project as there was in having the research station.

The average number of pigs kept was two hundred. Those kept in open field pens would answer their names by coming forward when called and most had respect for the human form and kept their distance, particularly youngsters. Some sows were very protective of their litters as were boars of their lady folk. Help was given in all stages of the breeding process but not always. I must admit to being somewhat embarrassed whilst assisting a mating process early in my time there in front of a mixed group of students. Mating pens were constructed with a sort of foot rest on either side about two feet high and one large pigs width wide, the reason being to take the weight of the male (boar) as he is a very much larger and heavier animal and also to prevent the male from clawing cutting the back and sides of the female. Pigs like many animals come into season twice a year for specific breeding purposes the females are brought to the mating pen and the door closed behind them, then the boar is brought out and either led or sho'ood along until he catches the scent. The door is opened and he enters and mounts straight away most times. This is where the assistance is required to prevent excessive wastage of the sperm. The sheath is grasped to direct the animal and this has to be done as quickly as possible, hence the embarrassment of a young lad in front of young girls who were maybe a little older than himself. Other demonstrations concerned numbering consisted of cutting 'V' clips from the ears, a system to identify individual animals, and the castration of very young male piglets, quite a simple procedure that they recovered from very quickly.

When farrowing, the name given to the birth of young piglets, the normal pens had to be adapted by the addition of farrowing rails which were stout wooden timbers four by two inches or greater and were placed about twelve inches out from one end and one side of the sleeping area and about nine inches off the ground. Their purpose was to allow the young piglets an escape haven when the sow, their mother, flopped down as is their nature. The rails would prevent them crushing their young. Human assistance is desirable at the production end to ensure a better survival rate when the sow is giving birth. An average of ten piglets can be expected in ideal conditions some may produce twelve or eight. Factors controlling numbers maybe age, health, and feeding and contentment of both parent animals and births are not confined to daylight hours. Signs are normally sighted some hours prior to farrowing and this will then involve attendance by an experienced hand with lanterns, rags, sacking and patience. As with humans in the same predicament the animals appear to require reassurance and can be settled with words and contact i.e. patting etc. and often seem to answer with contented grunts. Gilts, young female pigs at their first farrowing, may become frightened/startled and actually attack and eat their product. This has to be prevented. As the young piglets make their way into the world they are picked up and the membrane wiped from around their face with a rag to ensure that they can breathe easily then placed on to a teat. They are produced one by one sometimes only seconds apart. It's possible a breach may occur which then requires ones arm to be inserted, usually to just beyond the elbow, to free the obstruction and allow the births to continue. It is ascertained prior to the event as to how many piglets the mother can look after and the number of teats can vary but more importantly the number of active teats are counted as many females have blind teats. This is usually done when selecting breeding stock before mating but changes can occur after

selection, so if more are born than there are teats available they may have to be adopted and there is a method to that too. A squealer is the name given to a young pig that has not got a teat since that is what it does, squeal, and it is not wise to keep such a piglet. A little more human intervention is required and done at a very early age to keep the family healthy and happy i.e. the side teeth (tusks) very sharp and spiky are clipped, since as they grow which they do very fast, they pummel the teats with an up and down motion of the head and would damage other piglets, as they do in play.

Feeding times were always a noisy affair and the general smell of the station quite offensive to visitors but like many things in life one adapts and gets used to the situation. Our stock, all large whites, numbered as I said two hundred. Baconners were sent off to the market every six months or so, having selected breeding or experimental stock. I found the work interesting and although hard, quite enjoyable.

Although the hours worked were rather long I still found time for a private social life with football (soccer) I've mentioned, the movies, fish and chips were a treat at nine pence wrapped in newspaper, on one or maybe two evenings a week roller skating continued, dancing Saturday evenings at Wye community hall became more regular, swimming in the River Stour in the long warm summer evenings as well as attending to all the domestic chores expected of us back in the family home. Many hours were spent out in the moonlight sawing logs for the fire or chopping mornings wood or even digging the garden or maybe to catch a couple of rabbits for dinner so darkness never really bothered us. I rarely read books although my father was an avid reader, mother rarely rested she always had something to occupy her time. There was no TV but we did have one of those wind-up gramophones that came out very rarely. The wireless programs were selected by mum or dad so generally it was a quiet household with never enough time to do what ought to be done, even in those days you couldn't get 'round to its' so we would have led an active life, what might be described at the time of writing as a tough upbringing.

Dad remained the decision maker and ruled the roost as the saying went and to defy was asking for trouble. At one stage I recall having been given a punch ball since I had been interested in boxing, I installed the apparatus with one end to the branch of an apple tree and the other end to an anchorage in the ground. What I forgot to consider was that it was blossom time and my father 'did his nut' when he saw me giving that ball 'wwompo' with pink petals floating down around me, he said "he'd use me as a punch bag if didn't get it down straight away." Dad wasn't one to argue with even though I must have been around eighteen at the time. I never remember challenging my father as earlier cheek had resulted in a clip around the ear and sheer defiance had resulted in a few strokes of a leather belt in my later school days. Physical violence as such within the family was very rare and never ever against mum.

About a year after starting at the Pig Husbandry Research Station I bought my first motor bike for ten pounds which was a 1929 Matchless (as old as I was) in good running order, although the exhaust pipe was sadly lacking giving the appearance of having been rat eaten. It had the hand operated gear change on the side of the tank, a useable saddle and pillion seat, quite good tyres on rusty wheels, a rickety old kick start which did the job and the brakes and clutch worked OK. Dad was a very keen motor cyclist entering in many trial riding events, he was also a keen spectator at grass track meetings, many of which I went to from quite an early age, being strapped to my father whilst well wrapped up. Crash helmets were optional depending as to whether one could afford one, the old 'cheese cutter' was more the fashion then except they had the snap fastener undone when riding. I still have photos of dad wearing his cap sitting on bikes.

The very fact that I bought the bike without his approval resulted in him not wanting anything to do with it. I did not register it with the authorities and certainly did not have a licence. I knew nothing about engines except that they run on petrol and had nowhere to keep it except around the back of the house out in the open. Despite all the minuses there was one very good plus, it provided me with a hell of a lot of fun riding down the lanes and cart tracks and in the farmers' fields. I was warned by dad one thing had to be rectified, he reckoned when the engine was running it sounded like a tank and it attracted far too much attention and I would end up being reported, however I got another pipe from the rubbish dump I think and made it fit using dad's tools when he wasn't around and it worked a treat. Then the kick start fell off but a cotter pin rectified that even though the spindle was badly worn. For a very brief spell I actually rode it to work one winter but odd things kept going wrong. I managed to keep it going without advice or help although thinking back about it all, dad must have known I was using his tools. Eventually it was my brother who put paid to it all. We were in the Swingbridge Field down by the river and he wanted a go. maybe I wasn't a very good instructor because he would not, or could

not, change gear and remained in low gear revving the hell out of it. I stopped him and he said it wouldn't go very fast so I explained as best as I knew how but to no avail. His second go and that was it, it stopped and would not start again. We pushed it back home with a bit of a struggle over rough cart tracks but we made it. I had no idea why it would not go but tried my inexperienced best taking bits and pieces off here and there but how to put it all back together was beyond me, so I put all the bits and pieces in a sack where it remained for months. I eventually sold it all for five pounds with the bits in the sack and the remainder being pushed along on two wheels. So my first motorbike ownership came to an abrupt end but I had learned quite a lot. I suppose I had often watched dad working on his motorbikes - he had had two at one stage. Oh, I almost forgot my precious bike was a 350 cc so it had a bit of 'umph.'

Later on I purchased a second hand Norman Auto Cycle, made at the Norman cycle works in Ashford. This was a 98 cc model and I had to have an 'L' plate to ride it. Dad helped with this one and it was registered. I had a licence so all was legal but I felt a bit of a twit on it, especially when mates saw me peddling to assist the engine when going up long hills. I rode it to work for a while but I cannot remember when I stopped, or when I got rid of it, I do know I went back to riding my racing bike to work and was doing so right up until I left the Research Station.

Late in 1948, or it could have been early 1949, my brother Sid was called up for National Service. He joined the Royal Artillery for a period of two years, or was it eighteen months, anyway it was at least eighteen months and he did not take to military life at all, in fact he hated it, telling me one time that he was posted to a battery and put in a dry cell and charged. Apparently he was often on 'jankers' a term that I was completely unfamiliar with at the time. I had been exempt from call up supposedly having a job of national importance. I may have been talked into by my employer at the time but must have been in that category as were coal miners, I must have been of good value to the boss, well he certainly gave me a very good report when I did eventually leave the job.

As a teenager outside  
Ashford Markets



REFERENCE FROM WYE  
COLLEGE



Telephones: WYE 1  
Telegrams:  
COLLEGE WYE

WYE COLLEGE  
(UNIVERSITY OF LONDON)  
NEAR ASHFORD, KENT

Stations: S.R.  
ASHFORD, 3 miles  
WYE, 1 mile

8th February, 1950.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Donald Henry Newman has been employed in the capacity of Assistant Pigman at the College Pig Research Station since 7th March, 1947, where for the past two and a half years he has been under my supervision.

During this time he has proved himself an intelligent and industrious worker who has taken an interest in his duties. Punctual and resourceful, he possesses the necessary qualities which with development will enable him to assume a responsible position demanding initiative and reliability.

*A. G. Lusker*

Pig Research Department.

## CHAPTER 4

### Royal Engineer Training

Unlike many of the senior family members on my mother's side who were all ex-navy types I joined the army, The Royal Engineers, on the 15th February 1950 with my 20th birthday way behind me.

Having passed the medical and the pre-selection test earlier I joined my unit, Number One Training Regiment RE at Malvern in Worcestershire and helped to make up the numbers in 274 Party and half of the unit were ex boy soldiers who initially joined at fifteen years of age. At a guess now there could have been between one hundred and fifty to two hundred in the party.



TROOP PHOTO - NUMBER 274 RECRUIT PARTY AT MALVERN NUMBER 1 TRRE  
MARCH 1950  
(I'm 4<sup>th</sup> from the left/middle row)

The pre-selection test mentioned below covered various simple tasks. Those I remember consisted of assembling the following from bits and pieces laid out on a bench; a bicycle pump, electric light switch, jack plane, bicycle bell and there were others, you either knew how or you didn't. Then we had to name all sorts of tools and their uses from a quarter inch masonry bit to a manual post bole digger, screwdrivers/wood chisels to sledge hammers to miners picks, small spanners, plumbers wrench and wood working vice and some general education written test were also involved. Those not passing had the option of going to units other than engineering units. Over the course of time I found out later that the test varied from one recruiting unit to another, some apparently relying on reports and an individual's background, which I learnt a lot about some nineteen years later on in the service.

As a private soldier we were known as a Sapper, the name originating from a very early period when it described their main basic task as a soldier. The Sapper of my era, and many years before and after, had to be trained as a soldier first with drill on the barracks square (square bashing), the use of all the current small arms, range shooting, cleaning and assembly drills, basic infantry field tactics, fields of fire, use of equipment and clothing how to wear it and clean it, map reading, hygiene, physical fitness, military discipline and teamwork plus a multitude of other small tasks we had a well-known name for.

This was then followed by Sapper training i.e. to be trained as a field engineer grade three. The subjects included

the use and knowledge of the following; knots and lashings, anchorages, pulleys and levers, field defences, mine warfare, demolitions (including the use of explosives), improvised tracks, use of standard tracking material in rolls or panels, roads and airfields construction, water drainage, basic bridging, watermanship and water supply. Each of the above headings were of course a subject within themselves, some of them very involved, but the object of training to a grade three standard was to get the potential Sapper familiar with the subject matter and get to know his role and what was expected of him working under supervision. All the above training was followed by practical tests and verbal questions.

In the unit that I had joined all the above training took place within the first five months of joining up. We were mainly all volunteers, some like myself straight from civilian life, the ex-boys I've mentioned and some ex wartime servicemen re-enlisting. One chap was an ex RAF air gunner and two or three from the Merchant Navy. Wartime enlistments would not have had the peacetime training available to them but were I understand called up or recruited from industry that could be associated with engineering.



Trophy Winners during training

Phee Gordon 2<sup>nd</sup> from left backrow) we served together As QMSI's in 1966

Early army life in a training unit is anything but easy. As an ex cadet, albeit naval, I was part way trained which provided some benefit. Discipline was very strict and we were not allowed out of camp for six weeks, until we knew how to dress and press a uniform and move with a soldierly bearing as a good representative of the unit as we were instructed, and during that time we were occupied from dawn to dusk working to a strict tight timetable. The daily time table would have followed along the lines below.

0600 Reveille - everyone had to be out of bed within minutes. We slept thirty to a long hut and were rudely awakened to clanging galvanised buckets and shouting like "hands off cocks and on with socks" and other vulgarities. So it was grab your towel, washing and shaving gear, toothbrush and over to the ablutions — return and tidy up locker, make up bed folding all blankets/sheets to two feet by fifteen inches and place to form a box at the head of the bed, lay out certain items as per orders on the bed dress for breakfast.

0640 Parade for breakfast and march to the cookhouse, all plates, mugs, hands and eating irons inspected for cleanliness by NCO's - queue up for service, have breakfast, wash your own plates, mug KFS return to accommodation, sweep up and remove all refuse, last polish to the floor, dress for barrack room inspection.

0720 Stand by beds for the daily inspection.

0740 Draw rifles from the armoury and clean.

0800 First parade on the barrack square for inspection by troop NCO's followed by foot and rifle drill or Physical Training.

0900 Return weapons to armoury and change to work dress (denims).



0915 Parade for further training.

1000 NAFFI break, tea, buns - buy yourself

1030 Return to training area - first few weeks marching

1230 Lunch break - march to lunch, usual inspection and wash up after.

1330 Parade for training.

1630-1700 Cease works/training - march to tea first few weeks.

1800 Stand by beds - compulsory kit cleaning, uniform pressing, boot polishing, barrack cleaning (windows, floors etc.) haircuts. If very cold fires could be lit - coke fires two per barrack room.

1830 Camp guards and fire picquets parade for inspection outside the unit guardroom by the Orderly Officer - the highest standards expected. Everyone took their turns at these duties about one in every nine days.

Guards patrolled all unit areas throughout the night, two hours on and four hours off. Fire picquets had thirty minutes or so instruction followed by three or four hours work in the cookhouse peeling spuds or whatever else was required then slept near the guardroom.

2030 Stand down in barrack rooms unless otherwise ordered.  
Supper is available in the cookhouse - usually leftovers.

2230 Lights out - coke fires not to be stoked, no smoking, no noise.

0600 Guards and picquets dismount and prepare for normal days training.

After six weeks training spot inspections were made at the cookhouse on hands and eating utensils, meal cards were issued, barrack room inspections were every second day, and thirty six hour passes were allowed at weekends with the exception being working weekends. Saturday mornings involved full kit inspections squadron and regimental parades with drill and maybe lectures by the medical officer or padres hour. Some church parades were held on Sundays

As a contrast to the type of timetable I had to follow I thought it may be of interest to insert the writings found in my mother's belongings of life, perhaps as it used to be.

### The Soldiers Life

5 a.m. Reveille — Christians awake

5.45. Roll call - art thou weary

6.00 Morning dip - shall we gather at the rivers

6.50. Breakfast - meekly wait and murmur not

7.00 Canteen opens — yield not to temptation

8.15 Manoeuvres — fight the good fight.

8.45. C.O. Parade — when he cometh, people come

p.m. Dinner — come ye thankful

2.15. Rifle drill — onward Christian soldiers.

3.15. Lecture by Officers — tell me the old, old story

4.30. Dismiss — oh love that will not let me go

5.00 Tea - what means this eager happy throng

6.00 Free for night - oh Lord how happy we shall be

9.00 Last Post — all is safely gathered in.

9.50 Canteen closes — courage brothers do not  
stumble.

10.15 Lights out — rest of the weary.



Walking out dress possibly  
Pre-World War 1

At all times there were Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO's), L/Cpls (Lance Corporals) mainly and some Corporals, all junior instructors, everywhere to chase us all along. There were Regimental Policemen to control behaviour in the units dining halls and canteens, look after offenders/defaulters, man the guardroom and provide escorts as required.

Cpl instructors were mainly in charge of the field engineering subjects, with the sergeants apparently organising and supervising all aspects of the training, they were often on site in attendance.

I guess the officers must have been occupied otherwise as we saw little of them during training, maybe appearing a couple of times on morning first parade to inspect us and the all-important duty of pay day to pay each man individually in order that we may salute for our pay.

Extra duties or work were freely given by the junior instructors if standards were not met and what really 'irked' the likes of myself was the fact that they would pick you up on parade for not pressing your uniform or greatcoat correctly, and then charge one half a crown (two shillings and sixpence) to show you how to do it on the compulsory evening parades and it wasn't wise to complain.

Pay on joining up was one pound eight shillings, or about three dollars a week, and from that a deduction was taken for barrack damages. We also had to provide our own toothpaste, soap, boot polish, 'Blanco' and 'Brasso,' so we may have been left with perhaps one pound four shillings. All uniforms, clothing, boots, gym shoes, webbing equipment etc. were on free issue — up to a point i.e. subject to fair wear and tear, so replacements had to be justified. Wilful damage and loss were questioned and iron bums on uniforms were a sore point.

Unlike many of my new friends in khaki I had been brought up somewhat thrifty and taught the value of saving. I allocated ten shillings a week payable to my mother which remained so for about ten years.

Certain items on issue require an explanation for the uninitiated. All soldiers were issued with a 'housewife,' no

we were not that lucky, in this case it was the name given to a small cotton container that held sewing and darning requisites and was used in training for our make do and mend classes. Its main purpose of course was to keep one's clothing in good order by darning socks, repairing tears and sewing on buttons etc. The army wasn't in the throw away era at that time. Some of the efforts at darning socks were quite pathetic and for those that never mastered the domestic art quite painful when carrying out route marches on their handy work. I still have in my possession to this day, now forty five years later, the housewife that I was issued with and it is still in use. The button stick, which has long since been an issue item and now a collector's item, was certainly useful for all the 'Bull' required at the time - the Holdall to carry all ones toiletries KFS (knife, fork ,spoon) spare laces etc.

There was a place for everything and everything had to be in its place and there was a use for everything and everything has its uses. Some of it was outdated even in our time; the stainless steel shaving mirror for example could be used for signalling which had a sighter hole in the centre of it known by some perhaps as a heliograph. Unfortunately most things were mass produced for the army and we soldiered on to use them up long after their so called use by date which was all in the interest of economy of course. Brass buttons, badges and insignia, buckles, slides, strap ends and grips all had to be highly polished and buffed at all times during training and many years after, all part of a soldiers lot until such time as they were replaced with a non-polishing, non-reflective metal material. I think it was referred to as gun metal. Everyone knew the practice of brass polishing to be a time wasting practice and the cause of much unnecessary ill feeling and conflict as it was contrary to orders on active service since one was trained to see and not be seen. All underwear and towels at the time were white, and with aerial surveillance as it was then men on exercises, in harbour areas etc. were so easily picked out. But who initially ordered what, not the Red Coats surely? For ceremonial use buttons and badges eventually became a stay bright material and which were used on dress uniforms and the like. Our webbing equipment was referred to as the 37 pattern equipment, that which still required 'Blanco'. 'Blanco' was really a colouring agent that powdered and fell off with use and therefore its continued use was required to keep it clean and presentable.

My first five months in the army was a time full of surprises, a new life full of new things, of new and different people, another way to live, learn, work and act, to get on with others, receive and carry out orders without question. But it did not stop me and others like me from thinking. I came to realise that my family upbringing had been very thorough. I was way ahead of most new intakes regarding basic skills, sporting abilities and social graces for the want of another heading. Some of the guys from the bigger cities had never used a shovel, pick or gun, let alone an axe, ordinary handsaw or brush hook, never rowed a boat, couldn't swim, never played football rugby or cricket, or cooked a meal, darned socks or sewed on buttons. I often wondered about their early life and it gave me an understanding as to why some of our training was structured the way it was and simplified. So much for all the selection procedures that we went through.

During the learning/training periods we were broken down into groups according to our assessed ability and even extra training sessions were arranged for those lacking in the very basics in efforts to get us all on the same level. Even the use of basic tools was broken down into numbers for some who had no idea how to hold a shovel, pick or axe rhymes were used to help them remember i.e. when using a shovel, they had to repeat, "swing to fill, handle low, swing and throw" and for a pick it was "raise to strike, strike, break and rake" and so it went on in parrot fashion learning in some stages.

Many engineering tasks involved teamwork, as did infantry work of course, but for the Field Engineer construction tasks in equipment bridging for example, was somewhat more precise requiring skills, strength and understanding with the ability to know and carry out any given task. Initially all were trained to reach a grade three standard, which was a good basic knowledge of the subjects previously mentioned. We were also taught how to erect Nissen huts - the type of hut used for accommodation in World War I - many of which saw service during World War II. The construction details I still remember. All were tested on completion of training and I guess the results recorded on our individual documents prior to the next step in the training of a Sapper.

Having gone through the process of the Training Regiment of the Royal Engineers (I believe there were three such Regiments in operation in the early fifties spread far and wide in the United Kingdom - Malvern, Elgin and Aldershot?) we were then sent for further trades training. Each man, in addition to having been trained as a soldier and then as a Sapper i.e. a field engineer (later known as a combat engineer) is then required to have a further trade or skill as chosen or in some cases directed. My chosen trade was to be a carpenter and joiner and accordingly I was posted to No. 10 Trades Training Regiment RE based at Chatham in Kent. Other trades taught

at this unit included bricklaying, plumber and pipe fitter, painter and decorator, electrician and some metal workers.

Other units and regiments existed to train Sappers in just about everything or anything else, from clerical to plant training, mechanical engineering to railway squadrons, inland water transport to ports and docks, postal service and survey units.

During my twenty two years' service 1950-1972 I had service with, served alongside or knew of: assault engineer units who drove tanks, mobile bridging units, track laying vehicles and mine clearing tanks, commando engineers, parachuting engineers, railway squadrons, bomb disposal squadrons, survey regiment, postal units as well as all the combat engineer regiments. There was other engineer units of course, some of which I've mentioned previously, but in all it totalled some 72,000 men, which is a figure I have in my mind which I must have got from somewhere.

The Royal Engineers had a very wide range of tasks, far greater than any other corps or arm of the military services. This increased with time as modernisation procedures came into play and yet decreased as demand for support became too great. The engineers, although trained to fight as infantry, were always a supporting arm and a means towards an end i.e. to assist the way forward, delay the advancing enemy, provide cover be it defences or housing, provide water and/or fuel storage, build or destroy anything anywhere at any time often said to be first in and last out concerning attacks and defensive actions.

The following were originally RE responsibilities:

The Army Service Corp (RASC) now the ROYAL Corp of Transport was formed and took over transportation.

The Royal Signals was formed to take over the vital role of communications.

The Engineers were the first aviators forming the first flying unit, The Royal Flying Corps which was the forerunner of today's Royal Air Force.

The Royal Armoured Regiments were formed after the Engineers had experimented with tracked armoured vehicles and got the show up and running with the predecessors of the modern tank "they will never replace the horse" said the generals of the day.

Maintenance and repair of the army's vehicles became a mammoth task and so the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers were born of the RE. Even searchlights were introduced and then transferred to the Royal Artillery.

The Royal Engineers were initially asked to help in the given task of getting parachute training organised up and running on the orders of Winston Churchill during the early part of World War II.

One of the latest changes in the early nineties was the transfer of the Postal Services to the newly formed Logistics Regiment

Having given a brief rundown of the Royal Engineers, whose history goes back to the mid 17th Century by the way, I'll continue on with my own story.

The posting to Chatham was another step for all who arrived there for trades training in the upgrading to Sapper and of course the overall eventual efficiency of the Corps in total. There were three engineer regiments in the area, the other two being No. 11 RSME regiment RE and 12 RSME Regiment RE (RSME = Royal School of Military Engineering) and each had its special functions. There was also a depot for the Royal Marines nearby as was the Royal Navy Dockyards so it was very much a military area.

Discipline once again was found to be very strict, with hygiene and cleanliness said to be the reason. Anyone serving in the army anywhere at that time would know, and from my knowledge things were completely overboard on that excuse, I mean what the heck did 'Blanco' (a very messy process to get all the webbing equipment looking alike) 'Brasso,' boot polish, 'Silvo,' floor polish, excessive buffing of equipment and footwear,

buttons and brasses have to do with hygiene. Anyway they were the orders and we had to conform.

Here we were living under two routines, the first concerning administration, housing, feeding, parades, guards and duties, and the second concerning our trades training, the actual working hours, which were two completely different worlds. The instructors in the trades workshops, ranked from Staff Sergeant downwards, all were patient, cheerful and helpful in guiding us, teaching the skills and putting over the information required.

Living in the barrack rooms was much like the training regiments most of us had just left. Everything had to be highly polished including the floors and windows, beds were stripped down every day and boxed as previously described, webbing equipment or other issue items were laid out on the beds daily as ordered, best boots highly polished under the bed end and a clean towel hung on the bed rail. Each man also had barrack room or other duties to attend to, as listed and posted on the room notice board, maybe toilets and urinals ablutions, wash basins and mirrors, showers, all light shades and general dusting, window cleaning, centre floor area, rubbish inside and out, fire points, corridors, stairways, cleaning squadron offices, garden areas. This was all in the daily routine and subject to inspections and in addition guards and other duties had to be carried out, each sub unit taking their turns to provide.

As you can imagine much of our otherwise spare time was taken up in order to comply with the orders given and there were still evening compulsory parades to work on uniforms and items of issued kit in efforts to please the almighty ones, there was also written work to do or catch up on concerning our trades training (the very reason we were there). Many men, and I was among them, were punished by way of extra guard duties or parades for not meeting required standards, some were even charged for ridiculous reasons under section 40 of the Army Act, that is to say, "conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline in that he at on (date) did or did not do whatever he was supposed to have done, for example". The many military offences mentioned previously, another prime example was answering back, and if you did not say anything one was charged with dumb insolence, so you couldn't win and it was very rare for a charge to be dismissed. Such silly misdemeanours, although we did not know it at the time, had a consequence in later service as many older soldiers found out. All formal disciplinary matters are recorded on ones conduct sheet!

Hence an old saying : Naughty, Naughty Section Forty.

The officer commanding, usually a Major dealt with disciplinary matters on a formal basis, in other words those that were actually charged for a said offence. He would hear the charge and then ask the defendant if he had anything to say before giving his findings on the matter. Men were often confined to barracks (given CB) or they may be fined so many days' pay or the matter could be referred to higher authority depending on the severity of the offence. Confined to barracks meant rather more than just that. Seven days CB, for example, meant that one had to carry out a certain routine for seven days reporting daily at the unit guard room for inspection by the Orderly Officer in FSMO (Full Service Marching Order) dressed in ones best uniform neatly pressed, best boots highly polished, all webbing equipment freshly blanched clean with all buckles end straps and fasteners highly polished at 6 a.m. and again at 6 p.m. which were the times when the guards dismount and mount. After the evening attendance and inspection defaulters were given around three hours work by the Orderly Sergeant and in addition carried out their normal training during the day. Any man who was awarded CB usually had the assistance of roommates, as it was almost impossible to maintain the standard and do what was required to pass the a.m. and p.m. inspections. It often occurred where men were charged whilst on CB and had the sentence extended even with the assistance of mates. Certain officers and SNCO's were known for their sadistic type of authority and appeared to get their kicks that way. One just could not argue against authority and so had to endeavour to keep out of trouble as far as one was able, accept the extra duties freely thrown around. We all knew it to be irregular to say the least, but it seemed to be the wiser way in such an unfair system.

I was at the trades training unit during the late summer/autumn and early winter of 1950, getting on for five months I guess, and during that time the Squadron I was in received quite a lot of adverse publicity via the "Daily Mirror" I think it was and there was mention in some weekend papers. We were going through a rough time with the Officer Commanding for that period, a very 'hardy' type, a strict disciplinarian to the point of ridicule who took it out on the whole Squadron for the failings of a few. The Hammer and Sickle, the Russian communist symbol, appeared on otherwise clean barrack room walls in several places in green 'blanco' following a solid week of three hour evenings, scrubbing, 'blanchoing,' cleaning brasses of all webbing equipment, and then doing it again and again plus all the other barrack room bullshit. All the married permanent staff, sergeants and NCO's

were in supervising and it obviously did not go down well with them either. Who sought the publicity was never known by the likes of myself.

First promotion to  
Lance Corporal  
Chatham 10 TTRRE  
(approximately July 1950)



Just prior to this time I had been promoted to A/U/P/L/Cpl (an acting unpaid lance corporal) but that made no difference as to my living conditions. I had to do exactly what everyone else had to do although I could supervise the extra duties, someone to carry the can as we put it then and also to carry out the duties of the Squadron duty NCO.

This Officer Commanding on one occasion, who was a very fit rugby man incidentally, had the whole squadron parade in battle order, that's dressed in nearly all the webbing issued, over our works dress (known as denims) boots and carrying a rifle and then ran us all around the barrack square, round and round and round. He was running with us as well and continued on until about a quarter had dropped out unable to go on further and then proceeded to belittle us on our fitness.

Saturday mornings were devoted to drill on the square (square bashing) plus room and kit inspections. Anyone said to be idle, dirty, and scruffy or not up to scratch in any way, paraded on the Saturday afternoon for extra instruction.

Part of the duty of Squadron Duty NCO was to inspect Squadron defaulters from parades at 6 p.m. regardless of whatever the men were picked up for they had to pass a complete inspection. I would add that I had received no formal training as to the responsibilities and duties of an NCO except of course that which I had received as a Naval Cadet. However I assume this was the case, due to the fact that we were often accompanied by the Duty Sgt. in our earlier performance of such duties. Having experienced the ordeal so many times whilst on the receiving end I guessed I knew the score quite well so I had to do unto others as I had been done to. It was fair enough if a bloke had an obvious fault it was picked up and if I did not perform properly I was given some extra practice so to speak. Most of the men knew the score and went along with it so having mates from that point of view didn't really help.

I did strongly object to one particular order, as did others, but I don't know what they did about it. All junior NCO's at one stage were ordered to charge three men per day for five days one working week. I had words with the troop Sergeant who said he didn't give the orders, just do it or I'd be on his hit list. I then asked to speak to the Squadron Sergeant Major who wasn't co-operative either but at least he listened and also said he did not give the order but it was quite a simple request really. I said I thought it was unfair and he remarked something about what's fairness got to do with it now fall out and do as you are told. I charged three men that week after having found out how to go about it for really deserving causes and then copped three extra duties myself for not complying!

There were a few men who finished up in detention - close arrest. Those who would not, or could not cope, were moved around the barracks area always in single file, always running everywhere they went under the close supervision of the Regimental Police as they carried out their daily working tasks which were the dirtiest jobs that could be found, their heads were shaved, well almost it was cut very short, their boots had no laces and the working dress appeared very scant.

Wednesday afternoon was a compulsory sports afternoon. Early on I did what most of the blokes did by not volunteering to play anything. Word was out that you did not volunteer for anything, so we all went for a jolly old run as we were told. Sports afternoons were from 1330 hrs. to 1630 hrs. The OC accompanied us on the first two runs and we run out of the barracks and away from them for one and a half hours under supervision and encouragement. Those flagging in the rear being coaxed along if not pushed in some cases, then we were left to our own devices to get back or run back in a group. I, along with quite a few others, kept running my own thoughts were if he the leader can so can I. My father's advice came back to me, given on one of my short home visits after I'd got a stripe on my arm, "never ask anyone to do something that you cannot do yourself." Basically that's OK but of course it has its limitations, especially in the Engineers. Anyway, we who continued running got back to barracks in less time than it had taken us on the outward trip. I found I was rather fitter than most and other people obviously thought the same. On the next recreational afternoon I was ordered to play rugby, I stated that I had never played the game, "you'll learn" was the retort. I was in the front row of the scrum against a navy team, big hulking blokes who had not shaved, my face was rubbed raw. The following week I volunteered for soccer where I stayed for most recreational afternoons thereafter.

Towards the end of my stay I found myself entered for an inter unit cross country race. Twenty men were chosen from each of the three Engineer Regiments in the area. I would estimate that there were around eight hundred men in each Regiment, may have been more I just do not know, so there were sixty on the start line of a said fifteen mile course, what makes that particular race stand out in my mind rather more was the fact that towards the end of the race as I struggled on in my efforts to keep up with a small group in front of me, some young boys came up alongside on bikes and said, "are you the last one mister", in fact there were a few behind me but we were the last of the lot.

I also experienced a 21st birthday parade that I shall never forget. I was on an extra parade as a junior NCO on a Saturday afternoon, because I was picked up that very morning for not cleaning my greatcoat buttons. The nights and mornings then were bitterly cold and at the time of the morning parade it was still below freezing point. The brass buttons had a twinge of ginger about them and I had certainly pressed my coat and cleaned the buttons buffing them to a high polish the previous night. However I was not alone there were many other NCO's alongside me. We were ordered to parade on the unit square at 1400 hrs. in best battle dress, best boots, drill order and carrying our greatcoats for inspection by the Orderly Officer, who appeared at 1500 hrs. with the Orderly Sergeant. After a fifteen minute inspection followed by thirty minutes drill we were dismissed. I'd already had a thirty six hour pass in my possession and arrived home much later than planned to my parents disappointment.

In my own view I thought I was making good progress with my carpentry work. Of course I had benefited from woodworking classes at school so at least I knew how to handle tools etc. and I quite enjoyed this aspect of my training. In the adjoining workshops other sappers and NCO's were being upgraded in their trade from grade three to grade two, or grade two to grade one, both of which would increase their weekly pay and possibly promotion prospects.

There were a few men within the squadron who made application to buy their release from the army after deciding that if this was the way of service life well it wasn't for them. As far as I know most, if not all, were volunteers for prescribed periods of service. Myself I had joined up for five years, with a further seven years on the reserve. I would think it unlikely that national servicemen would be sent on courses such as the one I was doing (national service of course was still a requirement for most) and there was no getting out of it. From time to time men did manage to purchase their release but I've no idea of the cost involved, or if there were other commitments.

There had been some time off in our early stay in Chatham as I had got to know the area quite well. I'd become quite interested in the professional wrestling held at Rochester, the gymnastics of such big men were quite amazing and very entertaining. Bert Azerati was a name of one of the stars I recall and I had also got to know a

few of the local pubs, even then I could down a pint with most, had a couple of dust ups with the navy and learnt to respect and avoid the RMP (military police). Quite a lot of the pubs had a 'joanna' and someone who could tickle the 'ivorys' to keep the throngs amused. There were the local picture houses and a few of the lads went to the dog racing somewhere! Generally speaking one night out meant an empty pocket for the rest of the week for quite a lot of room mates. I'd had a few cigarettes prior to joining the army but it had never become a habit. During our initial training and also at Chatham a couple of days after payday men were on the scrounge for a fag and often used to share butt ends just to get a puff. Smoking up to that point had never affected me (not that I know of, that is). I could, would and often did, go without with no ill effects. One couldn't have had a cigarette to oneself anyway for half the week and if one had a little money left over it wasn't wise to advertise the fact.

Just outside the barracks on the bottom of the slope, on the left, stood a timber hut branch of the YMCA where hot tea and buns were always available. Some of the ladies there apparently did run a slate for some who wanted a very late evening snack. Supper was available in the cookhouse at a set time but the only choice available normally was take it or leave it. There were times of course when beggars couldn't be choosers. Unit standing orders listed the various times when one had to be in barracks by, unless in possession of a late pass or a leave pass. There was also a strict time for lights out in the barrack rooms, the latter I certainly agreed with, or though there were a lot who did not agree - the book readers, card players, general night owls and the late coming in types. There were always ways other than the official ways, it happened all the time, but it was a case of what the eye does not see!

I managed to do all my trade training write ups and conform mostly to what was required by way of kit layouts, inspection standards, drill and general duties. One could never say they were bored with nothing to do and a thirty six hour pass was well worth its effort to get away from it all.

Medical examinations occurred for all every so often and were referred to as FFI's (free from infection). There was a daily sick parade for those requiring it as colds and flu spread easily and fast but at the age that we were youth and high resistance kept us all pretty healthy.

On the administration side we were all requested to fill out a questionnaire part of which was to give our individual preference for future posting from a said availability list. From my wartime observations as an older school boy I had gained an eagerness to fly aeroplanes but I had earlier been advised that my education standard was far below that required, so the nearest I'd get to flying was to become a parachutist engineer within the RE so I did volunteer for that and as a second choice I asked to go to Trieste a favoured posting I'd heard of in Italy, and as a third preference I stated Egypt having read of all the wonders out that way I guess.

We soldiered on doing what had to be done endeavouring to learn what had to be in our efforts to become a qualified Sapper - a three star soldier which was another small step upwards in pay. Daily we continued to march through the back streets to Brompton barracks and the workshops and back again. On Fridays we were often accompanied by the Royal Engineers Band and I guess it was marching practice for them also. To the rear of Brompton barracks was the location of various trades training workshops where we had the usual mid morning and mid afternoon tea breaks and time spent there was pleasant and I found interesting. A very pleasant change from the unit which administered and housed us. I guess there must have been a reason behind the routine imposed upon us, but was there or did it just happen that way? I have always understood that there will always be a few bad apples and it would have been a relatively easy task to sort the wheat from the chaff, if I can use that analogy.

Towards the end of the course the routine had relaxed to a certain extent, we certainly never had the pay earlier on to live a lavish life anyway. During October or November, or round about then, in 1950 quite a substantial pay rise took place. I had since joining up adapted to the meagre pay which did not go very far but we were all in the same boat and got used to the idea. On average my pay prior to the army was four pounds thirteen shillings per week and this immediately dropped to one pound eight shillings, but we did not have to pay board/lodging/clothing and footwear as it was all free. I've mentioned that around four shillings was required for service necessities.

The pay for an untrained Sapper recruit was increased from the one pound eight shillings to two pounds two shillings, an extra two shillings per day bearing in mind the army can call on its members to work seven days a week if it is so required, even though generally at the time we worked a five and a half day week with guard and



duties always required over a seven day period. The increase would be 30%, so maybe there is a lesson there for any younger readers. The best value you ever got for your dollar is to use it around the time it is earned. Personally I was always encouraged to save and have done so throughout my life however small the amount might have been. Living within ones income has always been a safe bet savings have always been handy to purchase the larger items such as cars, the odd holidays or white goods for the home etc. Hire purchase has forever been a no, no in my book, but nowadays it depends on how you do your sums.

The end of my Carpenters and Joiners course came up very quickly, like all things in life if you are kept very busy time appears to pass that way. We all took our various Trades Training practical tests and written examinations and were thankful that our time at 10 Trades Training Regiment at the RSME was drawing to a close. Our final time was spent in preparation for our next posting. Personally I had to report for an OC's interview, during which I was told I had been selected to go on a Junior NCO's Cadre Course in preparation so that I could be trained as a training NCO in one of the Training Regiments which would give me a good background as a future leader in the army. I was completely taken back by this sudden rearrangement of my army life. I was asked what I thought of the idea having experienced what I had. I certainly did not relish the routine of Training Regiments as I had already been told, unofficially, that my name was on a list for a posting to Egypt so in my own words I stated that I would very much prefer a posting to an overseas unit, to get experience as a field engineer and serve as a regular soldier in a regular Regiment. Many more words were spoken to me which did not penetrate and I was told to think about it, and if I still disregarded the advice given for my own benefit now and for the future I would lose the stripe on my arm- have some words to this NCO Sergeant Major march out - so into the SSM's office where I had to wait for half an hour and then experience another ear bashing although this time I felt a little more free to speak. I had rather more respect for the SSM and I thought he saw my point of view. Losing a chevron meant nothing to me at that stage as I'd always felt that I'd been promoted too early anyway and some of the re-enlistments certainly resented it. I stated there was nothing further to think about regarding the Junior NCO's Cadre Course and I wanted to go to my preferred posting. The stripe was removed from my arm prior to leaving the Squadron offices with instructions to remove my rank from the other forms of dress. I also received written instructions to follow a certain procedure in preparation for a three year posting to Egypt - my third choice. The following day, along with many others going to various places, I had to attend the MI room for "jabs," inoculations against all sorts of things, I know my arm swelled up and was very painful, and we were advised not to drink alcohol for a given period of time.

Later we were organised to attend the Squadron Quarter Master Stores for an issue of tropical uniforms and from there to the tailors to get things fitted properly. There were lectures and film shows. I learnt that there were eight of us proceeding to the same Regiment in MELF (Middle East Land Forces) although many more were going to other units in Egypt. It was explained that life would be rather more primitive regarding facilities, although many found it hard to believe, particularly the guys from the towns and cities, I had lived a pretty primitive life prior to joining up. I switched on my first electric light, flushed my first toilet, had my first train ride, enjoyed the 'oodles' of hot water available in the showers and ablutions generally — so how primitive is it going to be we all thought. We still carried out drill parades and kit layouts to keep the military routine going. Guards and duties still came our way and I was a sapper once again roaming around the barracks in the middle of the night or, if I was unlucky, got the main gate duty standing around in the freezing cold watching the freedom guys staggering back into barracks after a night out on the town.

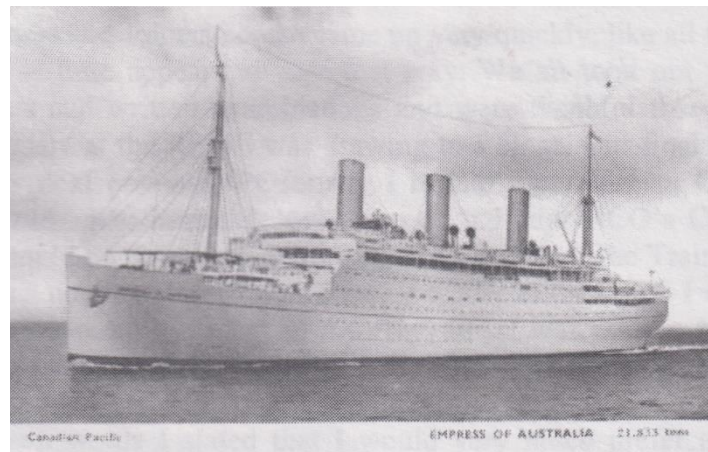
## CHAPTER 5

### 3 Years In Egypt 35 Regiment R.E. (16 Squadron)

Eventually we were all sent on embarkation leave, with extra ration money and various forms and printed instructions of where to assemble and when. My parents thought that three years away from home was a very long time, such thoughts had not registered within.

My younger brother had completed his National Service and was now married, so he wasn't to return home, and I was about to leave.

It was early December 1950, embarkation leave had come and gone and I have no idea how I spent the time. I guess I was anxious for the new adventure and found myself boarding the Empress of Australia, having met up with friends previously made at Chatham. We were allocated to our mess deck, well below and issued with a hammock, each laid claim to a space and two hooks and assembled for instructions on the daily routine; feeding and sleeping arrangements, do's and don'ts on the mess deck (there were many of each to conform with) daily ship's orders were to be posted, domestic mess deck chores allotted by the mess deck Sgt. table leaders elected, lifeboat stations given and a warning given that emergency practice would/could take place at any time.



It was then found out that this wasn't to be a luxury trip, space was very limited, we were sleeping above the dining table, in fact above everywhere in hammocks, another experience for most of us. Rules and regulations were given verbally and spelt out for us all on the notice boards adorning every available space, discipline was strict and for once I could see the necessity for it. Daily inspection by the ship's captain appeared an essential part of the routine — at which time all mess decks had to be vacated, and it was fresh air time for all on the upper deck whether you fancied it or not. Boat station drill was carried out daily for the first few days to ensure all knew what to do, when to do it and how, suitably dressed in a life jacket of course - Oh, I almost forgot on leaving quayside a band played all the sentimentals; Royal Britannia, Auld Lang Syne and many more and we were off.

I'd been on little boats before but this was different, a floor that kept moving, walls that kept bumping into you, hammocks that all swung together in the quiet of the dimmed lights at night, the odd cursing as a hammock emptied its load on whatever was below.

The table leaders suddenly found that they had more than enough food, there being empty spaces at the mess deck tables, the gentle swell was taking its toll.

Most of my family forbears, those that entered a service that is, were naval men. I cannot see that this would have a bearing on my life, but I found I was a pretty good sailor, sea sickness not being one of my traits, and as the food was good and varied, I and others like me tucked in.

Some training was organised, PT (physical training) being part of it, fresh air on the upper decks in a state of undress was always a breezy cold affair so different from the, what I thought was, overcrowded mess come

sleeping deck at night where the air smelt warm and sweaty and often foul, with all the belching and farting that inevitably goes on, particularly in situations where the stomachs of some are less than restful.

Lectures and the odd weapon training periods were given - I guess to make use of the time usefully and keep the men occupied. Army officers were not seen or heard, from my point of view anyway, but I would point out, that the naval officers, albeit Merchant Navy, were not shy about the standards that they expected. There was a medical room with a doctor and staff in attendance, and a daily sick parade for those requiring it. There were also cells below the water line looked after by a small military police contingent, and they apparently had some customers, you'll always get bad apples as I've since found out.

Life on board was found to be as anticipated one day after occupation anything but a luxury. A few days out the ship encountered rough waters many having a 'chunder' over the side, which I later found out translated as "watch out under" as the vomit sprayed in the wind. The swill bins slid and toppled on the mess decks, not exactly an appetiser if you were given the task to mop it up. The toilets and urinals became a mess, notices adorned every facility to remind all of the various hygiene requirements. One that still stands out in my mind requesting that 'butt ends' should not be discarded in the urinal stalls to which some clown had added "no, because they get so wet and almost unsmokeable." It was in the era of 'Chad,' 'Chad' was here' with the unmistakable sketch peeping over a wall drawn everywhere one went, the equivalent of today's graffiti.

Very soon the green waters that surround the United Kingdom turned into a Mediterranean blue as we sailed on to our destination, the weather warmed the clouds thinned to high misty wisps, and the sea became more calm Gibraltar and Malta were behind us. Cyprus not too far ahead. Way beyond was Port Said, our port of disembarkation, where we arrived either on 16th or 17th December 1950.

The weather was cooler than expected even though the sun shone brightly, our complexion differed greatly from the driver and his escort who came to pick us up. and theirs again differed from the locals, all running around in their night shirts, as we then thought The pick-up truck was a 3 ton truck, the canopy rolled up on all sides, with wooden folding seats on either side, the main difference being the colour of the vehicle - a sandy yellow - instead of our accustomed dark leafy green as found in Europe. Anyhow we piled our kit bags, large packs and small packs, into the centre of the truck and climbed aboard after having been welcomed to the ancient land of Egypt. Port Said, or what we saw it, did not appear too inviting, everywhere looked grubby and messy, even the buildings were a dirty white, whilst the local workers were unkempt to say the least. A variety of dogs were running around and a few Arabs riding donkeys. A few donkey carts and push- carts lined the roads and rusty buses and trucks wove their way along with clanging horns and tooting hooters. Before we had realised we were out on the open road and away from the hustle and bustle of the so called built up areas.

Oxen tilling the sandy soil with a wooden plough alongside the 'Sweet Water' Canal in the Suez Canal Zone, Egypt. The first of many, almost biblical, scenes there



We had been told to expect an hour and a half ride to the camp, camp one queried, that'll be different. We had a pee stop en route when we were told that we were going to Gothic Camp El-Ballah, home of 35 Field Engineer Regiment RE. We were also informed that it was a bit out of the way and everyone lives in tents but everything you need is within the camp, there is an infantry unit about a mile away - A Mauritian Unit, coloured blokes with white officers and senior NCO's, there is also an open air cinema (an Arab one) within walking distance and that's about it. To the uninitiated, and the eight of us fitted into that category, imaginations started to work but not for long as our attention was drawn to the Sweet Water Canal and to keep well away from it because it was anything but! A few locals existed in odd groups along the canal and it served their needs. Women were all

dressed in 'originally black' coveralls, for the want of a better description, complete with headdress and veils of the same materials so one had no idea as to whether they were 15 or 50, more likely the former as 50 was quite an old age for Arabs then (we learnt later).

The countryside was desolate, the only trees growing were on the side of the Sweet Water Canal. Small shrubs abounded in an otherwise sandy desert of small dunes, the horizon to the left appeared flat and featureless but somewhere in between, not so far from the canal road existed the Suez Canal running North to South.

We turned left into the signed road of the aforesaid Regiment. On our right was a large water tower with a Braithwaite tank on top, recognised from our earlier sapper training, and then to our surprise a football pitch on what appeared to be a gravel surface (guess we only thought of football fields on grass) immediately to our front and left. The driver stopped and booked into the guardroom, just on the inside of a concertina barbed wire fence that later we learnt surrounded the whole camp so the entrance was also the exit to the confines of the Regiment. The truck stopped again outside RHQ, the Regimental headquarters, and we unloaded our belongings onto the veranda and reported inside.

Posting instructions were handed over and two sappers appeared to take us to our allottee squadrons. Myself and three others were shown the way to 16 Field Squadron, the order?. Cpl took down details and then reported to the SSM, who moved us into his office for a twenty minute lecture on our new surroundings, the dos and don'ts, the whys and wherefores, what was expected of us, guards and duties and a general welcome to the Squadron. We were then posted to a troop, I and 'Nobby Clarke' went to No. 1 Troop. The Troop Commander was a Captain Rolands and the Troop Sgt. was a very young ex boy soldier, a Sgt. Hooper. Both extended a warm welcome and instructed us to dump our kit in the tent lines and draw bedding etc. from the SQMS and gave us a bed space, each in different tents, that already had three occupants. All tents were four- man tents and quite open, having no sides to them, or so it appeared, each man had a metal locker type wardrobe and an ammunition box at the end of a very old fashioned bedstead, we drew a paliasse which then had to be filled with straw, another little surprise for us "Joskins," as all new blokes from U.K. were called. However they turned out to be quite comfy and the straw was replaced every so often, seven or ten days or whatever it was in the requirements of hygiene, to give the fleas and bugs and new home. We unpacked and sorted out the gear as best we knew how and were still doing so when the other occupants of the tent lines appeared, having completed the day's work, training or whatever they'd been up to. Brief introductions were made, one of my new tent mates was a L/Cpl and a Cpl appeared to say I was in his section and had a chat for a few minutes saying I'd get to know the rest of the blokes very quickly as there was nothing else to do here anyway and the routine was quite straightforward.

**Gothic Camp Elbolla**  
Taken from the Braithwaite water tank  
next to the unit football ground



Alan Webster and I





**Troop Tent Lines**  
(All 4 man tents)

In fact the guys were very friendly and my Christian name soon overtook the name of Joskin. The meals were plain but good, at that time there were basically only two choices, take it or leave it. The NAAFI Unit Canteen was a very popular place used by all and the only place for refreshments and pastimes, unless one was content to lie on one's bed and read during off duty hours.

Quite a few local Arabs were employed in the camp, in fact some were running their own little businesses, there was the 'Dhobi' laundry, barber, tailor and Cha Waller that I can think of now. Other Arab labourers working under contract carried out various duties. There was a piggery in the outer bounds of the camp, living mainly on the leftovers from the other rank's cook house and the officers and Sergeant's messes dining rooms, certainly not heard of this one before — but the idea made sense. I'd always thought that there was a lot of waste from such establishments, anyway whatever we left on our plates eventually returned as a pork chop or bacon. Having worked with like animals in my pre-army life, curiosity got the better of me and I had to go take a peep. The sties and breeding pens were very well run and comparatively clean, I guess someone had a close supervisory roll over this little enterprise, essential since its close proximity to human living - no dung heaps to my knowledge existed to attract the flies so I assumed it was moved from the camp daily and it certainly would have been a useful commodity for the local Arab market gardeners.

Fly traps were in fact positioned around the perimeter fence of the camp which really kept the numbers down, I understood that the traps were emptied every couple of days or so, but they (the flies) also had a big attraction otherwise within the confines, bucket type toilets, even though they were emptied and cleaned around 4 a.m. daily by local contract labour. I remember seeing this latter activity going on whilst on a roving patrol on guard duty, I don't know whether the Arabs were on piece work or whether they wanted to get the job done in a hurry, but they were picking up these buckets putting them on their shoulders and jogging to the collecting truck, the contents quite often spilling down their necks etc. yuck!

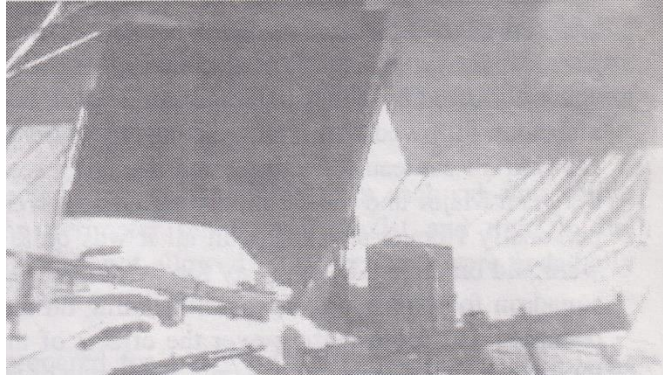
The heat of the midday sun brought forth the distinct human 'aroma' even in the winter months. Our showers were a very basic plumbing set up with exposed pipes attached to the timber framework of a corrugated iron shed, the walls of which were twelve inches off a slightly sloping concrete floor and twelve inches below a gentle sloping tin roof, well designed according to the book on camp structures for the army in the tropics, for ventilation and heat dispersal. Hot water was always available from an oil fed heating system.

Electricity was available, each tent having an aerial supply of one bulb and a tent pole switch. The tents would have been about sixteen feet by twelve feet (5 meters by 4 meters approx.) with 60 by 60 cm. concrete slabs laid for the floor, the apex of the roof supported by two poles about 3 meters high sloping to about 130cm. at the tent roof edge, the tent walls were in fact rolled back to the comers almost every day and could be closed after duty hours if required i.e. if there were cold winds, rain or dust storms. Each man had and used a mosquito net.

Within days of arrival we'd had our KD (khaki, drill) tropical uniforms exchanged or tailored to fit and divisional shoulder flashes sewn on by the local tailor. Personal weapons were issued although kept central in the unit armoury, the faithful old .303 rifle — been in use for donkeys years — goodness knows what mark they were? These were the Sappers general weapon, some junior NCO's had Sten guns and some were in charge (i/c) of Bren guns. Each troop also had revolvers for the officers, a PIAT (projectile infantry anti-tank) and 1" flare pistols.

### Troop Weaponry as issued at the time

.303 rifles said to be over 50 years old since they were first used, .303 Bren machine gun. The PIA T (projectors infantry anti-tank) that fired a fairly heavy' bomb shaped projectile giving a hefty kickback to the user. Sten gun. a short range machine gun. The 1" flare pistol, also still in use but not shown was the .38 pistol with revolving chamber as issued to officers



On the unit .22 range with Captain Roland and Sgt Charlie Cooper on Boxing Day

Paddy Neilly, Alan and I enjoying a shared bottle of Christmas spirit



Daily training or works dress was denims and a floppy jungle green hat turned up on one side, leather boots, shirt sleeve order and a 37 pattern belt i.e. first issued in 1937.

Beds were still boxed, the blankets folded with the pillow on top at the head of the bed in front of the mosquito net, rolled up behind the blankets but still attached to its hanging point at the edge of tent roof. Tents were swept out daily and rubbish picked up before first parade. All were expected to shave, clean boots daily and appear clean and tidy each morning. Hey, this was easy compared to our long introduction to military' life! On Saturday mornings there was usually a drill parade, and/or kit inspection, and a blanket shaking session. Life was quite dusty, the clouds from the blankets justified the exercise and this was normally done at the same time as the straw replacement in the paliasses.

Each troop had its own training programme obviously co-ordinated at squadron or regimental level, early morning PT, maybe weapon training, infantry training, map reading and field defences. Sapper training was revised and/or improved subject by subject, all done by the JNCO's. Live shooting on the range within the camp was a fairly regular activity, organised and controlled by the troop Sgt. and overseen by the troop Commander.

Christmas came and it was just a long weekend - two days off. Tea and rum known as 'gunfire' was brought around the tent lines very early by the troop Sgt. and troop Comd. and served to each man in bed if he wanted it on Christmas morning, a custom I'd only heard about previously they also served us with our Christmas dinners of turkey, roast spuds followed by Xmas pud. and mince pies, beer, nuts and oranges, it was all there. The afternoon followed with a sing-a-long led by our SSM, a single man who often appeared in the NAAFI canteen for a drink and a singing session. I was told later that the Regimental Sergeant Major and the Commanding Officer were also present and doing their rounds but personally I never saw them. In all it was quite an enjoyable festive experience. Trucks were laid on during Boxing day for swimming parties to the Canal waters, sports and

inter squadron football matches, social shooting on the ranges were organised to keep the men occupied and those getting over the effects of the previous day did just that. I felt I was melting in as a member of the unit, being one of them.

The festive season behind us, we were into the troop routine again, a short break for New Year and we carried on. At some stage early in the New Year as far as I can remember, we had a visit to the unit by 'Ivy Benson and her all girl band.' Entertainment for the troops the visit came under, bearing in mind that some of the blokes had been out there for two or three years it was a show to be looked forward to. There were very few married families there to my knowledge at the time in fact I, and many like me, had seen no white girls at all out there, of course I had not been around very long or tripped out to any known civilisation. There were the 'Polos,' as they were referred to, Bints with a hole in the middle (Bint was Arabic for girl) and no one fancied them (that I know of), they were dirty and grimy and could have been anything under the black garb. A contingent of Military Police came along with the show, a precaution obviously required, from the tales we heard later. I saw the show, very scantily dressed girls gyrating on the stage to roars from the audience. The MP's stood on either side, and mostly Officers were in the front rows. After the show the all girl band complete with 'hangers on' retired to the Officers Mess to be fed, refreshed and housed for the night and whatever (imagination ran rife under the whatever heading). I personally had never become involved with the female form, although in my short army experience I had become exposed to quite a number of Ribold' magazines and books, which I've since learnt are quite removed from reality, however such shows certainly stir up the hormones and I've wondered since whether they really are good for morale in such situations -1 could really be shouted down on that one.

Training continued and there seemed to be an emphasis on physical fitness as sports were always encouraged. I found a place in the troop soccer team right away. The troop strength was around thirty men but there appeared to be a shortage of NCO's, there wasn't the compliment as laid down in the RE squadron format i.e. 1 Cpl, 2 L/Cpls. and 8 sappers per section, 3 field sections per troop and a smaller HQ Sec. comprised of the troop commander, troop Sgt., signalman, cook, batman, troop store man and maybe one GD (general duties sapper). Each troop had its own drivers but they worked and trained under the MTO and the MT Sgt. within the squadron. Three of the above troops and a headquarter troop made up the squadron. The HQ troop outnumbering the field troops since, at that time, they had to provide all the administration; clerks and stores personnel to look after accommodation, rations, all messing requirements, clothing and equipment, armoury, weapons and ammunition, targets, explosives stores and general engineering tools and equipment to carry out the necessary engineering tasks expected of the RE. There was also a small Royal Electrical Mechanical Engineers Sec. attached to look after the very technical side of vehicle maintenance and an armourer to maintain the weapons. A very large MT Sec. including vehicle mechanics, all RE, 3 ACC (army catering corp.), cooks and a medical trained person RE.

As stated I was in 16 Field Squadron; there was a 42 Field Squadron, an 18 Field Park Squadron comprising heavy plant, bulldozers, scrapers, cranes, scammells and various 10 and 20 ton trucks and trailers, plus all sorts of mechanical engineering equipment. Then there was the Regimental Headquarters, quite a large body. Since I had very little to do with RHQ I just would not know their numbers then or now.

Quite a few NCOS and men were selected for special training from each sub-unit within the Regiment and moved outside the perimeter fence to live/exist and train in the surrounding desert- type country. They were not allowed into camp and were eventually sent off to a destination which we later learnt was Korea.

We, the field squadrons in the unit, prepared for and were soon on our way to a large exercise out into the real desert, the Sinai, on exercise Sandgrouse. We moved out in troop convoys each section having its own 4x4 3 ton Bedford truck, self-contained with several 10 man ration packs and several 10 gallon 'camel' tanks of water stored under the seats on either side of the truck rear. Each man carrying a weapon, clothing and equipment as previously instructed. We were led by the Troop Comd. in his Land Rover with signalman and batman, with the Troop Sgt. bringing up the rear in the HQ section 3 ton truck. The headquarters troop had 2 Land Rovers, 2 QM 3 ton trucks, 1 explosives/ammo truck, 1 x 250 gallon water truck and a 15 cwt. air compressor truck, one of the 3 ton QM trucks towing a 150 gallon trlr. Each vehicle carried spare 'Jerry' cans of fuel.

It was a long haul along the Canal road passing very primitive villages. Egyptians riding on donkeys sometimes leading their wives who carried very large loads of firewood high up on their backs, single oxen pulling very primitive ploughs, large water wheels operated by an ox walking in continuous circles with a draw bar attached.

It really was like stepping back in time, scenes that I had only seen the likes of in biblical stories and history books. However, we eventually reached the vast open stony plains having left the black top roads behind us.

Various vehicle movements were practised on the command of hand signals initiated by the Tp. Comd. and signalled on by all vehicle leaders who stood up through the hatch in the roof of all enclosed cabs - open league, close league, arrow head and single file, there were reasons for each and it was all so new to the likes of myself. Water was rationed, the nights were bitterly cold and yet the daily sunshine dictated shirt sleeve order. All meals were prepared, cooked and eaten in the open. Each person cleaned his own utensils with wet sand to minimise the use of water. We were all expected to shave daily, it's surprising what one can do with a third of a mug of water, even less if you are thirsty; clean ones teeth, wash face neck and hands and arms with a soapy shaving brush then rinse off, have a shave and dry - a very cold exercise when carried out at sunrise or a bit before in cold water. Every second day - perhaps, we'd get a canvas bucket half full of water for the section to wash its feet in, taking turns the 'gungy' water was very refreshing and what was left towards the end looking rather like soup.

Night time guards were considered an essential part of the whole exercise, each section having one man alert at all times. We carried out long route marches, practised road demolitions using the air compressor truck to drill deep holes in the rocky terrain to place explosive charges of 70 lbs., plus blowing craters, some almost 30 ft. across and 7 ft. deep.

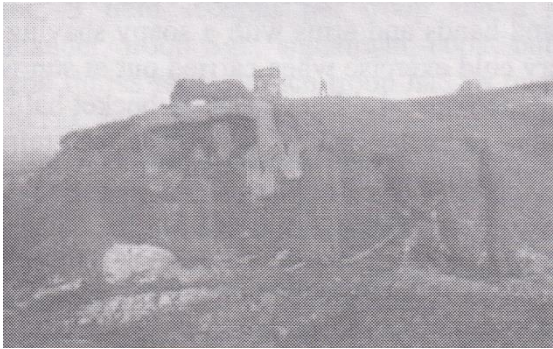
Collapsing the sides of 'wadi's' (dry river beds) for the practice of road blocks through cuttings and also the use of shaped charges, beehives, and hayricks as they were known. Minefield laying and booby trapping was carried out in a practical way and marked accordingly. Infantry and Armoured Corp, units were also on the exercise, centurion tanks rumbled along in the open and close league, our minefields either blocking their route or guiding them into prescribed fields of fire. Their trails of dust could be seen for many thousands of yards. A few light aircraft, high wing monoplanes, they could have been Austers, were also in use for aerial observation or whatever.

After some three to four weeks out, we found ourselves much further afield and located on either side of a railway line said to be running towards Cairo, dug in, in defensive positions in an infantry role across quite a wide pass through which ran the railway with mountainous country on either side. We were in 2 and 3 man positions, where we could not dig down we built up with rocks (the latter known as sangers), the bren guns and piats were placed in so-called strategic positions and all were issued with live ammo and ration packs. We began to wonder if we were being treated like mushrooms ('fed on bullshit and kept in the dark'). The NCO's were then informed that we were facing the Egyptian army dug in further up the pass. Several nights and days were spent there, well it seemed that way in my memory, the Tp. Sgt. and Tp. Comd. checking alternatively to see that one man in each position was alert throughout the darker hours. I never knew the full story of that little episode, whether it was for real or not. Having withdrawn from that area we moved on, replenishing our one water bottle each night - our daily ration topped up by a pint mug of whatever was going with each meal three times a day.





Above - Section 3 Ton Truck with Sapper Dewit as driver & Meal time in the desert — open air style



Above - Practice with air compressor tools in the placing of underground charges and observing detonation from a safe distance

Right - Me lighting a fuse on a 30/50 beehive shaped charge that makes an average sized hole 6-8" in diameter and around 6 ft. deep in solid rock. Why? To place large underground demolition charges.





My first desert exercise accommodation

Cook's truck with detailed volunteers



**Number 1 Section**  
Cpl Morris, LCpl Gregory, Alan, Charlie, Nobby, Dougy, Scouse.  
(apologies to others not listed)

Noisy, dusty  
Centurion tank



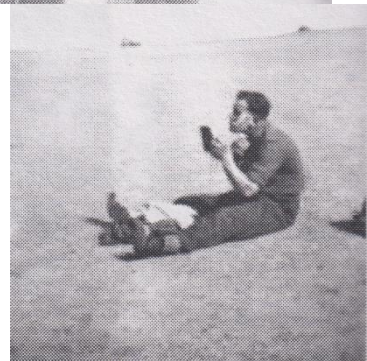
Above - view through the rocky hills

Right - with Daly and Ginger climbing  
rocky slopes



Left - A picture to send home

Right - an early morning  
shave



A couple of days later found us on a desolate sandy shore and fairly calm blue water, I know not where, a refreshing sight in itself Suddenly sea water soap became available, black collared khaki shirts and stiff, smelly socks and undies regained their suppleness and colour as they were laid out to dry on the sand having been washed with various other items. Swimming trunks weren't on the exercise kit list, so it was birthday suits or PT shorts for the shy, the latter were quickly ridiculed and so we all went in 'starkers' for our first body wash in weeks. Some, like myself, climbed the high rocky hills to the side of the sandy shore whilst others lazed around in the sun, most without a stitch on and all enjoying the free time. The following day the site was vacated, all rubbish either burnt or buried as was the usual practice where ever we went. We carried on the various aspects of training for war, often travelling in the dust of the vehicles that preceded us. We stopped on a Saturday afternoon where we were told to spruce up for a religious service the following day. On the Sunday at 10 a.m., having marched to the site and formed a hollow square around a pre-arranged decked out colourful alter, we stood in silence (about 300 men at a guess) when the Padre appeared walking towards us, a large book clutched to his chest, white collar and gown over a black frock, a purple scarf hanging low either side of his neck - you'll forgive the description of his attire I know. I have heard that monks have dirty habits but I know there are more suitable nouns for the dress of Padres, I've heard and forgotten them. I thought at the time what an apt religious setting, quite moving, I'm sure the Sinai Desert has a mention in the Bible, or was it Mount Sinai. With popular hymns chosen there was a gusty vocal response and a reminder of "England's green and pleasant land."

I'm not sure whether it was on this, or a later exercise, when we were given the opportunity to visit St. Catherine's Monastery, a very remote self-contained outpost with little if any connection with the rest of the world, where one of their hobbies is collecting the skulls and bones of their predecessors where they have shelves upon shelves and rooms full of same. It's amazing how such a religious oasis exists, but apparently they have done so for hundreds of years. I wonder now, some 44 years later as I write.



**St. Catherine's Monastery**

A trip for the lucky few

After some six weeks, could be more, we found ourselves back in camp, now acclimatised and hardened to the arduous of a MELF existence. Personally I found it all quite adventurous as I clicked away with my folding camera when I thought an opportune moment presented itself. Now there was much cleaning, sorting out and checking to do and spare time to catch up on mail with long overdue letters to answer. Some two weeks later having become settled into the routine of exercise, camp sapper training and a few pints of 'Stella,' the local brew in the NAAFI canteen in the evenings, we were told all members of No. 1 troop that is, would be going to Port Fuad moving into the transit camp and working in Port Said for a number of weeks.

My name appeared on Squadron orders for an OC's interview, there were no options and I duly appeared all decked out in my best uniform, best boots etc. as was the custom not that we relied on custom to do things. It was an order and orders were not questioned, just obeyed. I was once again up for promotion to L/Cpl, guess I'd been recommended by my troop superiors, it was obviously on my personal documents of previous acting rank, no mention was made of my attending a Cadre Course at the time although I attended a Junior NCO's training course at a later date. Although there were quite a lot of older soldiers within the Squadron, I was congratulated by most of the troop NCO's and some of the sappers and it seemed to be fairly well accepted. It was a surprise to myself, I certainly had not been thinking along those lines and had been fairly well occupied with a new life in a new environment, in a new country, absorbing all that went on around me, keeping my eyes and ears open and my mouth shut unless spoken to. I guess I was a quiet type if not shy, but nevertheless endeavoured to try and do my best at whatever I was given to do.



Troop Water Trailer  
(Soon after promotion again)

The dates and times of the various activities engaged in, I am not sure about now, some memories are revived by an extensive collection of photographs, so the sequence of the related times given may be out of order in which they took place.

The troop duly moved to the Transit camp at Port Fuad which was to be our home for a few weeks as an independent troop away from our parent Sqn. that remained at Gothic Camp El-Ballah. All personal kit, weapons and the troop stores (G1098) were taken in our normal allocation of troop vehicles so that we were able to operate completely as an independent RE troop. The main purpose of our move was to undertake some construction work on the dockside in Port Said. The actual task being to convert a cold store into an ice plant. I cannot recall there being any experts on the job, we were working from blue prints, the troop Sgt. explained to us, the NCO's, what had to be done. There was a demand for ice and insufficient sources to supply (before the days of refrigerated transports I suppose).

The cold store was a very large building with walls four feet thick, the tasks: an enlarged additional hatchway had to be constructed, inside structure had to be removed to provide space for a freezing tank, a large 'L' shaped Braithwaite tank had to be constructed supported by internal bracing and metal racks, above the tank a steel gantry had to be built to support a monorail in the form of an RSJ (rolled steel joist) -later referred to as a BSB (British standard beam) - to follow the contours of the tank, a wheeled lifting gear trolley to run on the flanges of the above, a bay constructed to hold freezing tanks in racks and an unloading bay to extract and deliver ice adjacent to new hatchway.

Troop detachment for work in Port Said to convert cold storage to an ice production plant - going to work daily by boat



Work truck outside cold storage



**View of Port Said**  
HMAS Magpie commanded by HRH Prince Phillip

Certain items were made and part assembled elsewhere and brought to the site when required. Anchor bolts had to be located and concreted into place, some concrete and brick walls had to be removed. There were a few costly mistakes made on that job, mainly through lack of communication in giving orders or misreading specifications. The plans were provided by RE Clerk of Works MELF 10, but I had no contacts with such people, being one of the lowly slaves in the organisation. All my observations of course may not be correct but I remember and write as I saw them.

The freezing process was to be as follows: the large tanks were to be filled with brine (salt water) and the ice containers fresh water, since fresh water freezes at a higher temperature than brine, the freezing tanks would be easier to remove and replace. I never actually saw the plant working, just experienced the cold whilst employed on the task. I did in fact suffer from 'piles' through sitting on the cold concrete floors on that job. The remedial medical instructions I received for treatment was to apply Vaseline and to push them back in place with a finger every night in bed - it worked; I wasn't troubled again until retirement. Actually I had thought I'd had haemorrhoids but I was told only officers get them.

During our time on that job, some of us often had a swim alongside the docks during the lunch break. On one occasion a couple of us were way out in the water when some very large fish surfaced between ourselves and the docks. There is only one fish one thinks of at such times! It was a very scary experience but then we learnt that dolphins often come into the local waters. Not all the troop was employed on the job, some men were left in the transit camp to look after our interest and carry out menial domestic duties, others to maintain vehicles and collect stores, help the cook etc. An additional small vehicle was requested as a general run around and we, the troop that is, ended up getting two Standard Vanguard staff cars which were said not to be suitable for their original purpose. We also got some additional motor cycles in which I showed interest for some fun riding. There was a very large vehicle stock yard located somewhere in the area, I was taken there to get some spare parts, it was said to be a BLR depot (beyond local repair), it must have catered for the whole of the Canal Zone by the size of it. Goodness knows how many troops were out there.

Just prior to the job after my promotion there was a change round of NCO's. Moggy Morris and Gregory Peck, Cpl and L/Cpl Respectively of No. 1 Section, my section, went their different ways and some new national service men were posted in, one a Cpl and one a L/Cpl, both I felt were far better educated than myself and I had no resentment towards them, unlike some regulars in the troop. I got on well with them and was quite happy with my lot anyway, still keeping my eyes and ears open and asking questions if in doubt or unsure.

Entertainment during the weeks away was very restricted, the local radio did not provide much attraction, we could swim but to go beyond the confines of military establishments meant one was pestered with Arab beggars and con men selling cheap watches, dirty postcards, leather wallets and what not. They often appeared at the work site but got the 'IMshee' response from one and all. On the odd occasion we did venture out, five or six of us went together.

HMS Magpie, a smallish naval vessel, sailed up past us at one time, remembered only because we were told Prince Phillip, husband or husband-to-be of the future Queen was in command.

We had some PT periods, one kit layout, but parades were kept to a minimum apart from morning roll call and a quick inspection. We all got to know one another very well, Capt. Rolands was well liked who, when showing his disapproval at anything, would say "hells bells and pomegranates." I never heard him or the Troop Sgt. use any foul language, far different from the many NCO's in the training establishments. In fact Capt. Rolands started to call me laughing boy because of the infectious laugh I apparently had. I'd had two nick names since joining up, but lost them as I moved on thankfully, 'Porky' and 'Farmer,' because I was, and sounded like one, I guess.

Many weeks later we were back at Gothic Camp and had resumed military training, there was always a need to refresh/improve or learn something new. I was given the responsibility of the PIAT a troop weapon described previously, the only anti-tank weapon the troop had, a primitive sort of weapon that fired what I referred to at the time as small bombs, weighing over two pounds each, they were in fact a shaped charge that was able to penetrate any tank armour at that time, providing it made a right angled connection with the target, or a direct head on hit so we were told. It had one hell of a kick back and had to be held very firmly against the shoulder, the initial loading of the weapon by compressing a very large coil spring was quite an effort in itself so one had to have a reasonable build to carry/handle and fire the thing. I had a No. 2 to carry the projectiles and load when

required, we also carried our own personal weapon as well, mine was now a Sten gun. I liked shooting and proved to be a reasonable shot with all the section weapons, having been brought up with guns helped. My father had an incentive for me to shoot straight since he had to buy the cartridges -12 bore game shot were four pence each during the war, so any dinners shot always cost something.

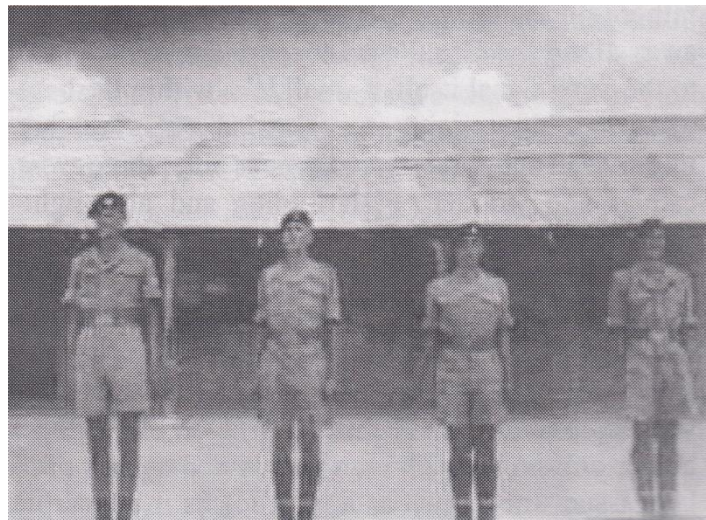
Map reading out in the desert was quite different from that in England and the desert, more often than not, was quite featureless. The route of the 'Wadis' did not always conform to the lines on the map, travelling was usually a time and distance problem guided by compass, the only variable being the surface over which one travelled, sand dune country with small shrubs, open rocky craggy plains, comparatively smooth gravel ground, or the rocky escarpments and bands of rocky high ground. All vehicles carried sand channels, which were in fact PSP panels about 15 inches wide and 8 feet in length (PSP = pierced steel plank). Its original use was designed for making roads, airfields, parking areas etc. each snapping together to form large steel mats. As an ex sea cadet, I was quite surprised how much of my former training came into use as a field engineer. I met very few people who could box the compass in the army, I knew semaphore, knots and lashings back and eye splicing, handling of boats, winds, tides and currents, rowing and outboard motors also came in handy, but like all things in life if you do not use it you lose it and the memory pales.

As the warmer weather came we changed from shirt sleeve order BD to KD the lightweight uniforms issued for tropical use although denims, the works and training dress, were worn winter and summer. We remained in Gothic Camp for quite some time and the summer timetable came into being. Routine started at 0600 with either PT or a swimming session, for the latter we travelled by vehicle to a location that followed the Suez Canal. The only trouble with the early morning swim periods was that we spent more time in the vehicle than we did in the water. After breakfast first parade was around 0800 then we trained and/or worked, finishing at 1400 hrs which was the end of the official day.

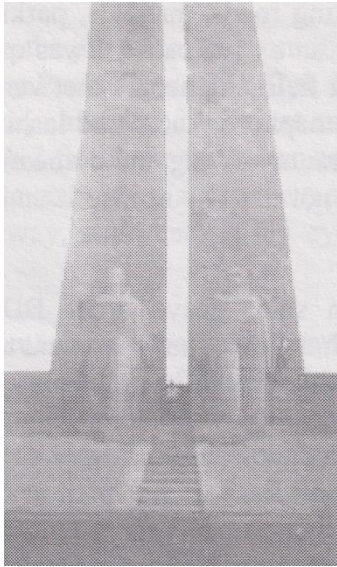
Bogged in water truck



Khaki hot weather dress for parades and guard duties



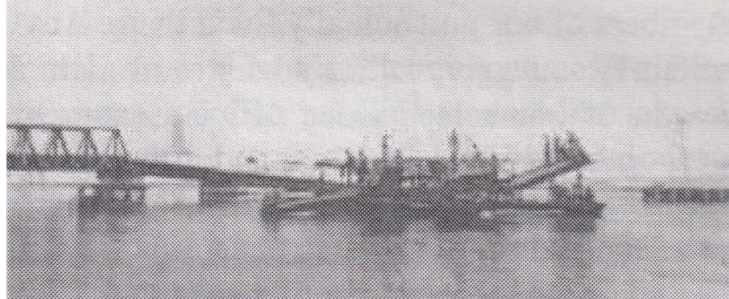
Sport was still encouraged and perhaps a road run for those that did not. or would not. participate in voluntary sports. Sunburn was a problem for some. I was personally warned being at that time fair haired with blue eyes, but I took the sun very well. The chaps that were affected in my view without exception were the ginger red head types and allowances were made for them. Most afternoons were free, in the warmer season we learnt then where the saying came from "mad dogs and Englishmen out in the Midday sun", too hot to work and yet we played soccer and hockey etc.



**British War Memorial located at Gable  
Maryam**  
Long since taken down by the Egyptians

After a few more weeks we had a troop excursion to a place called Gebel Maryam where a rather impressive war memorial was built, it was also a small engineer base about 25 miles away along the Canal road towards Ismailia. The Camp grounds were just about adjacent to the Suez Canal itself, a small lake within the base was fed by the Canal waters, on which watermanship training was carried out. Training consisted of raft construction, both improvised and military equipment rafts, there were various types of infantry assault boats, canvas and wooden, both folding and also light aluminium storm boats as they were referred to, various types of outboard motors and the heavy duty wooden pontoons on to which Bailey Bridge could be built. We practiced assault river crossings using all types of equipment and outboard motors and built bridges both on land and across water. Each man was expected to be able to swim and get across a 30 ft. water obstacle fully equipped with rifle and ammo. Not all were able or confident and often extra training and encouragement was required to achieve this. As with all things there are devised methods especially for the bigger crossings. Each man was issued as part of his equipment with a waterproof cape (a later issue was known as a poncho) its main purpose was as the original name suggests a cape, a waterproof outer garment and the other uses were as a ground sheet, roof covering (note two or three could be fastened together), and a floatation unit. This last use will need some explanation - all clothing and equipment is removed and placed in the centre of the cape and laid out on the ground, it has to be stacked neatly and the cape then folded in the taught manner, the idea then being to float the parcel across whilst you swim behind it. It certainly works. Another method of floatation, particularly for non-swimmers or incapacitated persons, was to use ones denim trousers tied with string or something at the leg bottoms. They were then dunked until saturated and holding the waist, thrown back over the head and brought forward quickly to fill the legs with air and then lay in the crutch and hey presto — you've got yourself a pair of water wings. This would hold one afloat for about 20 minutes if they were in a good state of repair, so a swimmer or a boat could tow another across. Improvisation was part of engineering methodology i.e. the use of whatever was available to achieve whatever was required.

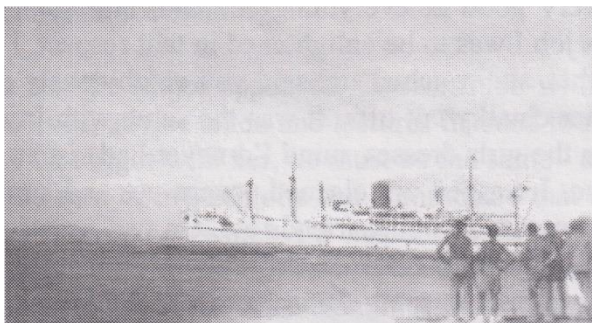




Swimming test in battle order during watermanship training and the close support raft class 9/12 construction and operating training

Actually it was home from home we were still living in tents, only smaller ones, the routine was more like holiday mood except that 1st parades still took place with inspections — all in the interest of hygiene of course. This was quite a break from normal training since water, particularly now in a tropical climate, was not always around and also the equipment on which to practice. However the water was very refreshing and no one minded getting wet through, something we had to expect, accept and get used to in all weather conditions as I found out in later service.

Ships of all sizes shapes and nationalities passed silently by appearing to be sailing through the sand dunes at times, and I could imagine passengers wondering what soldiers were doing in their isolated outpost along the Canal. After two weeks we were back in Gothic Camp once again, back to our guard duties and regimental routine. Early morning starts and late afternoon sports gave us a thirst for the NAAFI canteen evenings.



Ships sailing through the desert via the Suez Canal & view from the escort job flat at Moascar.

Around early October 1951 I was sent out on an individual assignment and had been selected as an armed escort to the wife and children of our Officer Commanding while he was away overseas as I understood it in some neighbouring Arab country. I had heard previously that some married quarters, a limited number of them did exist at Moascar Garrison adjacent to Ismailia, about half way along the Canal Zone but did not realise members of our unit actually lived there. Anyway I guess I had a briefing on my duties but certainly cannot recall any of it now. I took all my personal kit with me, including a couple of blankets, pillow, officers camp bed (special item for a L/Cpl), my personal weapon a Sten gun, bayonet and 100 rounds of 9 mm ammunition, well enough to fill 4 magazines and some left over. We had heard that some trouble was brewing in the Arab populace and there had also been a mutiny in the Mauritian ? camp not too far away from Gothic Camp at Et-ballah. The coloured soldiers had locked up all their white officers and SNCO's and armed themselves, the military police were unable to control the situation and I believe some men from 35 Engineering Regiment had gone over as an armed force. The situation was resolved by negotiation but I never heard the full story if ever it was available as I had moved out soon after.

I was taken to Ismailia by Land Rover with a driver and his armed escort and delivered to an address in Moascar. I introduced myself to a very attractive young woman who answered the door and was very pleased to see me. My kit was dumped off with "the best of luck mate" and the Land Rover drove away. In my new officers' quarters surroundings, a new world to me and I assumed I had to watch my P's and Q's as I'd been taught in my earlier years of learning. Anyway what are P's and Q's if it had something to do with manners I was not overly concerned. I heard that all the native staff had been ordered to leave their employment (those working for the British military that is), against their wishes in a lot of cases. I was informed most officers, had three workers, some four, including a cook, dhobi waller and a handyman gardener and some employed a batman.

Here I was with a new lady boss, a few years older than myself, not many though, another new experience, never had a female boss before and then there were her two girls around 10 or 11 maybe younger, their names escape me now. I was given a space in the corner of the lounge/front room for my camp bed using my small pack as a bedside locker for immediate items -washing, shaving, cleaning kit, towel, spare pants/socks etc. I settled myself in calling Mrs. W by her surname and she preferring to use my Christian name, only it was Donald instead of Don, it wasn't a boss and employee relationship at all as she was very friendly. I was her armed escort. Whilst in the house I made myself useful, mainly to fill in the time, and at other times in answer to her request for help. I'd always thought my mother was an expert, or very good at everything she did, and somehow thought all mothers were like that. On this job I was to be enlightened in that respect. I saw her preparing vegetables and said I'll do that, she watched and said you've obviously done this before as my thin peelings covered her chunky cut-offs. It was the same with ironing only I used spare material so I didn't bum the girls dresses, mind I'd never had sisters, but these were just flat bottomed shirts to me. I washed up, cleaned, swept up, and spruced myself up whenever going out with her as escort shopping/friends etc. On two occasions I had to ward off undesirables in the streets, the threat of my Sten gun was an item of fear for them and an extreme measure of comfort to me. Young thugs were known for approaching lone servicemen on the pretence of begging in attempts to snatch a weapon hence mine, like all others should have been, was strapped to my wrist. Physical violence on my part sped them on their way, three of them in the first instance. On the second occasion I was approached suddenly/unexpectedly, attacked in fact by a lone character striking at me with one half of a large pair of tailors scissors. I was in no position to shoot in the crowded street as the weapon was not cocked and he had hold of it with one hand. Somehow I came off best with hardly a scratch, having taken his weapon and retained my own. I must have marked him badly, as another army guy said when he came running to assist, but it was all over in seconds I guess. Mrs. W was full of admiration asking if I had been hurt, the girls looked frightened, we all made our way back with my alertness state fully on edge

A couple of days later sitting just inside the room from the balcony having a coffee, I heard shouting in the street and looked down to see an RAF Cpl being beaten over the head by an Arab. The Cpl was carrying a rifle - I cocked my Sten, I had kept the mag on, and without further thought fired two bursts, about half a magazine, into the stone wall above their heads. I immediately rushed down and met the RAF guy and told him that it was I who fired, he said "the bastard is armed," I said "where 'd go," he said "that big white house over there." We walked quickly towards the house and saw an army patrol of the Lancashire Fusiliers on the double coming towards us having heard the shooting. The Cpl of the LF took control having heard our quick story and posted me on the front entrance to the garage and the RAF Cpl on main entrance to front door saying he would go in with his men and flush him out. At the front we were both ready, within minutes the armed Arab ran out - down the entrance from the front door. There was just one shot, he fell, five yards from the RAF Cpl a tiny hole dead centre in his

forehead and a two inch hole in the back of his head, a revolver on the ground to the front of his hand - empty. A few, three I think, single shots into the air brought a vehicle around to us. I've an idea I wrote and signed a statement as a witness and all left the site, myself getting a thank you from the RAF guy.

Back in the married quarters I sat down to a meal with Mrs. W and the girls, I had my meals with them all the time. I was informed that the major would be back within a week. The afternoon's incident was not discussed in front of the girls. There had also been instructions to vacate the quarters. Military Police were patrolling and calling in. Mrs. W caught me out one day, assistance again of course "would I help the children with their French lessons" heck I knew words like Paris, blancmange and wee wee! I said something like "I'm better at peeling potatoes," back home it would have been doing the spuds. Anyhow in due course suitcases and large trunks appeared which I helped to pack. "Would I pack the Major's clothing" he is so fussy" (or was it particular?) with his uniforms, "I just don't know how to fold them." This I did with my usual expertise, common sense really in my book, but I must have received some learning from somewhere. I'd never packed officer's uniforms and fancy army gear before, or flashy suits and fancy hats. I put paper over, in and around shoes and other footwear and also his leather belts and cross belts, which I've since learnt are Sam Browns. The paper at least stopped the brown polish from getting on the clothing.

At last the Major appeared. Conversation with officers of that rank I'd never had, orders received, advice taken and lectures listened to maybe but I thought he's married to 'er and I get on alright with her, he must be the same - and so it was, they are different at home. He had heard of my exploits and commented that it was a worthwhile exercise then, at dinner in the evening (which I'd helped prepare including a roast) I sat at the table with the family, and another officer and his lady whom I knew not. The conversation was above my head and not of my understanding, so I engaged in light chatter with Mrs. W who was now calling me corporal, and her girls. Eventually the conversation came around to me. "so you had a chance to kill one of those black bastards and missed it did you?" Somewhat surprised I said "it wasn't quite like that sir, I did what I thought was appropriate and mace out my reports accordingly sir," then he said "give the man a drink" and thanked me for looking after his interest. I was then drawn in to the conversation, not fully at ease I must say, men in the lounge, ladies cleaning up, and the girls gone to bed. After a couple of drinks the level of conversation altered, whether they came down a couple of pegs to my level or I went up a couple of pegs to their level, however we met somewhere in the middle I guess. I felt more at ease and gained confidence as the evening wore on. I remember my mother having a 'Sunday voice,' bit of a posh accent when talking to the local vicar or doctor, like some people do when picking up the phone and talking to other than friends.

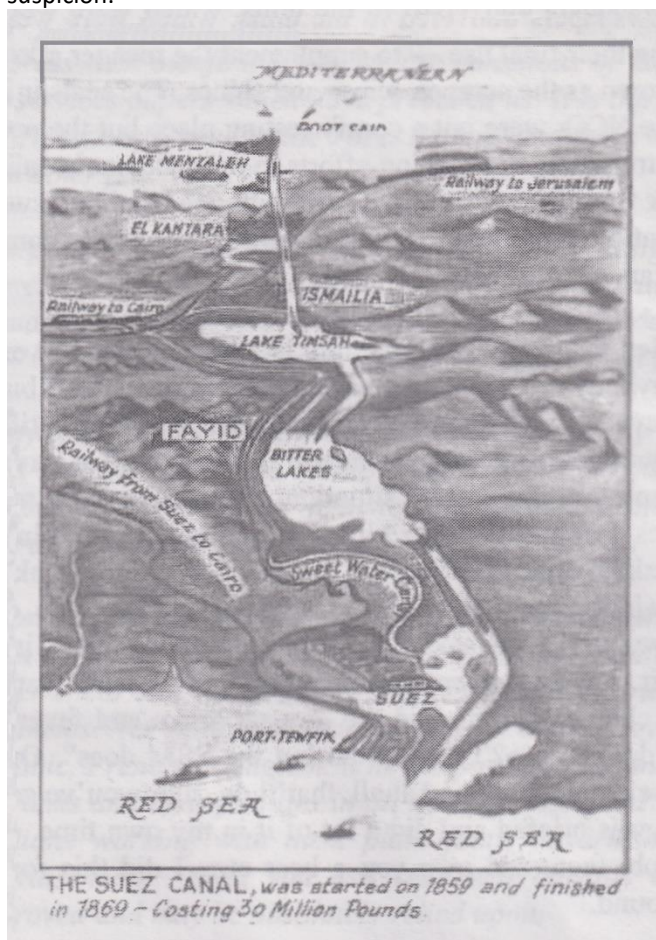
Had I learned anything in this respect unknowingly in my youth? Dad always said "you gotta learn to speak proper." Mother although the less educated of the two, put it over rather better by saying "you must learn to speak nicely."

I had never really mixed with any educated types, apart from the gentleman farmers for whom I had acted as a beater along with others, on their in season game shoots and many of them spoke with an air of superiority, inserting habitual words that I often thought unnecessary, inappropriate, meaningless, superfluous or in fact quite ridiculous, two of which were, "what" for one particular gent and another used super. Both inserted their particular word frequently, where one might insert commas in writing for example or after very brief statements or remarks. It certainly gave them an individuality and appeared to be accepted in their class. Anyone of a lower status with a like habit was subjected to ridicule - funny that isn't it?

I found it more natural, if I can put it that way, speaking to ladies, wives of officers with whom I had made contact during the course of that armed escort duty. Why I'm not sure, I certainly did not consider myself as a ladies man as I was too naive. I'd never had a girlfriend apart from the giggerly school type of attraction, never been alone with a girl and never studied anatomy. I just did not know what I should, or ought to have known. Sex education and books on the subject were unknown to me and there had been no parental instruction either. I had been taught to respect women, never to fight girls, offer up your seat, carry their heavier bags and generally help them because they were weaker. As a boy it was common to see a man doff his hat to female neighbours and friends. Here in Egypt, men would publicly beat their wives with sticks. Health and hygiene films that had a couple of times been inserted into the training routine, dealt only with the naked male, with a very brief reference to the female species and an emphasis on venereal disease and the effects of that on one's person - bit of a yuck film.

My time of living with an attractive lady and her young daughters came to an end, my armed escort duty was fini. Looking back I felt as though I'd been one of the family, even been exposed to provocation as a bathrobe revealed a thigh in passing by, or a breast in bending over but, other than that, the only evil deeds, if one can say evil, were in my imagination. The young girls did on the odd occasion, appear rather forgetfully unclothed, to be hastily chastised by mummy, as they called out goodnight to Donald. Mrs. W had learnt of my past, revealed over a glass of beer or a coffee in the passing of some quiet evenings and I too learnt more about what I had previously thought of as the upper class but as a woman I thought she was sadly lacking in domestic skills. Of course my only comparison was my own mother, I now know to be pretty tough to match.

Back in the tent lines, the Regiment had now moved to Minden Camp Fayid, which was further on south beyond Moascar and Ismailia from its previous location. I settled in to roughing it again, no firm structures just the canvas roof and walls supported by poles and ropes. The camp was much the same but no piggery, the latrines were DTL's (deep trench latrines) replacing the buckets of Gothic Camp. The general layout was also different. The whole area of Fayid was very much a large military settlement housing many and various regiments and smaller units, each contained within its own barbed wire perimeter obstacle fences and each responsible for its own security. Hostility abounded amongst the Egyptians along the whole of the Canal Zone now but many of the locals had come to rely on the bountiful living that the British army had supplied to them. Some continued on with their service in the little shops that made up the shopping centre but all who remained were regarded with suspicion.



The HQ of MELF was local, there were garrison cinemas, a garrison hospital, large electric power station and mains water supply

The Royal Air Force had an airfield nearby but I knew little of their operations, quite a large military police detachment existed and was usually given a wide berth by us 'Toms\*. They controlled the equivalent of the civil garrisons amongst their many other duties. Most Egyptian employees left their garrison employment under other pressure it was assumed, leaving some holes in the unit administration.

Normal training continued with some emphasis on unarmed combat and how to deal with persons trying to disarm you (a bit late on my part), nothing like knowing the official wax though. It's worth pointing out of course that most military successes are won by the element of surprise and doing the unexpected (no wonder some very young officers do well). However for the uninitiated, some way is a starting point, rather than having no wax at all.

Physical training became a regular routine in the programme and I found myself having been given the responsibility for troop fitness during these periods, chosen I guess because I represented the squadron in some sports and athletics and dabbled in most, considered a strong swimmer and thought to be fit, not exactly the attributes of a physical training instructor (PTI) which I was not. I knew various exercises yes, but the right way to go about it, no. A Cpl from one of the other troops gave me a 1946 pamphlet on the subject, and I bumbled on.

Much had been going on in the Canal Zone about which we knew very little. We were getting some UK newspapers delivered to the units, which were well read, thumbed and creased before getting their final use — to supplement the meagre allowance/issue for DTL use 3 little sheets known as the scraper, wiper and shiner. The seats in the DTL, despite the efforts of the hygiene NCO, were not a comfy resting place but the newspapers were some respite if you were struggling and making efforts to produce one's daily contribution under constant aerial attack from flies. One could read with one hand and swat with the other and then finalise the event by completing the paper work, as no job is complete until the paper work is done, so we are so often told!

Volunteers were called for from within the unit to fill vacancies left open by the departure of local workers, anybody with experience of tailor, boot repairs, barber or laundry was asked to come forward, all ranks were to do their own washing until something could be organised. The army of course does have an arm to carry out this service but I guess it had to be got up and running in the present situation. The duties were re-advertised and with the backing of mates I committed the ultimate soldiers sin, I volunteered to help as a barber. The SSM asked what experience I'd had, "nothing to speak of sir" I replied, he looked out of his window and bellowed to some character, who doubled up stood to attention and said "yes sir," SSM said "you need a haircut," "yes Sir," "good you agree," right Cpl cut his hair. The equipment was produced out of a cupboard along with a towel (nothing electric), a chair drawn up and the guy sat down and feverishly asked, "do you know what you are doing Corp?," I said "no but the SSM does." On completion I stood back to hear the verbal, "that's not bad at all, that'll do, right you've got the job." What had I let myself in for! I was briefed and did a lot of it in my own time. A few tins came my way to do a good job, fags, and owe you a beer etc., I did this for some time until an official barber was found.

On Thursday 1st November 1951 issue No 1 of The Canal Zone News appeared, a copy of which I retained out of interest and from that, I have extracted excerpts now reproduced as being worthy, informative and interesting as a back up to my story of events.

**PERSONAL MESSAGE from GENERAL SIR BRIAN ROBERTSON Bt, GBE, KCMG, KC VO., CB, DSO, MC, ADC,  
Commander in Chief, Middle East Land Forces.**

*The Canal Zone news has been started for two reasons. The first is as an insurance against interruption in the supply of newspapers from Cairo. The second is to provide a reliable source of accurate up to date news for the garrison of the Canal Zone; all newspapers produced in the Delta are subject to Egyptian censorship, and, however much they may wish to publish the whole truth and nothing but the truth, they are not in a position to do so.*

*The Canal Zone News is not a newspaper but a news sheet. That is to say, it reports facts but does not comment on them. Our papers from England are arriving in increased numbers now, and we must look to them for the comment and criticism which a newspaper provides.*

*I wish the Canal Zone News good luck. It has an important task to fulfil, incidentally I realise that it has been started under circumstances of some difficulty: we must make allowance for that.*

## **EDITORIAL**

On going to press with our first issue, we are conscious of the long line of distinguished services papers which have preceded us. It is thirty years since the "Winners Times" appeared in the Ypres Salient, and there were probably earlier ones in other places.

Most of these papers were lively, witty, illustrated, and designed to bring relief from boredom as well as to give news. Although up to date and reliable news will certainly be given, the Commanders In Chief Middle East have designed this "Canal Zone News" for a further most important purpose.

In 1936 treaty obligations were freely and co-operatively entered into between Great Britain and Egypt. These mutual provisions have now been prematurely repudiated by the very minister, the present Prime Minister of Egypt, Nalas Paslia who negotiated them in 1936.

The repudiation was followed by a campaign of deliberate misrepresentation and downright invention unparalleled in international relationships. The Egyptian Government and its ministers simply cannot be trusted either to tell the truth themselves or to permit it to appear in the Egyptian papers, whether in Arabic, French or English. The purpose of the Canal Zone News is to give all ranks and their families in all three services and to all English speaking civilians working with them plain facts, unvarnished truth and balanced appraisal. What you will read will be fully authenticated, officially approved and may be absolutely relied upon.

Where for any reason connected with the needs of security services or public policy it is not found possible to print full information on matters which affects your unit or its families you will not be given half truth or evasion. It is our determination to take you into official confidence to the utmost extent possible. The same frankness and accuracy will be the principles underlying our reportage and criticism of the material published in the Egyptian newspapers. A considerable duty also devolves upon this paper to make fair comment upon, and to issue correction where necessary of any inaccuracies which may occur from time to time in our British contemporaries. One such correction appears in this first news sheet. General Sir George Erskine in his broadcast; made it clear that British Forces in Egypt intend to stand firmly upon their undoubted rights under the Anglo/Egyptian Treaty of 1936 without fear of intimidation and personal violence.

That the British have not lost the power to withstand with courage and uprightness acts of violence, burning and looting was proved by the steadfast behaviour of the women and children in Ismailia and Arayshia on the morning of 16th October. General Erskine echoed the thought in the hearts of all our British people in the Canal Zone when he assured the Egyptians that we should in no circumstances be "starved out, forced out or knocked out."

### **EGYPTIAN GAZETTE**

Freedom of the press in Egypt is restricted, and much of what you read in "The Egyptian Gazette" has been censored and is biased in favour of the policy of the Egyptian Government.

### **THE FACTS**

Fayid Police Officer Removed from the Canal Zone. British Military authorities, after full investigations over a period, have obtained conclusive proof that an Egyptian Police Officer (Capt. Said Lolfi El Koheli), of Rayid North Police Station has been exercising his influence to the detriment of British Forces within the Zone. At approximately 3.30 p.m. on 30th October 1951, he was removed from his place of duty, placed outside the Canal Zone, and told he would not be allowed to return.

### **ROYAL AIR FORCE**

Business as Usual - The Royal Air Force continues with its normal flying training programme, making full use of the freedom to fly over the Delta Region which is its right under the 1936 Treaty.

### **NEWSPAPERS**

A Transport Command York arrived at Fayid on Saturday afternoon carrying an unexpected, but most welcome parcel containing some 2500 copies of Fridays UK daily papers with detailed accounts of the election day events. It was not possible within the remaining hours of daylight to distribute these papers throughout the Canal Zone. But Army and Air Force units in the Fayid/Fanara area were able to rejoice in

an abundance of news from home. It is hoped that this delivery was the forerunner of a series of increasing magnitude for which a request has been made and for which, if forthcoming, prompt and widespread delivery will be arranged.

#### **ANTI-BRITISH PROPAGANDA**

Pamphlets produced by the Egyptians and written in English have been found in Tel-el-Kebir addressed to British soldiers. The text of these messages accuses British troops of shooting civilians, and threatens reprisals, with injunctions to "get out" and "blame your leaders for what is coming to you". This is additional evidence of Egyptian attempts to aggravate the present situation.

#### **INTIMIDATION**

Today's "Al Misry" shows a photograph of "tough" Egyptians being medically examined. They are part of a gang, which it states, is going to enter the Canal Zone and to kill any Egyptians still working for the British Army by Saturday. Warning notices printed in Arabic suddenly appeared today at a number of key points in Ismailia. They said that all Egyptians working for the British Authorities must leave their employment at once or else they would be killed the notices were not signed.

#### **"THE FIRST EGYPTIAN WOMAN MARTYR"**

At 5.45p.m. on Sunday, 28th October a grey Chevrolet truck filled with hay approached the British road block on the Cairo/Ismailia road near Tel-el- Kebir. Although it was challenged at all three check points it refused to stop. At the third check point it began to slow down, but then accelerated away from the position. It was then fired upon by two sentries in accordance with the orders they had received. The truck disappeared in the direction of Ismailia at great speed. A party of British troops gave chase in a ration truck but although they travelled ten miles they could not overtake it.

Two hours later an Egyptian Army Officer arrived at the road block and asked why a truck belonging to the Royal estate had been fired upon. He added that a woman had been killed and a man wounded. He was informed that the only truck which had been fired upon was one which had refused to stop when challenged.

The sentries at the road block denied seeing a woman in the truck, but stated that she may have been concealed in the hay. No sign of a dead body or of a wounded man was seen at the road block at any time.

#### **A CORRECTION**

On 27th October a London newspaper published this statement:- "A Royal Air Force source stated today that 500 women and children have been evacuated by air to Britain in the past five days, while a further 159 are returning from Port Said in the liner Oronsay these are all RAF families. "

In fact, the passengers flown home from Fayid during the period in question consisted almost exclusively of families repatriated on normal overseas tour expiry; only one family volunteering for premature repatriation was included.

#### **THE NAVY DOES IT AGAIN**

Behind the bald statement that no British ships have been held up by the Egyptian action from passing through the Canal there lies the story of the part played by the Royal Navy in countering each move before it can take effect.

The normal disposition of HM ships in this area is one frigate on Middle East patrol in the Gulf of Aqaba. None the less, the Navy was prepared for the present crisis. On Monday 15th October the Egyptian Government decreed the abrogation of the 1936 treaty. On Tuesday rioting broke out. On Wednesday a cruiser arrives at Port Said. On Thursday a frigate arrived at Suez. On Friday a flotilla of destroyers arrived as well. Since those early days there have been some changes in Task Force 52. better known as the Canal Force, under the operational command of the Senior British Naval Officer and Flag Officer Liaison, Middle East, Rear Admiral LM.R. Campbell, DSO, also and bar who flies his flag at Fayid. The text then goes on to give the composition, a further paragraph under the sub heading, no Surrender as follows:— In their fruitless attempts to obstruct the passage of shipping, the Egyptians have put many difficulties in the way

of the British, the text further continues with the many examples of action and inaction.

There were further write ups under the following headings: Home and World News, News for Families, Local Everyday News and Forces Broadcasting, giving details of the local radio, other snippets were,

#### **HOME AGAIN**

Those British servicemen whose wives and children were prevented from landing at Port Said and who were subsequently returned to England from the Canal Zone owing to the present situation, will be interested to learn that the troopship "Empress of Australia" is expected to arrive in Liverpool today.

#### **CHEERS**

With effect from 5th November NAAFI are making certain reductions in the prices of British brewed beers, which will replace supplies of the locally produced Stella beer. All deliveries of Stella have ceased and supplies are only being continued from existing stocks.

Reputed quart bottles of popular brands of British beer now retailing at 9 pt. will be reduced to 6 pt. and reputed pint bottles from 5% to 3 pt. The prices of Bass, Worthington, Guinness and Stouts will remain as at present. This temporary decision has been made by the NAAFI board of management during the present state of emergency in the Canal Zone.

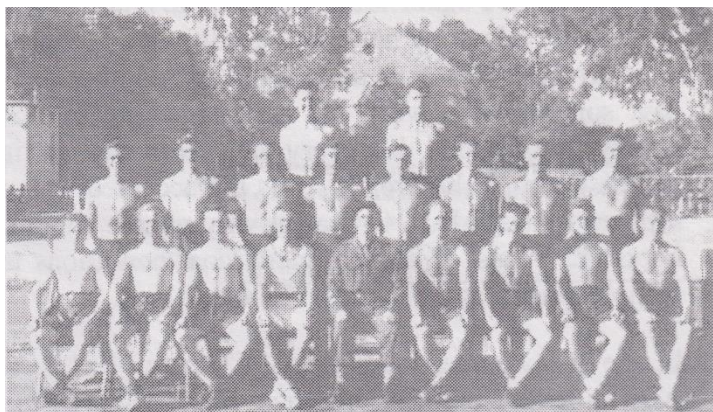
No Food Rationing. A small paragraph to reassure families and refute false rumours which have been circulating within the Canal Zone.

With the Canal Zone News in operation we were very much more aware of what was going on. Gradually information came through that reinforcements would be arriving in the Zone in the new year, reports of the odd skirmish appeared security was becoming all the more important and quite a headache for some in some areas.

There was an enormous reserve of transport of all kinds at the vehicle depot located at Tel- el-Kebir - tracked, halftracks and light tanks, cranes and all type of plant machinery. Around the whole depot a minefield had been laid to deter would-be thieves, anti-tank mines and anti-personnel mines, laid between two large, thick wire obstacle fences and well sign posted in English and Arabic. Even so there were, from time to time, reports of attempted entry.

In early November, I and a couple of others from the unit, were sent on a six week junior leaders physical training course held at Moascar, maybe my earlier opinions had reached higher ears. The first week of the course, I thought, was to find out if all who had been sent on the course were suitable. The course was run by a Warrant Officer of the Army Physical Training Corps (as far as I knew) assisted by wiry thin over energetic Sgts. Sgts I believe being the lower ranks in the APTC.

PTI'S COURSE  
Moascar Gym





We were all put through our paces, about four hours exercise of one sort or another and two forty five minute periods of classroom instruction per day. I was in my arena of interest; I had always enjoyed and had done well in PT and sports as some of the old school reports I still have, show I had followed this through in my after school activities, right up until and after I'd joined up.

As one would assume they were looking for potentials; young men who were likely to make the grade, i.e. good performers and with the right characteristics and potential leadership qualities. As already stated I had attended a Cadre Course (a course for junior leaders), which I thought afterwards may have been to my advantage. Leadership from the PT angle is rather different from the soldierly angle, PT as emphasised from day one, was to be enjoyed, encouraged and well managed, and one could not get the first two unless the third existed, fitness was a gradual process to be managed properly. Leadership had to be cheerful, pleasant and yet firm enough to remain in control and enjoyable to both class and instructor. There were amongst us, very good performers without leadership, and some very good leaders who were lousy performers. In this particular following, to lead by example was a must, and as with many skills, practices and processes and modes of training in the army, there was a devised way of going about it, exercise followed a certain sequence to ensure the bodies were fully exercised, as I remember, Arms and Shoulders - Trunk and Legs - Lateral - Abdominal and Dorsal, the basics anyway. It's certainly true that you get a healthy mind in a healthy body and vice versa, and healthy people can enjoy life - they look great, feel great and are able to withstand the strains and stresses and discomfort of military life as will occur, very much better than the unfit. Treatment and advice for minor injuries, stiffness and strains, fatigue, exposure to heat and cold, dehydration and heat stroke were all part of the course. The six weeks went very quickly, and it is was the only course of the many that I attended during my army service that I attained a 1st placing.

Back in camp at Fayid I learned that normal training, as we had known it, had ceased. The unit had become a working one. As an engineer unit it had been put to task to furnish facilities by way of camp structures, to assist in the housing of the expected reinforcements in the Canal Zone. Tradesmen were now getting some practical experience in the field as they say (desert out there). There was plenty of work for plumbers, pipe fitters, bricklayers, carpenters and joiners, electricians, and of course the Field Park Squadron with all its plant machinery levelling and grading the various sites. Many Camp structures were stored and held in parcels at Royal Army Ordnance Stores for just such a purpose, and just needed assembling on site, so our Engineer section trucks took a hammering carting stores and supplies, which kept the drivers fully occupied for a change.

Christmas once again was upon us (1951) and the usual fare was available and served as previously. We were now only getting one complete day off a week, Sundays, but Xmas gave an extra two days and New Year another day. Boxing Day was virtually a sporting day, something to work off the hangovers, but Guards and duties went on regardless, twenty four hours a day every day, there was no time off during the day for those doing guards the night before, this was the accepted way of life. The 'lowly' Junior NCO's and sappers found it hard to reason why guards should be carried out in best uniforms, best boots etc. whilst almost in operational conditions tramping around in sand sometimes in complete darkness, but that's the way it was.

In one of my earlier tasks as an NCO's i/c I had been given a platoon of men from the East African Rifle Company, big men, black and well built to work with. The job was to assist plumbers and pipe fitters, digging trenches and holes to specifications, a copy of which I was given. They were a pleasant bunch of men but like most human beings rather shy of hard work, although quite able. We were being pushed to make faster progress to meet target dates, the junior officers wanting to impress their commanding officers, who wanted to please their district commanders, who wanted to show their commanding ability to the general officer commanding, who would be delighted to inform the minister of defence he could cope as we at the time imagined.

I got on quite well with these black fellers, learning a little of their lingo, "jambo askari" I greeted them in the mornings to get the reply "jambo ba wanna." I was surprised they could speak far more English than I could speak 'Swahili.' Anyhow I put my instructions through their NCO's and gave them measuring sticks as regards the depth of the trenches and laid out string lines for direction. Rather than stand around in a supervisory role I worked alongside the sections in turn taking my place in a digging team, with an occasional stroll around to see that all was going well. I'm sure I got more respect that way although some of my friends disagreed.

Later, a few C & J's, myself included, found ourselves constructing timber and CGI structures from pre-cut parcels as previously described. We found that there was a fair bit of waste in the system, many timbers had warped

badly and were cut and used for other purposes, and a fair bit of timber had been damaged in transportation, half lap joints broken off and large splits making them unusable, plenty of softwood timber was available for form work so any shortfall in kit structures was easily made up. Another task I found myself responsible for and allowed to organise as I saw fit was the manufacture of tent slabs now in great demand, 2ft x 2ft and 2" thick or (60cm x 60cm by 50mm). To start I had two cement mixers, quite large and petrol engine driven, water supply laid to site in 3/4" galv. pipe with 4 tap outlets, a big shed to house form work and whatever, three Carpenters plus two other sappers to operate the mixers and a large section from the African Rifle Company.

A couple of days were spent preparing the site, constructing form work, each frame to cater for three slabs, 60 of these were made to start with from 2x2 timber, sand was stock piled, bagged cement brought in, hessian bags of 4" and 5" nails, hoses and fittings, galvanised buckets, measuring boxes were made up to ensure a consistency of mixes, gallon tins of whitewash and brushes, shovels, brooms, rakes, timber and metal floats and wheelbarrows. Carpenters were responsible for their own tools. Once set up the work started, all having been briefed on their responsibilities. I had asked the coloured Sgt. if we could get the same men each day as it would be preferable to get all the work flowing smoothly. The carpenters additional duties were to supervise pouring, compaction and finish and also the curing and stacking of slabs. The area also had to be kept tidy and free of debris and the mixer operators to concentrate on quality control.



Tent slab formwork with Gordon Syson and the open air tent slab factory, workers from the East African Rifle Company



Below ground services with bricky LCpl Nabber Prince and DTL formwork and foot troubles



Ken Monks MT Cpl With the MT office store knocked up for him

The work progressed very well the Africans appearing to enjoy the work. The breakage rate of slabs was less than expected and the cement mixers were employed for the full working day. Orders came to increase the output, a visit was made to the site by superiors to ascertain progress, procedures, any hold ups, supply of materials, rest periods and lunch breaks etc.

The curing time had to remain as was. The only thing apparently overlooked was that the sapper contingent put in an hour of so called unproductive work each day, cleaning and maintaining the mixers, tools and equipment and preparing for the following day. Regardless of how, the output was to be doubled, there were no other mixers available, labour as required was available, there was no shortage of materials therefore hand mixing was the only available additional option. From the work point of view I'd already earned the nickname of 'Eager Beaver' within the troop, since I had previously met with all expectations said to be conscientious and even called a slave driver.

Taking the only option extra bodies were required to make up and maintain form work, extra measuring boxes required, since bags of cement were in volume 1 % cubic feet that was taken as the unit of measurement, more shovels, barrows, rakes, brushes, floats and an additional section of riflemen to form two extra mixing gangs and a start was made. Within days the hand mixing had outpaced the cement mixers, an air of urgency had been created, more than double the amount of form work required, double the space for curing there were more breakages in the form work and the finished product and therefore more waste, but this was considered acceptable for the extra results. The whole process carried on for weeks never being able to build up a stockpile. Other employment found me constructing the wooden box seats for DTL's, made up in sixes, so as to enable reasonable handling, transportation, assembling and placing on site. At this time I found myself working with a national serviceman, George who was a sapper within the troop and a time-served apprentice carpenter and joiner in civilian life. I do not know whether a class one army C & J would have matched up to him, I never made that grade in carpentry deciding to concentrate on field engineering as it was then known. I was at the time a class 3 and George was not impressed with my work, as he said, "it did the job, but a bit rough". I learned a lot from him watching him carefully, he used a lot of timber he would have rejected back home and showed me how to sharpen a saw, hold and cut with it, which saws were the best, cutting through a piece of 6 x 2 and leaving half the pencil line on a spot on square cut.

Many months were spent on these working tasks and there were many like myself who were first timers at such military construction works. With our efforts satisfactory achievements were made to meet requirements. I would not have had an overall picture of what the whole squadron was employed on, only the troop of which I was a member, now numbering around thirty five to forty. There were two other troops involved in the camp constructions and we were all backed up by the HQ troop and MT troop who, to some extent, were still carrying out their normal duties, administrating and transporting us. In fact even as a troop we were divided as regards our working places and I often wondered what the Tp. Sgt. and Tp. Comd. did all day long. Visits to my own site were rare, I say my, meaning the one where I was employed, with usually five or six others I did my own ordering, recording, and reporting.

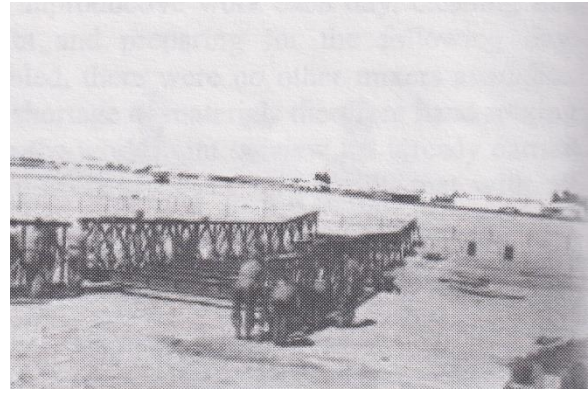
Mid 1952, having completed eighteen months in MELF, a number of men including myself were notified of and given leave in Cyprus. Actually the leave pass stated from 1100 hrs. 2nd June '52 to 2559 hrs. 16th June '52 for the purpose of proceeding to Famagusta, Cyprus. This was a mixed community of Greeks, Turks and Cypriots on an island in the Mediterranean Sea almost due north of Port Said but nearer to Turkey. We sailed in a ship called the "Fair Star" to the Golden Sands leave camp at Famagusta for fourteen days including travel, all paid for by the military. The accommodation was exactly the same as we had just left with identical tents. Meal times were over extended periods to cater for late risers early and late diners etc. There were no duties obviously and bicycles were available at free loan or taxis if required.



LEAVE IN CYPRUS  
After a swim in Golden Sands leave camp, touring bikes  
with Paddy Cochrane and O'Neil and visit to Cyprus  
Monastery with Nobby Clark and Paddy O'Neil

A shop and canteen existed in the camp to cater for all requirements but most spent time out of camp touring around, unless on the seaside sands adjacent to the camp. I remember one pub/club, whatever it was called, the 'Spitfire' (not sure as to whether that was the official name) but inside a balcony overlooked a smallish dance floor from which I understood, but never saw, the occasional 'inebriates' hung, swung and dropped to dance, a popular place for soldiers incognito. It was high on the list for military police visits, our own 'Red Caps' stationed on the Island for our own protection. Certain areas were out of bounds, the old city being one example that comes to mind. There was much to see and areas to investigate as well as rest to catch up on and the blue warm waters of the Mediterranean to enjoy. It was over all too quickly before we were on our way back to MELF the Canal Zone, Egypt

A few weeks after arriving back I was sent on an upgrading course, Field Engineering at Gebel Maryam. It was on this course that I met up with some members of a parachuting engineer unit known as 9 Para. Sqn. RE (one of my earlier choices of a posting who tended to be elite, as I then thought. I learned that they had to pass a very selective fitness course prior to parachuting, they certainly looked very fit. The course was quite intensive, covering a lot of ground quickly as though it might have been revision including bailey bridging wet and dry, of which I had done very little up to that point which I found difficult and confusing. I found some subjects a breeze, others very involved, as some aspects were quite new to me. I guessed I had not been around long enough really to have acquired the knowledge that others apparently had. I struggled through with the course and realised that I still had much to learn. From my later observations and service I learned that it was a very condensed course.



Field Engineering course at Gable Maryam adjacent to Suez Canal and basic Bailey bridging on the course

**Troop Football Team**

Hardisty, Clark, Self, Bates, Monks, Stevens,  
Dewitt, Barber & apologies for unknown  
persons again



**16 Field Squadron Football Team**

Green, Squadron Sergeant Major, Self,  
McCarthy & apologies to unknown  
persons now forgotten

A certain amount of construction work was still going on, and the other field squadron, 42 Field Sqn., had been employed with similar work during the year. A new squadron had formed up, 30 Field Sqn. RE, which now occupied space within the Minden Camp perimeter. This eased regimental duties for all concerned, no one liked guard or any other duties that used up ones otherwise spare time. Competitive sporting fixtures remained throughout, in fact those competing at regimental level were often given time off from work to train as inter unit rivalry was very strong. Squadron and troop matches and games in the unit took place in our free time and attracted quite a spectator following.

During the long working periods on camp construction and/or improvement we met men from various other units, working with or getting assistance from them. I was still keen on fitness and trained whenever I could for athletics. Field events were my speciality; javelin and discus I appeared to do well at, cross country running was really an endurance test out here and not favoured by many, the shot, pole vault and throwing the cricket ball I entered for, and made up numbers for the hop, step and jump and the long jump, I liked swimming as a form of recreation but rarely entered in any events as we had some exceptional swimmers in the unit. I was keen to the point of taking a javelin to the work site, in order that I might practice during work breaks. Fortunately, or unfortunately whichever way you look at it, at a time when we had the labour of the Royal East African Rifles

(think they had the title of Royal) I had previously undergone a small coaching course in throwing the javelin during which I was advised and trained to throw in a style that differed from my schooldays training which, with practice, would greatly improve my throw. I did in fact gain quite a few meters, many feet in those days. A little away from the site and with a friend I practiced with more than some interest from our friendly 'Sambos' who quite openly laughed at my efforts. I was after all to represent the Regiment at the next inter RE units athletics meeting. Anyhow unperturbed I continued and a little later had a chat with these black infantry 'fellars' and in the course of doing so invited them to have a throw the following day. Well, seeing was believing, I could now understand their laughter which some may have taken as ridicule, some of these guys would have dwarfed the likes myself and weighed half as much again, against my eleven and a half stone (73 Kg). Each one of the eight or so had a throw, beating my own by anything from 30-50 feet (10-15 meters) and without taking a run up to the line. I was hoping to improve to the 160 ft. mark (I'd heard that the Duke of Edinburgh could throw 180 ft.). Ever since that time I've always imagined black men throwing spears and somehow the name of 'Sambo' has stuck with me (no racial inference intended). I have a little array of MELF medals (sports); five for the javelin, two for discus, two for football, one tug of war and one swimming. I did add to them in later service

One evening, I guess it must have been a winter evening as the tent walls were drawn over. I was chatting to tent mates when a voice called out "hello, anyone at home," "who's that", was the hushed reply in the tent, "dunno", "come in" I yelled. The door flap moved in and up supported by a blue beret sporting a Royal Corp, of Signals badge, "looking for Don Newman" the guy said, "you've found him," I said as he completed his entry and stood up. "Bloody hell, Will Huggett," who was a bloke I went to school with "wha'd ya know." What a surprise, I had no idea he was in the army let alone out here, he had come out with all the reinforcements I'd guessed later. We spent a good couple of hours reminiscing, he knew I was out here made the efforts and succeeded in finding me. He gave me his location and we both said we would make contact later, but for some reason we never did and I never ever saw him again, although I know he left the army and had a fish stall on the seafront at Folkstone in Kent, UK which I learnt from his elder brother when I paid him a surprise visit in 1985.

Towards the latter part of 1952, one Bren gun carrier was allocated to each field troop I became the NCO's i/c and was to look after a small section to travel within when required. One big advantage of the vehicle was that it could go anyplace where others dare not including over sand dunes, deep ruts, soft sand and fairly steep cross country inclines. The disadvantages were it was uncomfortable and very hot with heavy all metal surrounds, open topped with exposure to the sun at all times for the driver and crew. There was obvious protection from small arms fire should it ever be required.



Above – As IC with the new Bren Gun Carrier

Right – Troop en route to exercise



Work on a regular basis had tailed off before the third Christmas I had to spend in MELF and a return to training took place. Another exercise was being prepared for in the out and beyond and before we had realised what it was all about we were on our way, weapon training map reading such as it was, foot patrols marching by day and sometimes night in the cold and silence. The night always cold and felt even more so because of the contrasting warmth of the midday sun. Compass reading was explained and explained individually to ensure all understood, the prominent features of the bright starlight skies were pointed out, but if all were like me, few are remembered - the northern star, plough, great bear, seven sisters and the milky way? I had asked prior to the exercise if I might be able to take a driving course, via the MT, NCO Ken who was a friend of mine. He fixed it and I fitted in whenever there was an opportunity and this was one of those opportunities, as we changed location over the flat stony ground almost daily. It was great no obstacles, nothing to hit. I had had unofficially quite a bit of experience behind the wheels of a Land Rover, 5 ton truck and more recently the Bren gun carrier, the latter which was not in use on the exercise. My aim was to get a licence which, a little later on, was achieved without bother on our return to camp under the auspices of the MTO both written and practical.

The National Service NCO's had come and gone and I soldiered on. I was promoted to Corporal as a section comd., something I'd often done as a L/Cpl Anyway. My duties within the Squadron remained as was but from a regimental point of view, I carried out the duties of guard comd. as the duty came around. There was still a problem, political in higher circles I guessed, but requiring active alertness in our armed state whenever we left the camp surrounds. Road blocks were another duty we found ourselves involved in for several days at a time, during which we were self-contained. Five men on active duty 24 hrs. a day, we lived within call of the actual duty position, a canvas roof as usual.

Weapons were carried or within reach at all times loaded and safety catch on. All vehicles, military and civilian, were stopped, checked and inspected if thought necessary by the duty personnel, both armed. Such checks and inspections, in fact every vehicle that approached, was at all times within the sights of a Bren gun trained on them, with order to fire under given circumstances as thought fit, or as ordered by the duty patrol. The road block consisted of 44 gallon drums filled with sand/rocks and painted white, positioned so that vehicles had to slow down and snake their way through. The Bren gun was positioned in view of road users within a sandbagged enclosed firing position. There was one tent on site and two tents further from the road.



Road Blocks  
All part of duties at various times & enjoying a roadblock bath





Point Duty & Concertina wire which was part of our own security



I was called to investigate one dark night, two wavering approaching lights and no noise. As the lights approached they were high above the road surface, still no noise, still wavering. I ordered cover and walked beyond the road block with a flashlight on to intercept, still unsure - still no idea - I waited with baited breath, to find relief in an approaching camel, the soft pads still hardly making a sound, an armed Arab seated high with small reflected lights either side of the hump or humps. I beckoned him towards the duty position, he then dismounted from the kneeling animal and with broken English and crumbling Arabic (my local dialect was almost non-existent) it was ascertained from papers carried etc. that he was a member of a 'hashish patrol' and appeared quite friendly towards us. He was allowed to continue and reported on.

One particular task worthy of mention, was the removal of which was to me, a huge generator plant from the Fayid power station. Taken on a recce of the job by the Tp. Comd. to meet an Engineer S/Sgt. who outlined the simple requirements, simple to him. which were unusual to say the least and complicated to me on first sighting. However on a step by step procedure it turned out to be simple, just the control required at one stage to be critical for ease of removal. Stores required for the job were already on site and a warning order for a D8 bulldozer given, it was to be my job.

The complete back wall up to gable height of the large housing building had to be removed. Metal stanchions supporting timber railings, on to which metal sheeting was secured, were all removed with care (the original design was such to cater for such action). The holding down bolts one inch in diameter, of which there were several either side and both ends, the nuts and washers of these were removed. Eight traversing jacks (10 ton jacks from memory) were positioned, four either side at jacking up points. After having explained their use and method of operation we made a start, one man per jack and one man checker to watch jack operators on each side. Heavy metal chocks with large timber beams were positioned for use, the jacks were adjusted to jacking points and strain taken, and double checks made from that point. Jack levers were operated on word of command only, down up, down up, down up. Checkers to watch that jackers fully complied, that jacks worked, no slips and all OK. Once above holding down bolt height, horizontal movement was made under similar strict control to the buildings edge on the buildings base, where a higher vertical position was required, and then chocked for safety. Unused railway sleeper timbers were brought in from the outside compound, liberally coated with what I called cart grease from drums provided which was spread with flat headed shovels. They were then inserted from either side under the flat runners of the huge generator, at a guesstimate now 30 ft. long 12 ft. high and 12 ft. wide (10x4x4 mtr.) A sleeper slip way coated likewise from the rear of the building to the centre of the compound was nearing completion when the D8 bulldozer arrived. The generator was lowered on to its greased level base, jacks and chocks removed and was towed out with ease. Task completed and a bit more heavy engineering notched up to my credit, but reason for removal still unknown to me, others would have had the responsibility for repair, replacement and or reinstallation. I never knew. The nearest I ever got to a like task was removing a 50 ton tank from a bog in later service.

At some time earlier vegetables ceased to exist in our diet, watermelons, pumpkins and like fruit and veggies were said to have been contaminated via syringe, and accordingly all local produce ceased. Those of us there at the time will never forget the meals of glue like 'pom' (tinned powdered potato), salty fish and sometimes meat



if we were lucky. Vitamin tablets were given as a substitute for the absent veggies. I am not sure how long this went on for now, but at one stage all in the unit were requested to supply a sample of an uncontaminated bowel movement and labelled corked test tubes were made available via the SSM's office. Those couple of days were a laugh a minute listening to related stories of blokes with the runs endeavouring to catch a sample, those who were just the opposite and did not have a spatula walking back from the DTL's as though carrying an ice cream. Some saw a chance for revenge to the Sergeant Major for an unwarranted extra duty by way of a liberal smearing on the outside and then there was the story of one who picked up a large crows deposit. Office comments were unknown, I guess the samples were eventually subjected to analysis by the medical corps or whoever.

Other occasions had seen our diet restricted to sandwiches and that had never been nearer the mark, for they were indeed 'sandwiches brought about by inclement weather that caused high winds resulting in dust storms we knew as 'Kamseens' sometimes lasting for three or four days, and whirl winds that took all things loose skywards, hot desert winds that brought much discomfort. The cookhouse as such closed down and sandwiches were prepared and wrapped in so called dust-proof rooms, cheese and com beef mainly with the obvious grains of crunchy sand. All work and training ceased and all, as far as I was aware, remained within the tent lines closed in, sweating freely and the fine dusty sand sticking. Any movement that caused ones bare flesh to touch the metalwork of the bed frame found it rather more than warm. Drinking plenty of water was an essential thing to do as well as one of the more pleasant things in such situations. Most tents had a 'Chattie' (local purchase) in which to store water, a porous type of clay-like container that sweats and in doing so cools the water. The weather as described must be one of the worst that one can endure if caught out in the open. Even under cover the eyes, nostrils and mouth become gritty, sand collects and itches around certain parts of the body - ears armpits and crutch - to scratch is tempting and abrasive.

A later troop detachment found us in Port Suez, the southern end of the Canal where it passes out into the Gulf of Suez and thence into the Red Sea. Various employment tasks were given to the troop. To commence with I was employed in the erection of large power poles, concrete ones at that, which appeared to be a bit of a trial and error job to start with even the troop Sgt. remaining on site which was rather unusual. All the poles had been delivered, laid out and actual positions pegged and large deep base holes had to be dug by hand to a depth of six feet, using long stout timbers as cantilevers, guy ropes, pulleys and anchorages, with three ton trucks supplying most of the power. Initially attempts were made to erect the poles with a tow rope via the cantilever and the vehicles in four wheel drive. After a couple of breakages, well one broken pole and one cracked, there was a rethink and a new approach to the task. More ropes, double and treble blocks and anchorages appeared on site. Looking back it is now so easy to be critical, it would appear that we just did not have the necessary experience in our working numbers at the time. However the job was eventually completed to the satisfaction of those in charge, although I did not see or take part in the final methods used as I and a couple of others were moved on to undertake other jobs, but out of interest as with any 'stuff up' (the way we referred to any job that didn't go right) we discussed it later as a lesson for the future.

Weeks later, all with more experience under our collective belts, we returned to Fayid.

## **HEALTH AND HYGIENE**

Whilst perusing my many and varied thoughts all based on facts of the past. The tended to omit some of the domestic things that will always exist in life where ever it may be Generally the age of most military personnel, especially those exposed to the rigors and discomforts of mother nature, is very young, being the early and mid-twenties of our three score years and ten. Fortunately these are the years just prior to and up to the prime wellbeing of mankind, or so we are led to believe, and accordingly fitness and health tend to resist the normal ills affecting civilisation. However more often than not. large numbers of humans living together will always present problems and so it was with the army Hygiene becomes all important with the sharing of facilities, toilets, showers and ablutions in general, drinking water, dining halls and kitchens, living and accommodation areas and the physical contact that by military necessity so often occurs. Disease has often been the greater enemy of mankind than the selected foes he has set out to conquer, but most over the course of time has been dealt with, cured or prevented by medication of some kind, immunity has proved to be anything but a lasting condition, it was so in my time, still is. and possibly will remain so for all time as medicine battles nature and vice versa.

Diarrhoea was common in all the camps in which I lived in Egypt sometimes concerning a few, sometimes very many, often ceasing as quickly as it started without medical assistance. Skin diseases could, and would, spread

quickly. Tinea took its toll on many, affecting feet, crutch, armpits and necks. All such cases were daubed with 'Gentian Violet' the said treatment at the time by the medical staff. Men walking around painted with the staining bright mauve/violet liquid were avoided like the plague, the bright patchy colour that remained even after showering, acted as a deterrent and also a very strong reminder to observe strict hygiene that was the responsibility of every individual. Ringworm was treated likewise as were bad cases of sweat rash. It is to be noted that all men were issued (free issue) a tin of foot powder, that was replaced just for the asking. Crabs (not sure of the official name) was another complaint, little red spider like nits clearly seen by the human eye would generally infect the area of pubic hair and burrow into the skin. There were often outbreaks and sitting on a friends bed, or sharing towels and clothing, toilet seats and showers were said to be reasons for the spread. Again the purple paint was the remedy. The old soldier's cure for crabs -one must thoroughly rub the infected area with salt, then go and sit over a bucket of fresh water, wait until the crabs get off for a drink, and then shove off and leave them. Some things were said to be self-inflicted for example, sunburn, mass mosquito bites, exposing oneself to malaria by not using the issue mosquito net when sleeping. Common colds did the rounds and I recall one particular notice posted on the M I room door which read as follows: with treatment the common cold lasts for fourteen day, without treatment the common cold lasts for two weeks, so why- come here and waste our time.

Being an all-male bastion, many explicit posters were used to get a medical message across, a by gone era that couldn't be repeated in today's modem army. Personally, with the exception of dental treatment, receiving inoculations and presenting on FFI's (free from infection parades) I carried on living a very healthy lifestyle comparatively speaking.

Guards and duties were a part of everyday life in every unit but certain establishments were unable to provide their own security and as a result. Ourselves, like most other active units I presume, were called upon to provide the security required. One type of establishment of which there were many situated throughout the Canal Zone, were the water purification units. One such unit, to us a local establishment, became the regiment's responsibility, since this was the units all important water supply, located so it happens next to a native village, rather a large gathering of literally very primitive mud huts reinforced in some cases by discarded military waste, old cans, CGI and timbers.



Guard's LMG position & search light



Water Filtration Plant



Left - along the edge of the Sweet Water Canal - anything but!  
Right - orders to stop sniping from the village disregarded

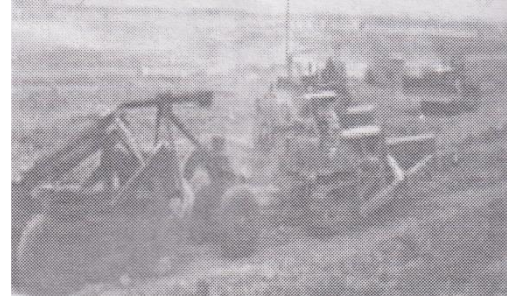
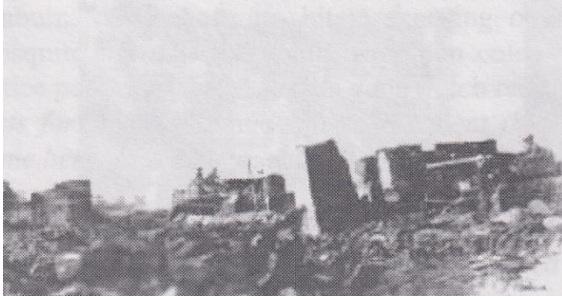


Sometime after my joining the unit the anti-British activity started and this projected itself locally by small arms sniping from the local village at those carrying out guard duties around the water plant system. Although sandbag emplacements were built it was still a frightening experience to have shots pinging around in the course of duty.

Large warning signs in both English and Arabic were displayed along with distributed leaflets to the villagers but as we mere mortals, thought at the time, it's unlikely that anyone could read them in any case, probably used as firelighters. Despite the warnings the shooting continued, the civilian police were said not to be very cooperative and it was understood that interpreters were finally asked to convey to the villagers that, unless the shooting stopped, drastic action would be taken to ensure that it stopped. Whether such action was spelt out to them is not known.

A couple of months later a large number of men, myself among them, descended on the village with orders to clear everyone and every living thing from the area. Guards were placed on and around the cleared areas to prevent return, and immediately D8 bulldozers that had been on standby moved in to demolish the village. The whole area was flattened, graded and rolled within the day. Many innocent people we felt having lost their homes, such as they were, but they were their homes. Photos of the event are provided. Although some rough handling of the natives apparently occurred, from my own point of view, most needed little persuasion, we were of course armed and would have looked somewhat formidable to them.

Despite the general situation for the greater part of my three years as a member of the Middle Eastern land forces, reported shooting incidents appeared to be quite common, and a couple of those were somewhat controversial cases, with a lot of doubt on the original orders as to when one could or could not shoot. Verbal orders were (and are come to that) always dodgy and can be altered, refuted, and or said to have been rescinded by the senior of the parties involved without apparently questions asked. Some men, it was generally felt in the world that I mixed in anyway, received long jail sentences for carrying out an ordered military duty. The judgements were not the results of so called published facts, but were thought to satisfy the motives and enforce discipline for those in authority. As opposed to orders, advice was sometimes passed down verbally on action to be taken when where no written orders existed. I am sure many readers would concur who served in that place at that time, but may be reluctant to admit. I think maybe this was part of what exist in many fields of service and referred to as the unwritten law.



Left -Mud hut village which was demolished  
Right -Plant machinery' in action



Whoops too far!



This palatial home survived

For the last two to three months of my time with 16 Field Squadron I had been the acting Troop Sergeant of 1 Troop on many occasions. We had been without a Troop Comd. for rather longer, I'd even taken the troop on field exercises out into the desert on a squadron exercise with all the troop transport and quite enjoyed the experience, all the junior NCO'S giving me full backing throughout. But my time with the Regiment was drawing to a close, and the squadron got their last ounce of flesh by giving me a guard commanders duty the night before my last in the Canal Zone, which was spent at a water filtration plant. I actually left the unit lines at 0545 hrs. on 17th December 1953, having completed the full three year tour in Middle Eastern Land Forces, referred to by the lads as a 'Python'.

Many, many years later in 1989, at my mother's passing, papers and documents were sent to me among which I found a thirteen page letter in the form of a daily log written for my parents interest by myself on the return journey home by ship, extracts from which are as follows. I must say I had completely forgotten writing same.

It begins on the early morning of 17th December 1953, my day of departure from the Canal Zone.

*Received an early call at 0400 hrs, washed and shaved got myself and clothes together and went to breakfast which at the time I did not realise was to last for the next fourteen hours. Our actual move off had been set for 0545 hrs, I found the worthwhile time in which to go around the Troop tent lines and awaken the lads for a final farewell. Picking up my large suitcase, kit bag and small personal toilet gear I made for the FUP (forming up point). After loading the roll call came to life, and all names were answered abruptly - no one was going to miss this parade.*

*A three hour journey found us at the point of embarkation, Port Said. Kit unloaded, we planted ourselves on the benches provided on the quayside still wrapped in our greatcoats and just waited, haversack rations had been taken back in the three ton trucks to camp, this we realised when we got hungry. At 3 p.m. we were on the boat, in the sleeping quarters we found room to be scarce, in a room or perhaps space of sixty feet long and fifteen feet wide and nine feet high (19 mtrs x 5 mtrs x 3 mtrs approx.) eighty three men were to sleep in three tier bunks. We set sail half an hour before the evening meal.*

*18th December - I awoke at 0400 hrs. having by then had a full eight-and- a-half hours sleep and lay awake until 0630 a little unsettled by the sway and lurch of the ship. I put away a hearty breakfast, which*

*reacted in a lot of cases but not my own, as a means of a good meal for the fish. As the morning passed the sway got worse and sea sickness took its toll, lunch time came and passed with undoubtedly fewer in attendance. Little sun and a fiery wind has so far been the uninviting weather on top decks, fresh air is good, but warmth on the other hand is an attraction, so many like myself remained below.*

*24th December Christmas Eve - I find myself lacking at my previous intentions, nevertheless I will endeavour to pick up the strings of the daily- life aboard this the 'Empire Ken'. The four days admittedly hardly the fault of my own person, for you see I had run smack bang into the Troop Deck Sgt., who was at the time eagerly searching for an NCO to take charge over the orderlies employed in the galley, so you see I walked into the job, my spare time since has been rather limited.*

*The 19th and 20,n - very little happened outside the general ship's routine and I had my given occupation to attend to. The 21st proved to be rather exciting, or perhaps the better word would be interesting, the boat having come to a stop in the harbour of the George Cross -Island of Malta. Shore leave was granted to all aboard as far as I knew, and some 90% took advantage, thirty four turned up for the midday meal including myself there were a few Sgts, left on board. The boat I have since learned is travelling two thirds empty*

*Quite a lot of trading had taken place prior to our moving away from Malta, and I was pleased with my own transactions, more than a few chaps came back on board rather the worse for drink and a lot found that they had been relieved of more money than they had thought.*

*22nd day - nothing much occurred, except that we were as happy as the day when the soldier gets his pay.*

*23rd - spent travelling along the coastline during which time many schools of porpoise were seen.*

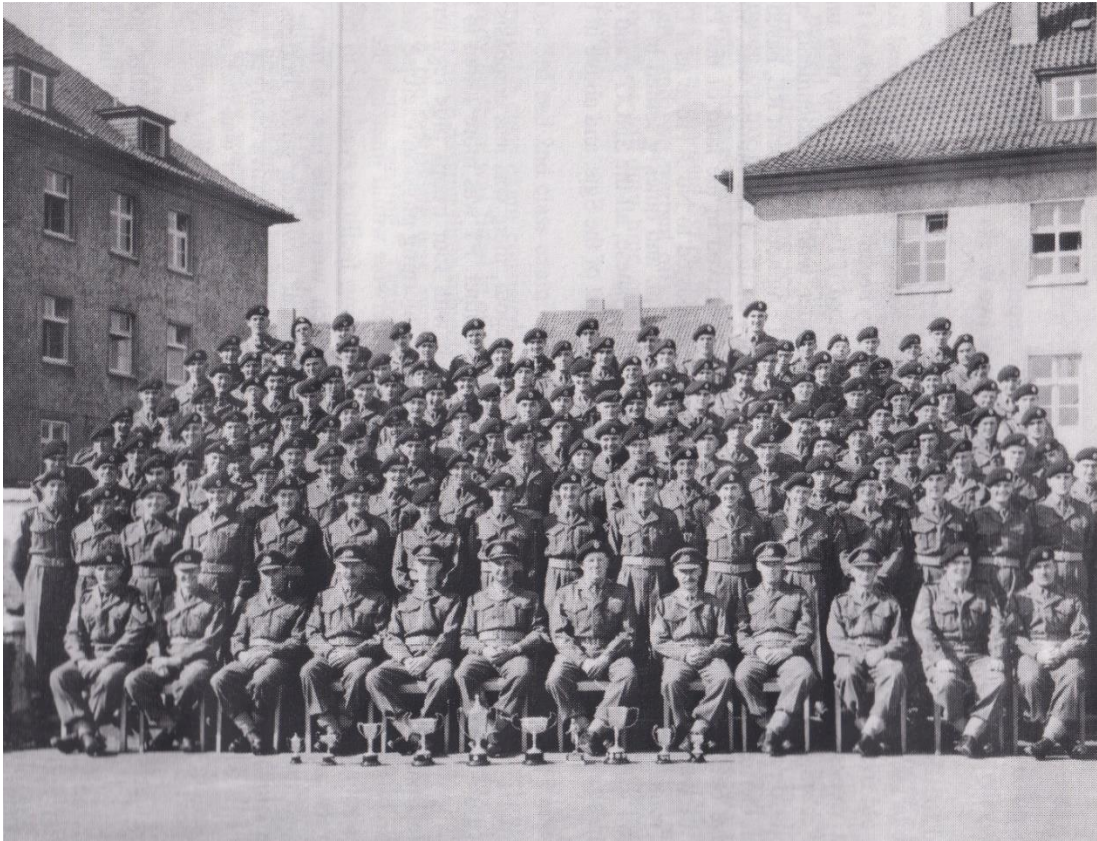
*24,h - still found us hugging the coast as we came up to the Straights of Gibraltar, schools of porpoise still abounded and likewise that of cards since we left Port Said. Going through the Straights was a wonderful sight, on the one side the lowlands of green possibly cultivation leading back to mountains of a dark grey rock that formed the makeup of Spain as seen by the casual onlooker such as myself who travelled on the route to dear old England. Opposite the picturesque Spain stood the hard high rocky mountains of Morocco, just like an oil painting come to life, the above scenes faded at 1600 hrs, more than likely forever from my sight (true to this point now forty five years later as I write).*

*25th December - Christmas day aboard was like all other days spent on the ship so far, with the exception of course a more appetising meal, and no ship's inspection. I've not mentioned previously but I have slept on the top of a three tier bunk throughout, 'Alky' Clark' and 'Georgie -Sharples' sleeping below and we 'd all noticed that the waters had now changed to a murky green, such a contrast to the blue waters we had come to expect.*

*Boxing day - another of routine and I think it was this day when we passed the prominent lighthouse of Lisbourne, climatic conditions were getting a lot colder, it seemed to me to happen overnight maybe one of those days.*

*27th - another day without excitement but ships orders did give us a little interest, upon which greatcoat buttons began twinkling, runners and buckles began to shine, exact dates and times were given as to disembarkation, this we read was for us troop deck personnel on the 29,h. The Bay of Biscay, heard about so much was considerably calm compared to some seas we had gone through.*

*The day prior to disembarkation proved uneventful but moral was high. (It would appear that perhaps I had other better things to do for there that bit of long lost writing ended.)*



29 FIELD SQN RE.  
26 FIELD ENGR REGIMENT RE  
(GERMANY 1955)

## CHAPTER 6

### Germany 1954-1957 26 Regiment R.E. (29 Squadron)

We were given twelve weeks end of tour leave to compensate for our three years of devoted loyalty (we had no option) with the exception of two weeks in Cyprus.

I returned to a home that I did not know, my parents had moved, now at Sheperdswell some five or six miles from Dover in Kent. I spent a few weeks at home and around Kent renewing old friendships and visiting the relatives, but quickly became bored, so much so that within six weeks I contacted the army authorities and asked if I could join my new unit, wherever it might be, and duly received a posting order with travel documents and instructions to proceed to 29 Field Squadron RE, 26 Field Engineer Regiment RE, based at Hameln in Germany, BAOR (British Army of the Rhine) whatever the number was. So it would have been the latter end of February 1954 that I arrived in the land of the Pied Piper, as the well-known nursery rhyme goes. I was inter posted to No 3 Troop as a Cpl sharing a room on the troop floor with a much younger Cpl and quickly settled in. The Troop Sgt. I learned had been a prisoner of war with the Japanese, all the SNCO's and the SSM in the squadron had wartime service medals as did most of the Sgts, and above in the Regiment.

The training routine, I found to be pursued with more vigour, there was less emphasis on sports, swimming and fitness in general owing to the weather. PT was more suited to the regimental gymnasium, but with four squadrons, each with four troops plus regimental headquarters competing for early morning periods, early morning physical exercise was a secondary consideration, or so it appeared, anything otherwise would interrupt the field engineer training programme. There were far more training facilities available to cover almost every aspect of engineer training, some of which were quite new to me, wet bridging and rafting equipment as one example, large local bowstring girder bridges as they were known, on which the unit trained in placing dummy explosive charges. Large chambers existed in the road and rail systems for demolition purposes. I was then able in this new posting to practice many things we had only heard of and read about previously.

Field Engineering, particularly at the lower levels is a trade of practical skills, good organising and planning at level two with some knowledge of instruction, and finally a good all round knowledge of field engineering subjects at level one, the ability to instruct on, carry out reconnaissance duties with regard to bridge, road, rail, airfield, construction or destruction, and organise and plan the varied and many other duties within the engineer sphere. At this stage of training one would have the necessary experience of that required for Sgt. status, assuming he is following the line of field engineering, along the way he would have picked up the basics of general administration, supervision of hygiene, barrack room domestics, standards of dress and appearance, general discipline and be able to instruct foot and arms drill and set an example ideally in all forms of military bearing fitness and skills.

Further to the BAOR engineer training, general education had more prominence than I had experienced up to that point. Certain standards were required before substantive promotions were granted. There were grades within each rank, acting unpaid to enable a man to fill a temporary vacancy, to police, instruct, control, lead, give authority to, enable him to show his ability to accept responsibility - usually of a temporary nature. Acting paid, all of the above plus he has been found suitable to act in that rank, but is not fully qualified to hold it, is likely to lose the rank on posting to a new unit. Substantive paid rank, fully qualified in all aspects, once granted is retained for all postings within the Royal Engineers and can only be removed for severe disciplinary reasons or incompetence:

#### **Education Standards Required**

Army 3rd class for substantive L/Cpl  
Army 2nd class for substantive Cpl  
Army 1st class for substantive Sgt and all ranks above Sgt up to and including commissioned rank.

I passed 3rd Class July 1950 and 2nd Class March 1955. Both were achieved without further tuition from my school days. The Army 1st class examination required further tuition on my part and was provided by two RAEC teachers (Royal Army Educational Corps) who were on the strength of the Regiment, a warrant officer class two

and a Sgt. I was an acting paid Sgt. at the time of sitting in classes along with many wartime S/Sgts., Sgts., and two warrant officers. Most classes of instruction were attended in what was known as off duty time other than that given in normal working hours, for obvious reasons.

The 3rd and 2nd class examinations were general army standards to my knowledge. The army 1st class exam consisted of three compulsory subjects and two optional subjects, study for these was fitted in as and when training and exercises would allow, I sat for the exam twice passing three subjects first time and the remaining two on the 25th Oct. 1957 when the certificate was awarded. (Compulsory subjects - English, mathematics and applied map reading. Optional - military geography and principles and practice of instruction.)

I returned to UK on leave, during which time I had planned to buy a motor cycle, my father said he would advise, he having been a motor bike rider all of his adult life and suggested I buy locally where he had dealt for years and where good service and parts etc. were genuine, it was to be a cash deal. I had spent years saving money, as encouraged as a very young child small amounts though they were, I selected on Dads advice the latest model 350cc AJS, he was riding a Matchless at the time, and I've an idea that he said that they were made in the same factory, as a 1954 model it was one of the first to have telescopic forks on the rear wheels. I bought it from Arter Brothers at Barham between Dover and Canterbury in Kent. The all up cost was two hundred and one pounds two shillings (a little over four hundred dollars in Australian currency at the time of writing). I still have the docket. I already had a licence, I had been riding the old military despatch riders bike, the 350cc BSA, long tested and reliable, spring front forks and a rigid back wheel. I rode the bike back to Germany with the exception of the small trip across the Channel which was by air on a smallish transport cargo type plane.


Receipt for my first motor cycle 350cc 1954 AJS

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S.1255.      30th August, 1954.

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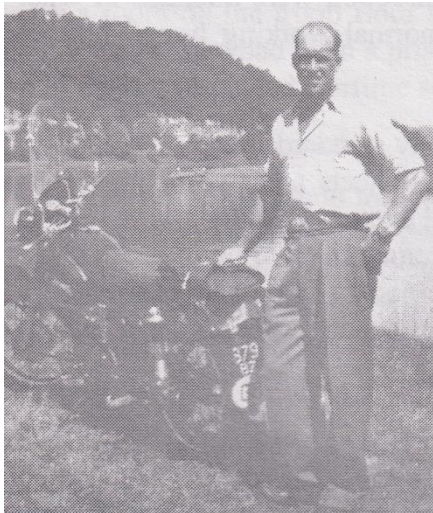
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Left  
My first motor cycle  
AJS 350 cc 1954  
model

Right  
My Dad's first  
Raleigh motor cycle,  
belt drive, possible  
the very early 1930's



**Cpl E W Kinsnorth RA (TA)**

An early photo given to me soon  
after our meeting.

On a short trip of leave again to UK, I had not been used to so much leave, I met the girl who was to become my wife, having a beer in a pub in Dover whilst in uniform, I met some TA part time soldiers Territorial Army guys who were down on their annual camp from London, they told me that they were having their annual camp dance down at the town hall and had only popped out for a drink in the interval. I was invited back, I had already bought a half bottle of spirits to take back home, anyway along I went with these fellers back to the dance and joined in a bit of social fun doing party dances, I had learnt the rough rudiments of the social skill prior to joining up but never progressed any further. During the course of the second half of the dance I'd spoken to two or three girls, but on leaving at the end I took the address of one of them, they were all from a Royal Artillery unit TA, I was due back in Germany within a couple of days and they were on the last days of annual camp as I'd thought.

Back in barracks I put pen to paper in her direction and so started a 'ritual' that was to last for some three and a half years, the sum total of my remaining time in BAOR. On returning from the UK leave on my AJS 350 motor cycle (it was taking me anywhere from fourteen to eighteen hours to get from Dover in Kent to my unit at Hameln in Germany, flying complete with bike across the English Channel - Lydd to Le-Torquay in France and then riding the remaining 400 odd miles or so) I reported into the guard room, wet through and cold about 8 p.m. and received instructions to report to the Sergeant Major of 29 Sqn. in the Sgts, mess, I complied, wondering what the heck I'd done or what was wrong as I waited for the SSM to appear, I had removed my helmet and gloves as the big man himself appeared, holding out his hand "congratulations Sergeant Newman, Don isn't it?," as with all previous promotions I was completely unaware "thanks sir," "come on up and meet the RSM" he said, "but I'm wet through, haven't shaved," "come on it doesn't matter." I squelched my way up the stairs behind the civvy suited collar and tie Sergeant Major to the bar room, and there I stood bedraggled in the doorway, silence reigned as a crowded room of eyes focused my way. "RSM sir, I'd like you to meet my new Sgt. on his promotion, Sgt. Newman, the two strolled back towards me, I moved a couple of paces inside the room still dripping, all still

silent "Sgt. Newman Sir," "welcome to the Sgts, mess and congratulations on your promotion," "I apologise for my appearance sir but the Sgt Major" — "I understand, I'll see you tomorrow morning Sgt. — you've got a room for him haven't you?" "yes sir" and the RSM moved away, he had said something else to me, but being all agog it went by me. The SSM and another Sgt. I recognised as the RA EC teacher Sgt. showed me to a room with two beds one for myself. After a five minute chat the SSM said "see you in the bar Don in one hour", I said "I'll try", "one hour" he said and walked out. I took off my tank suit and placed it in the bathroom and rushed over to my Cpls. room, collected my civvies, shoes, shirt, tie etc. washing and shaving kit and returned, and within the hour spruced up and clean approached the SSM in the bar. My own troop Sgt. had gone, but I was introduced to many others. I also found out what the score was for the Monday morning. Someone loaned me a Sgts. armband as shin sleeve order was then the works dress, after a couple of drinks or so I made my excuses and was soon in my new room. I parked my bike to a place of safety, collected and cleaned my gear for the morning and into bed sleep came quickly and I slept soundly.

Starting a new life as Sergeant as I said had come rather unexpectedly, although I had carried out the duty as a Cpl previously. I thought the Engineers in BAOR were somewhat more professional all round. I had my interview with the RSM. the official one with the SSM and the Officer Commanding 29 Field Squadron RE and between them all they left me in no doubt as to what was expected of me but also offered help if ever I needed help or was in doubt. I felt as though I might have ruffled a few feathers in the sqn. and also within the Regiment, being a comparatively 'new boy' Cpl in the unit, I had after all been in the army for only four and a half years, there were many ex boys and men with active service ribbons, Cpls all senior in service to myself. Ex boys were men who had joined up at fifteen years of age and changed over to man service at eighteen years of age, they were supposed to have the edge on others who enlisted at eighteen or older and were said to be preferred junior leaders.

My promotion was as acting paid Sgt., quite a lift in pay, I had my education to improve upon, the classes at which I had already started, within a few weeks having learnt of the availability, I had applied for and was told I would be put on the next Field Engineer Course Class One, the duration of which I knew to be about four months.

I was to find out very soon that the Regiment was a very active one in every sense covering all aspects of training, revision of basic soldiering - weapon training - map reading - infantry training - road runs - equipment marches - all engineering skills and subjects. Wednesday afternoons were quite often recreational training but the open air space for games appeared limited compared to that available previously from my own point of view, sport was usually available and played at weekends. Regular full scale exercises took place on a regular basis, we were in fact on a wartime footing, each squadron having predetermined tasks to carry out if as they said the 'balloon' went up, and of course each troop had its allotted task or tasks within the squadrons; bridge demolitions, road or rail demolitions, sometimes field defences and or minefields, rafting equipment or whatever. There was still the threat of communist forces as we in the lower echelons understood it. My parent squadron was said to be on standby and such action was practised for almost the whole of my time in Germany. Standing orders existed for mass move out. Each man knew, or should have known, what to do if the alarm went off, as it often did in the small hours of the night, certain drivers went off with escorts to load live ammunition and explosives from the various stores and dumps around, the quarter master loaded up masses of stores usually all kept at a state of readiness, canvas accommodation, rations survival equipment and the like, each troop loaded its G1098 the name given to all the stores it carried, to enable it to work live and exist as an independent small unit. Men paraded at given points having drawn arms and magazines, with all their exercise kit packed as per : and dressed as required. Time limits for all the above actions were set and practised until achieved. Much of our training was carried out under cover of darkness, once all had become proficient with their tasks in daylight, some very frightening tasks had to be carried out. My early time in Germany, army boots were still studded with steel heel and toe clips, which were quite unsuitable for some of the work and so gym shoes had a real operational use, they were ideal for clambering up and over the steel girders of bridges, when preparing them for demolition.

Some of the bowstring girder bridges were massive, almost wide enough to drive a small car over the main girders (not that I think that would be possible) the girders would rise perhaps forty feet above the road or rail that they carried, maybe more, with a further drop of perhaps thirty feet to usually water below. Most of the so-called target bridges the larger ones had boxes and brackets built in or attached to accommodate the explosives charges and chambers built into the piers where sufficient bulk explosives could be placed. Roads and railways were prepared in a similar fashion with deep chambers/shafts positioned on comers and embankments, two-three- four meters deep to house four, six and eight cheeses respectively, as they were known, each one

weighing one hundred and twenty pounds of dummy explosive. The whole drill comprising, removal of covers, rolling cheeses from the back of a three ton truck, placing in the shafts, laying of electric circuits and replacing the covers could all be done in minutes by an experienced team, there were usually four shafts per demolition. Unfortunately the winter sometimes left some chambers full of water, I remember on one occasion with the help of some of my NCO's, lowering the Troop Officer, 2nd Lt. Robin Kennedy, head first into a flooded shaft to locate a detached lifting hook, used to remove the training cheeses after demolition practice, one of the very rare practical officers who liked to get the hands on experience of sapper work, he was not afraid of getting wet or dirty or asking questions and stayed on site for the working period in a useful mode, despite his having attended 'O Groups', carried out recce. trips, and organising all sorts of things whilst his men slept. A rare breed indeed.



WO'S AND SGTS. REGIMENTAL PHOTOGRAPH 1955

A corner of the Sergeants Mess dining room -with Bob Toogood and Bob Ramsey the Regimental Police Sgt



Meanwhile engineer training continued, troop officers were coming and going for some reason, we also had more drill, barrack room and kit inspections than I had previously been accustomed to (the first year of service excepted). I had learnt since along the way how and when to give orders for foot and rifle drill, quite a bit about basic military law and gave short talks and lectures by following those I listened to and reading books for the

facts. Remembering some parental advice whilst at home on leave, I had always endeavoured to lead by example so I maintained the effort to learn all that I could regarding knowledge and skills required, kept up a personal fitness whereby I could keep up with the best on anything requiring stamina and endurance, I engaged in all troop sports encouraging everyone to have an interest in something and helped arrange additional sport for those interested at weekends.

I soon found myself in the regimental swimming team and got to know the Warrant Officer class two Regimental APTC instructor very well, (Army Physical Training Corps), he had a small crew decked out in red and black striped jerseys, but suggested the likes of myself who had completed a PT course do my own basic fitness training for the troop.



THE REGIMENTAL SWIMMING TEAM

I had some very good troop NCO's well experienced, one wearing Korean medals, the Cpls. knew their stuff and were very competent. I had learnt quite a lot of what I called BAOR knowledge in the short time I had worked with them, all the L/Cpls. were very willing and enthusiastic, two of them ex college types who intended applying for a commission. I believed I got on well with them all, the troop sappers were a mixture from all walks of life and as expected many required constant supervision, instruction and guidance, National Service was still in being so some were serving under duress. I often explained to all under my control in the form of briefing for certain engineer training or exercise, that the easy way wasn't easy, but the hard way could be bloody hard if every man did not play his part and do his bit. I liked to play hard and work hard and endeavoured to be firm, fair and friendly to all members, which was taught to junior NCO's.

Training on the river Weser at Hameln was a real test of competence, with a current flowing sometimes up to eight knots, vastly different to the minimal training I had on still lake-like waters that I had previously experienced. Battling the current when positioning floating bays into a bridge under construction was extremely difficult under cover of darkness and could be very dangerous if inexperienced men were employed. All types of rafting equipment were used taught and tested with live loads on completion, with the odd disastrous result one being fatal that I heard about, when a tank drove too far on to the raft it tilted, the tank sliding into deep water drowning the driver, precautions did exist to prevent such happenings and one would assume that they were not taken at that time, which is what training is all about.

Many Engineer units of which there were several in Germany came to Hameln for their annual bridging camp, but as the resident unit so to speak, equipment was more often available to us. Bridging equipment of all types was often carted around the countryside for use on exercises, in specific vehicle loads and built on virgin sites,

one had to know what components were on what truck and ensure the trucks were in the right order to come on site, all part of the reason for why we were training.

There were two QMSI's (Quarter Master Sergeant Instructors) - Warrant Officers Class II - experts in field engineering on the unit strength, their job was to oversee all planning, organisation and construction techniques by the officers and sergeants in the regiment, overcome problems, give advice and umpire when required, they also ran the Field Engineering Class II courses in the barracks.



NO. 3 TROOP OF 29 FIELD ENGINEER SQUADRON RE  
APPROX 1956/57

Large training areas were available for practical demolition and minefield laying - booby trapping, infantry training that included extensive field defences and underground command post, improvised roads and tracking materials, installation and operation of water points and improvised bridging. On certain large exercises I was amazed to find that we moved about the countryside quite freely, harbouring up in any farm that took our fancy, tanks and halftracks trundled across cropped fields and churned their way through woodlands, three ton trucks and Land Rovers went where ever they were able to go, cross country if the situation demanded, small villages appeared to be taken over at times. In discussion with older Sgts, I said there was no consideration towards the farmers, and their retort was that "we won the bloody war didn't we?" I did find out rather later on that a form of damage control had been instituted, and that damage control inspectors were to follow the army around in order that farmers may put in a claim for compensation, but when that actually came into being I wouldn't know, although it was heard later on that farmers in certain areas were asking or directing tanks on to their crops as the compensation was more beneficial.

Personally, with the exception of one area, all areas I had entered either socially or on military duties, I found the Germans very friendly, even the farmers on whose property we descended for a comfortable night's sleep in their straw barns, often getting fresh veggies given to the cooks, who were open to barter exchanging some of our less desirable compo. rations for fresh eggs etc. More often than not the cooks were left to do their own thing, I had more than enough to do doing my own bit and did not intervene unless there was a need or special meal time required.

On one troop task building a small landing pier out into a large lake used for civilian/public yachting we gained further experience at sinking timber piles into the mud bottom using water jets, the power being provided from

the standard Petters engine, a versatile 8 hp little power unit and pulsometer pumps with some improvisation. It was at this location, the only one that I came across where anti British feeling was very bad. Lake 'Stien Hude Mere,' not sure of the spelling or where it is located now, it was a job that we did for the local community just for the benefit of the training. Because of the anti-British feeling all employed on the job were confined to our small encampment so naturally all were glad to get away from the area.

Back in barracks we learned an annual administration inspection was looming. Preparation for this to my way of thinking, and I was not alone, was excessive however orders were orders, I complied and did my best to bring the troop up to scratch bull shit wise, as soldiers proper I thought they were way up to scratch. The accommodation for the men had been barracks for the German army so the story goes and were in comparatively good condition, each troop had its own ablution facilities on their troop floor and was responsible for its own accommodation maintenance and cleanliness, there was an allowance for decoration etc. and this had to be used each year in order to keep the allowance, so there was much white washing and painting to be done, many inexpert hands taking part learnt new skills with the painters and decorators amongst our numbers becoming supervisors for the duration of the job. It was also that time of the year to ensure that every man had a good best battle dress uniform, boots, in fact make sure that all items of kit where in the best of order. The drivers of the troop vehicles had the harder time having more responsibility than their opposite numbers in the troop. I was quite astonished to see the ridiculous standards required to prepare trucks Land Rovers and motor cycles for the final inspection, spanners and the likes in tool kits were actually burnished and laid out on, new in most cases, strong canvas like containers, any boxes used were freshly painted with unit logos and signs. The transport consisted of quite a variety of wheeled vehicles and normally one halftrack armoured personnel carrier per troop which were all brought up to a very high standard of (appearance at least) and all had to be in very good working order, all were freshly painted with canvas covers cleaned, repaired or replaced, tyres glistened a shiny black, windscreens and headlights gleamed and the inside of the cabs were spotless. Formed up on the square for practice parades they all looked very impressive, First class 'bull' to say the least.

Drill parades and drill competitions, despite the lack of any actual formal instruction that I had missed out on the troop remained in the above average performers. It was exceedingly rare that I had to place anyone on OC's orders for non-compliance or failing to carry out a duty. The odd exception being when carrying out the duty of Regimental Orderly Sergeant, high standards were always required for Regimental Guards and as an incentive an extra man was detailed for the duty, enabling the smartest man on the guards inspection, chosen by the Orderly Officer, to be dismissed and therefore excused the whole night of duty. As the Orderly Sgt. one had to deal with off duty drunks, brawls outside the barracks and behaviour in the unit canteen which on occasion involved placing a man in the guard room cells, to cool off, or for his own protection or maybe putting one in close arrest, following an alleged assault, damage to property or some other incident whereby they had to be charged under the appropriate section(s) of the manual of military law to resolve the issue(s). Any minor incidents of not achieving standards in personal hygiene, dress or equipment were corrected by way of extra instruction which meant extra parades in what would otherwise be off duty time. Training/working hours in barracks were from eight to five Monday-Friday excepting Wednesday afternoons reserved for recreational training, Saturday mornings were either on squadron or regimental level and involved best BD parades, rifle and foot drill or maybe a kit layout inspection followed by Padres hour, health and hygiene lectures, or any troop admin required. Saturday afternoon was off duty time or sports for those so inclined and Sundays unless a church parade intervened. Junior NCO's mess, WO's and Sgts, mess and the officers mess often arranged mess entertainment on Saturday evenings to cater for the quite high number of married personnel on strength, but attendance at such functions was optional as far as I know. Personally I often went out on the town with friends to the local guest houses (pubs) to mix with the locals, sample their brews, have a meal, eye up the local talent and maybe return to the mess very much later on, after all we had the mess to ourselves pretty well all week, single members that is. When in barracks I was spending a couple of evenings each week on education classes, duties permitting, all in an effort to gain the necessary for my first class certificate.



Self on the Inter Unit Motor Cycle Trials - - Lt. Kennedy as one of the trial judges, the old BSA 350cc

I had been asked as to whether I would captain the regimental motor cycle team, it been assumed that because I had my own bike (and I believed I was the only individual in the unit to own and keep a private bike in barracks) that I was an expert, quite the contrary as I explained to the organising officer, I enjoyed riding, but the sum total of experience was riding on tarmac, however I'd like to join the team to get further experience - I then found out that it was my rank with some experience that was actual!} required. There were six sappers in the unit all employed as despatch riders (DR's) who had asked to form the team in order that they may compete in the inter unit trials riding they had been riding in the adjacent country on recce afternoons and some weekends, however this had all been put on hold until after the admin inspection. I got to know the DR's involved, two of them were ex speedway riders having ridden on the ashes (ash tracks in London) where the back wheel most of the time is at a forty five degree angle to the direction of travel. Two others had had their own bikes in civvy street and had done a bit of grass track racing and trial bike riding, I knew about both having attended such meetings with my father as a school boy, my father was a competitor in trial riding and I often went to watch him. The other two were just unit riders with a bit of enthusiasm for the sport, actually six were required for the team, myself made seven this was rather better for obvious reasons, I was able to find out and read up on requirements and do a bit of private practice on my own bike as and when time permitted.

The Admin inspection came, and after all the preparation the troop got by without comment, I did have a couple of young guys who were scruffy by nature, very good workers who could use their noddle when they wanted to, but somehow always invited comment on morning and practice parades. I'm sure the junior NCO's took these men in hand for the big day having their kit cleaned for them. As is always the case in any group of students anywhere, the only people that attract attention are the very good at the top of the class and the very bad at the bottom. Seeing that we had no official comment I accepted that we had passed satisfactorily, the troop officer on the other hand congratulated the troop saying he was impressed and well done to everyone. Favourable remarks appeared on squadron orders, so one supposes on such occasions that all the extra effort, materials used and the final presentation of men, equipment, vehicles and living accommodation were all worthwhile. Squadron administration, training programmes, general office procedures and man management were all subjected to scrutiny, unknown to most of the field engineer troopies, myself included up to this point.



Regimental vehicles on the Unit parade ground awaiting the arrival of the Administration Inspection Officers



A request for a photo after a best Battle Dress Parade practice for a forthcoming Administration Inspection

After a long weekend, the unit returned to normal training, new chaps were coming in to replace those who had completed their tour made for new faces amongst our numbers. Annual Ranges camp came when we all had to live under canvas. The Officers and Sergeants lived away some distance from the men's tent lines and also apart from each other, each mess having its own mess tents and cooks, the food also differed as the senior ranks paid extra for the better food. The men were by no means going short had a very good fare, extra rations always being on issue when out in the field. The old gallon stone jars in wicker baskets may well be remembered by some readers containing the issue rum. A long held custom I believe for issue in inclement weather which the SQMS reckoned there always would be in any two weeks on field exercises. Each man was given the opportunity to qualify on the Bren gun, Sten gun and rifle with plenty of practice shoots. Officers and SNCO's also qualified on revolvers, although it was around this time that hand guns were changing, updated, anyway they were the personal weapons of the officers plus a few others in the squadron authorised to carry them. Most also took their turn in the butts, changing targets and marking shots, which also gave them the experience of having shots whistling over their heads. Guards and some infantry training took place during the dark hours, and all were fully occupied for the duration of the field training until return to barracks. Such camps broke the monotony of barrack living and instruction and tended to draw everyone closer.

In late summer I, along with a couple of other squadron members, both Cpls, was sent back to England to a big engineer camp at Gillingham in Kent on a Field Engineer Class I course. Members on the course came mainly from units in Germany and England, but there were Sgt. students from the Australian, Canadian and New Zealand Engineers. One from the Gurka Engineers and two dark skinned fellows from Gibraltar, around thirty or so altogether. All were expected to have a good all round knowledge of field engineering and there were exercises and revision on same which I am sure some learnt from. Instruction was given on organisation, planning, designs, reconnaissance, methods, old skills and new skills, new equipment, railways construction and familiarization with all sapper tasks, having spent most of my time in Egypt and comparatively little in Europe. I learnt a lot from fellow students, having been told from childhood, if you don't know ask. The course lasted four months or thereabouts, quite intensive at times from my own point of view, made more new friends and gained more than course knowledge mixing with different guys. I was able to go home at weekends my parents living just south of Canterbury a total of thirty three miles, but mainly preferred to remain in camp or visit the home of my writing companion, the girl I had met in Dover previously. I'd managed to scrounge quite a little library on nearly all the subjects taught, even though some were quite old they were still current and useful for future reference.

I achieved the required percentages in each subject, doing very well in some - demolitions, mine warfare and water supply and pass marks in others. With another qualification under my belt I returned to barracks in Germany a little before Xmas. In barrack training, all previously arranged prior to my return was in progress, the troop Cpls. having all in control. Myself and the troop officer attended first parade, the junior NCO's were instructed to carry on while I got myself back into stride making myself familiar with all around and finding out what future training might be in store and preparing for such training where appropriate, requesting sites



equipment and training aids.

Christmas 1954, a large number of men were given leave and went their various ways, having just returned to the unit after an absence of some months, I remained behind. Duties as usual carried on regardless, training as such ceased. Minor maintenance work filled in time for those available on the few working days that there were over the Xmas and New Year period. The Sgts, mess had an excellent Xmas party and dance and a huge raffle with what I then thought were exceptional prizes; an expensive bicycle being the centre piece surrounded by household/electrical goods, watches, wallets and handbags, other personal items, hampers of food and chocolates, bottles of wine and spirits, tools both garden and trade, the likes of which I had not seen before. The mess strength would have been around fifty with the add on extras additional to the regiment employed in the nearby bridging camp and stores areas. Married members turned up in full strength, they far outnumbered the single members, the likes of myself numbering just twelve give or take one or two over a given period. Drinking by quite a few was to excess, but it appeared customary and acceptable, the able looking after the ones not so able at departure time or before if required. My own shared quarters were just behind the bar, just a short stumbling distance to the cot as many would say, but fortunately 'maybe' I always felt bloated rather than drunk unless as on some earlier occasions someone slipped in a 'micky fin,' in either case I accordingly made my excuses.

The Sgts Mess Christmas draw display



Christmas dinner in the other ranks dining hall was served by the Sgts. and officers who remained in barracks, who earlier in the day at reveille did the rounds of 'gun fire' (tea and rum in bed for those who wanted it). The Christmas fare was very good, in fact rather extravagant with too much being wasted. Boxing day, some sport was organised but generally it was a do as you please day, with the exception of duty personnel of course. New Year's Eve and day were celebrated in the normal way, more so by the highlander friends amongst us.

The festive season behind us, a little bit of cleaning up, smartening up and brushing up seemed appropriate routine to get us all back on the right footing which took care of the first week with morning road runs and physical jerks to shake off and rid ourselves of the Xmas excesses. Drill, weapon training in all its aspects, map reading, engineering questionnaires to get and keep the mind ticking over were all part and parcel. All were reminded yet again of our requirement to remain at a state of readiness in the event of call out and this was substantiated with printed instructions to all section commanders.



REST STOP RIDING HOME TO UK ON MY 350c.c. AJS.

As expected later on into the new year the alarm was given at 3 am to test our operational readiness, all knew their places of assembly with the exception of those detailed for immediate duties, drivers and mate to proceed to pick up ammo and explosives the depots of which were several miles away from the unit, storemen to unlock stores and the armoury, troop transport to assembly areas. There was a roll call, quick check of weapons and equipment load up and mount vehicles, watches checked, wait for the word to move off. Once out on to the road convoy procedure observed until operational areas reached when vehicles peeled off to their predetermined destinations where they hoped to meet: their stores vehicle for the sites allocation of (dummy) explosives. Everything was done as if for real, times were allocated for each task and secondary targets given for the smaller jobs leaving just a small maintenance come firing party on the original job, depending on the exercise situation most demolition parties moved on to given map references on completion to harbour up, fuel up bodies and vehicles and rest up and then maybe move on to other exercises in the field before return to barrack^ all training stores had to be collected and so the sections went to one another's targets for a bit of extra experience to demolish the dummy preparations. All such exercises were very realistic with the exception that umpires paid a visit to see that all jobs had been prepared correctly and give criticism where thought necessary. Operation preparedness became a way of life, thankfully it was never put to the real test. It involved a lot of teamwork and overall planning, some aspects/activities may have been omitted in my revelations, since my observations were only concerned with things/orders that concerned myself and those that came within the troop responsibilities. I worked closely with the troop officer, who quite often was a very young inexperienced subaltern, a few liked to get involved with the practical skills, others were book worms with gloved hands, all at that time were entitled to a batman and given the due respect that their rank demanded, but respect both ways was a requisite for a good working relationship. Many previous mess bar stories had given guidance on how to deal with difficult Troop Commanders. Effective irritating and uncomfortable life can be! Generally I endeavoured to make any disagreements tactfully known, though I was often said to be not very tactful, going by the book is not always the best way, there are exceptions to the rule in all walks of life, one must allow the latitude of experience to overcome conditions and situations, adaptability and improvisation will often overcome problems and obstacles to achieve the aim.

Hameln, a rather small quaint ancient town with quite a few one way cobbled streets, was I guess the centre of quite a large rural area, situated on the river Weser and some fifty or more miles west of the Russian border dividing West Germany and East Germany the demarcation line as so defined at the end of World War II.

As a troop Sergeant I had my own allotted vehicle and driver for all exercises, essential since the troop was nearly always divided on their working tasks in section groups, a Cpl two L/Cpls and perhaps nine sappers, and on some

occasions in half section groups. My vehicle was a small armoured scout car two seater with switch gears, five forward and five reverse and the driver sitting askew to the line of travel, an open top that gave no cover in the pouring rain and accordingly we both wore a supposedly waterproof tank suit issued for the purpose, the doubt since after some forty eight hours or more and it was quite often a lot more than that, one was rather wet and warm on the inside having been exposed to the elements continuously. My driver, Mack as I called him, was a cheerful L/Cpl and we often took turns in driving on the long arduous training stints so that the other could catch up on a bit of shut eye while the sections were lying up somewhere resting and sleeping if they could. The troop officer was often called away on 'O' groups where they had to report progress, troop stats, place requests for fuel, food and material requisites, informed on the overall operations and given new tasks and orders for completion. I often did reconnaissance at night to select the best spots in a given area so as not to divulge a suggested interest to any inquiring eyes, say for a proposed bridge building site where a good access route was essential and nearby cover, trees etc. were preferable, forming up areas for bridge components transport and harbour areas for administration vehicles, HQ of the site. The job of supervising, checking that all materials and stores and rations were arriving at the right place at the right time, attending to all the needs of the troop at all times, taking command of the bigger construction or clearance jobs was a full time occupation.

Winter exercises in Europe were sometimes bitterly cold, more often than not wet, and a combination of the two, extremely uncomfortable to say the least. As previously stated, the final test of many engineering tasks was to be able to perform in darkness - nature's best 'military' cover. Since operational requirements were, or part of were, lines of communication, in this sense, roads, railways, airfields and waterways in some cases, the object to keep open, repair or provide alternatives, re-align or build new. Or, maybe to deny the use of. Practice in all aspects was a must, and part of that practice was the use of rafting and/or bridging equipment, the temporary immediate means of an alternative crossing over water.

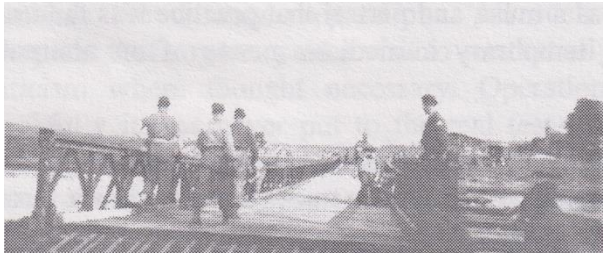
There were various classifications depending on requirements, e.g. the loads to be carried, at that time there was the class two consisting of two timber tracks supported or a form of scant scaffolding seated in the base of canvas folding boats, ideal as an infantry foot bridge or would take a light four wheel vehicle less than two tons in weight. The class five FBE folding boat equipment, larger heavier and more sturdy, rigid and well braced in design with similar construction procedures, both the above equipment could be used for rafting or bridging. The CSR (close support raft) rafting only, either as a class nine (two pontoons) or class twelve (three pontoons) consisted of a narrow roadway with ramps either end supported by balancing cables, a much larger raft built on pontoons. 50/60 raft, a very much heavier version of the class twelve built on pontoons, far more complicated and time consuming to construct, for the transportation of heavy vehicles and tanks etc. All rafts were designed to be propelled by outboard motors, four on each from class nine upwards, essential on rivers such as the Weser at Hameln where one had to combat an 8 knot current. The job of a raft commander is not an easily acquired skill with four independent outboards handled by four operators. Many more words could be written for those with a technical interest in the various equipment used and also the general military field engineering technology however the aim is to give a broad picture of army life as I experienced it at the time.

The transport companies supporting us at the time carting all the engineering equipment around to where ever it was required were employing DPP drivers, non-English speaking personnel clad in blue uniforms. Displaced persons from the war years, I'd heard they came from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania and possibly other places too.

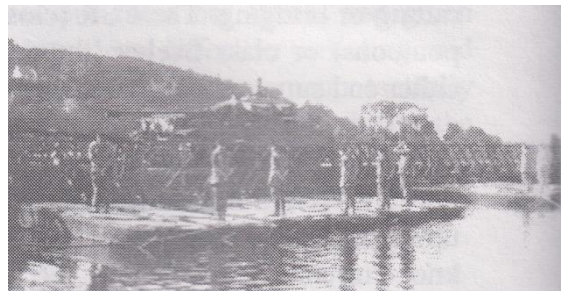
Bailey bridge, either wet or dry, was still the bridging equipment built onto pontoons for the larger spans of water (wet) or supported on bank seats at either end (dry). the design varied on the span and the classification required, although the basic design was said to be akin to a young boys 'Meccano' set, the analogy was rather misleading.

White tape was used at night to confine equipment and guide the construction parties the usual time to construct on field exercises). One particular hazard did exist, in severe frosty weather the men in the construction parties had to wear gloves to prevent their hands sticking to the metal components which could well take the skin off. No one liked wet bridging at night, construction parties could expect to be wet from the waist down, and rain never stopped proceedings. On several occasions we returned to barracks from the training areas at three or four a.m. after seven or eight hours, wet through and cold in the back of three ton trucks, and I was to find on arrival, a very tired silent steaming mass of humanity lying on the floor of the trucks, many asleep, hot tea and sandwiches were available to those that wanted, but generally most made for their beds.

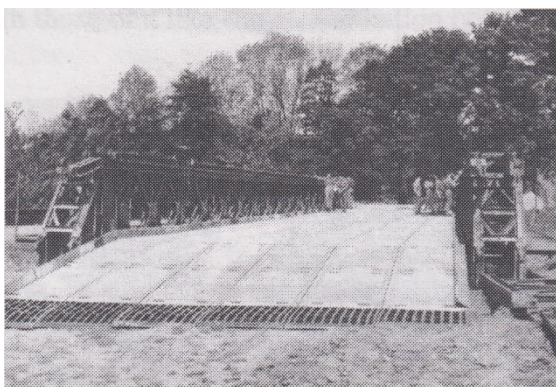
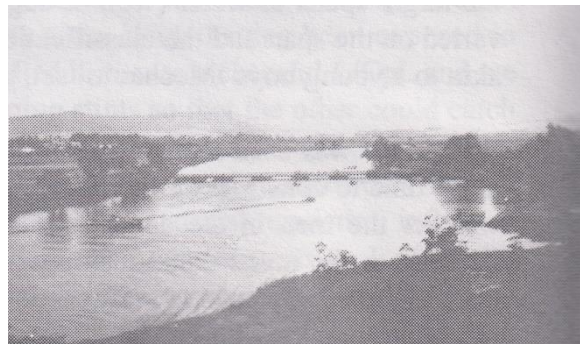
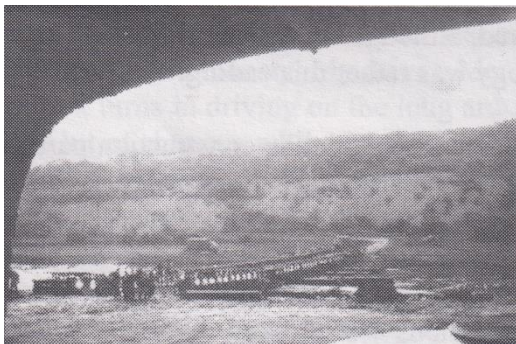
Such training on field exercises was kept to a minimum, since it presented many problems; boots and clothes drying, rough accommodation and the associated health responsibilities, however it was found that healthy young men stood up to such adverse conditions with no after effects, there were no colds or flu outbreaks because of, I write from limited experience, since long periods of extreme discomfort at low temperatures of more than fourteen days has never been my lot.



Left - bridge building - the bailey bridge on pontoons across the River Weser  
Below - testing the end result with a Centurion Tank.



Left - a double/double bailey supported on bank grillage  
Below - more pictures of wet bailey bridges



Left - the new HGB (heavy girder bridge) designed to be built both by man power and crane, preferably the latter.  
Right - a DD BB with foot walks on either side

Life in the Warrant Officers and Sergeants Mess. As a living in member, by far the best conditions I had so far encountered in life, to all intents and purposes, a hotel, better than, mind I had been in very few at that stage and it wouldn't have taken a lot to improve my living standards, bearing in mind my childhood background, early teenage years during the war, young adult years prior to enlistment in the Royal Engineers. Then there was the introductory year to military life, three years under canvas out in the Suez Canal Zone Egypt, the land of flies, torrid smells and a primitive civilisation that we had little contact with, we had the basics to keep ourselves clean, were reasonably well fed and remained healthy and so my expectations were not very high.

In the Sgts. Mess in Germany, civilian local staff both male and female were employed to attend to our material and comfort needs, cleaners, waitresses, barmen, waiters, storemen. all very subservient - the barmen and waiters would bow on approach, bow again and click their heels on receipt of an order and depart with a slick bearing and presence to satisfy ones needs promptly, the likes of which I have never encountered since, the waitresses extremely polite, efficient and patient especially with some of the characters they had to deal with. We were afforded great respect and treated very well indeed, made to feel important, as masters and leaders of a higher order. Unfortunately I am sure that this type of attendance and respect tended to breed a superiority complex to a few of the members, who displayed an arrogance that to the likes of myself was embarrassing at times, treating the staff as inferiors, complaining about silly things at meal times. There were set menus for meals generally, but one could almost get what one wanted by placing an order with the cook, most made their preferences known; bacon crispy, fish for breakfast, fruit, eggs sunny side up and favourite beverages etc. and the waitresses always remembered.

There were dress standards, collar and tie with jacket always in the mess other than the dining room and private quarters, respectable dress and footwear was required at all times. Central heating existed in all rooms as it did in all the soldier's barrack rooms, we had a very large games room with a full size billiard table 12 ft x 6 ft. darts, cards and other games. T V then had not come into being, there was the radio and a record player, a quiet room and a large hall where social gatherings dances were held and also our not too infrequent regimental dinners to which a few distinguished guest were always invited, to add to the strict formality of the occasions.



**LIVING-IN MEMBERS OF THE SGTS. MESS AT THE TIME**

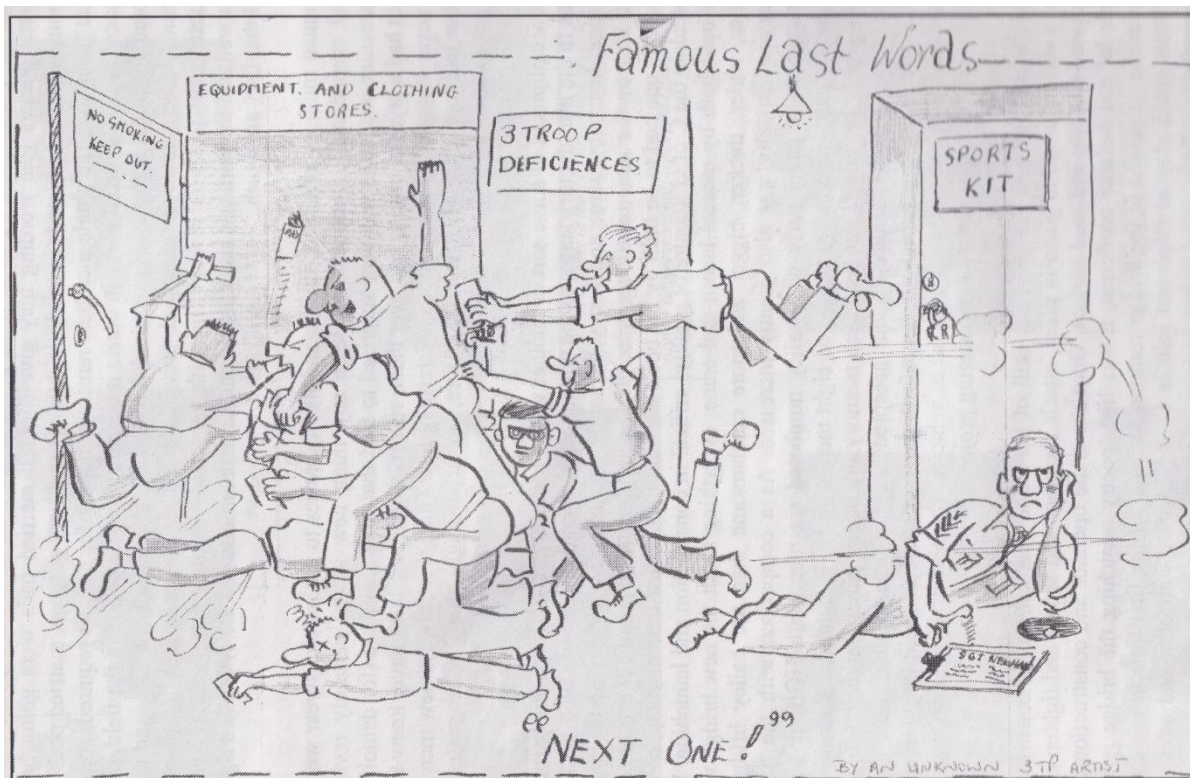
Dave Revins, Bill Furnace, Self, Spud Baker, Bob Ramsey, George Rowan. The RAEC Sgt. and apologies to him who laughs loudest.

Where were Paddy McClelland, Tom Metcalfe, Dicky' Bird and Topper Brown, Bob Toogood?



Capt. Humphries, one of my many Tp. Comds. in our mess after some formal occasion I guess.

As sergeants we were the all-important members of the regiment, the ones on whose shoulders the laurels and pride of the unit rested, however within the walls of the mess we were the lesser mortals subjected to the disciplines of seniority and at times kept firmly in our places, a regime of respect that I was to find out later in service, that was so all important for the good of all and general smooth running of any unit. We had our comfort, privacy, privileged positions and with it we were expected to maintain an example in our own personal bearing and presentation, and in everything we did, assistance and advice was always available for junior members in need, and I have to admit I took advantage of the free training. Much can be learnt over a glass of beer and a conversation with the more learned heads. Some of the Sgts, were very senior in their rank, elderly types, well fifteen years older than I, such a difference at that age, who had obviously settled at that level. Inside the mess walls Christian names or nick names were the norm, excepting the RSM always Sir, or the WOII's not known too well were also accorded the honour, it was noted that some of the more senior mess members liked to keep their distance and associate only with those of a like status, a situation not always of their own making.



"FAMOUS LAST WORDS" Drawn by an unknown 3TP Artist

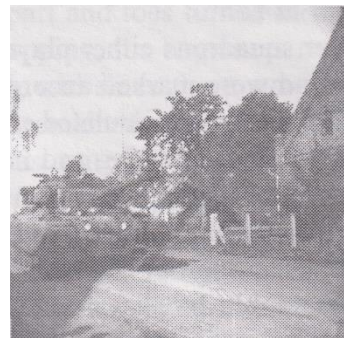
There was division in this the first Sgts, mess in which I became a member, something that never became an issue in any other mess to which I was associated, single members versus the married pads as they were known. In this period of service there was most certainly an unfair distribution of duties, namely that of Orderly Sgt.

and/or Duty Sgt. which came about mainly because of it was thought, the large amount of time spent out in the field on exercises, in less than a year after my promotion, owing to, it was supposed, pressure from some quarters (the wording may give a clue), married pads were going back to their spouses for the weekends in trucks laid on for that very purpose, married pads of all ranks that is, and we the single members remained behind for duty as required, some exercises functioned on a partial basis, in others it became a rest up period in the field, but whatever some personnel were always required for security, guards/call out duty, and this involved senior ranks, however as stated previously orders are orders to be obeyed without question, or that's as it was then, with very few exceptions. Regardless, the pluses far outweighed the minuses, and I would and have recommended the WO's and Sgts, mess for all that they are worth.

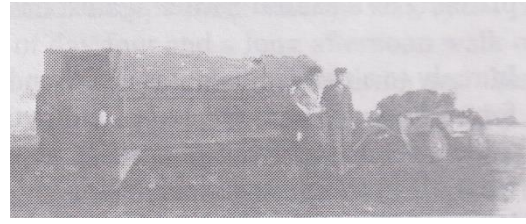
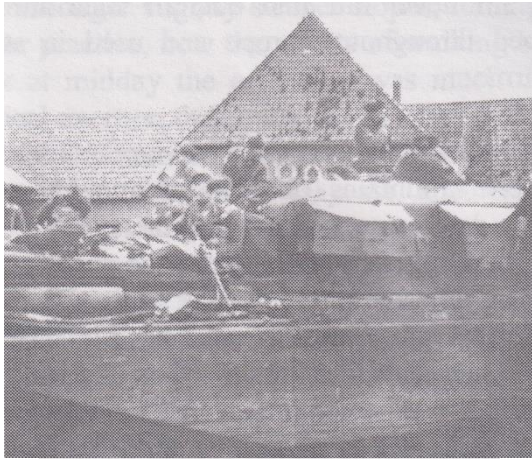
Annual training continued, similar and like exercises to the previous year were organised and carried out, if one did not learn anything new it was certainly revised. In one particular instance I was very surprised to find that road chambers (for demolition) had in fact had a layer of tarmac laid over them, reports were made but I never knew the outcome, it never stopped our preparations, exercise or not. There were always new men in the troop who had not done this or that before, so accordingly there were snags within the organisation.

New equipment of some sort or another was constantly being issued, one particular bridge was in the introductory stage, to the unit anyway, around the end of 1955 the heavy girder bridge, heavy by name and heavy by nature, the big new brother of the bailey bridge, working on the same cantilever principle and similar in design and constructed on rollers. But this one had to be built by the book since no one, at that time anyway, could judge or calculate the C of G (centre of gravity) critical in construction and launching. Designed to be built both by manual labour and crane, everything about the new bridge was heavier, taller, wider, thicker, bigger and more cumbersome than the bailey bridge, the load carrying capacity was also greatly increased. As a comparison with the bailey bridge equipment. A panel party with bailey numbered six men, with HGB, it was twelve a transom party with bailey numbered eight men, with HGB eighteen. A working man load was said to be around 90 lbs., from memory the bailey panel weighed 540 lbs. and the transom 640lbs. Fortunately the accepted way of construction was by crane the alternative being manual labour, henceforth many operational Field Engineering Units had a 7 ton Coles Crane added to their list of vehicles which naturally enough was found to be very useful for any number of engineering projects.

Bridge building now relied on the skill of the crane operator/driver, construction parties were still required, to guide in place, attach, fix brace and secure and tighten components, likewise decking and road surface. Once the crane operator and construction teams knew their lot and became proficient, it was like 'poetry' watching the bridge going together under the command of the bridge commander, and for the first time in some cases, troop officers could play an important role as C of G marker/controller and advise the bridge commander before critical points were reached, by going by the book. This is not to say that officers did not normally play an important role, the overall organisation was theirs, managerial planning, to make sure that they got the right men in the right place at the right time with the right vehicles, tools, equipment, materials and with the right incentive, correct clothing, fuels, food water first aid and a means of communication, site organisation has also to be policed and watched over, all part and parcel of the knowledge required by the rank of Sergeant and upwards, my own little memory aid in that respect was the six 'P's' (prior planning prevents p— poor performance).



Tanks moving through German villages



Left - in support of the 11<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade - getting a lift forward to 'sus' out an engineering task, Sapper McClusky nearest camera

Right - Engineering half-track and Dingo armoured car bogged



Centurion Tanks that sank in the peat bogs. Troop called in to assist in recovery with REME Scammell recovery vehicles - A long job digging out by hand involved.

Some exercises were organised on a divisional basis, our division sign was that of a rampant bull, a black bull on a yellow background. The 11th Armoured Division, worn as a shoulder flash on the battle dress of all men in the division and also stencilled on all division vehicles.

Engineer squadrons either played in the roll of supporting arms or detailed as the exercise enemy and were marked accordingly and worked in their roles of ground and route denial by minefields or simulated demolitions, or alternative routes via minefield/obstacle clearing, bridging/rafting and improvised roads. On one such exercise I found myself with the task of extracting a fifty ton centurion tank from a peat bog, employing the whole troop to literally dig the thing out by hand, placing heavy girder bridge ramp decking panels on the proposed dug out extraction route. With the efforts of three Scammell ten ton recovery vehicles, treble blocks and anchorage points hammered into the road base, the sunken armour was retrieved. We then had the task of locating and then recovering the decking panels forced deeply into the bog. Such oversights happen, despite distributed knowledge of such areas, we had heard stories of squadrons and troops of tanks disappearing in like bogs, whether this was in WWII or since I never did find out, all such areas peat bogs/marshes etc. were said to be mapped throughout Europe and used in strategic planning as a natural barrier against heavy armour.

In reply to a call for volunteers, I found myself selected to attend a two week skiing course for military applications to be held in the Hertz Mountains (thinking back could have been quite close to the Russian border),



as the due date came, along with others in the unit we went off in transport suitably equipped with the suggested clothing and the necessary other items of issue kit to see us through the course duration plus traveling time. We were all comfortably housed just up and across the road from the designated base of instruction, where we presented ourselves on day one primed with the written orders and instructions given to all new arrivals at the accommodation. As expected it appeared very cold, and the area could have been many hundreds of feet above sea level, compared to the location of our parent unit. The whole area noticed on arrival way in, was covered in a thick carpet of the whitest of snow rather blinding on the eyes until acclimatised as it were.

The instructor, a big blond German with a good knowledge and apparent understanding of the English language introduced himself and explained the contents of the course, placing an emphasis on the fact that fitness was an essential requisite for the proposed training, I therefore assumed that the selection process had accommodated that fact. We were eyed up and down and on that basis given white coveralls and gloves for which we paid the usual military price, our individual signatures for the temporary loan, skis were likewise but had to be handed over for safe keeping after every training use. The course was 90% practical and the aim to get ourselves familiar with equipment required, the military application, basic skills and make as much progress as possible to become an accomplished skier. As with so many occupations practice brings one so much nearer to perfection and that was up to ourselves on completion of the course.

Personally, always given to laughing at the downfall of others, I was rather more than cheerful for a larger part of the course. Every member of the course like myself appeared to be a complete novice, and I thought we must have looked real idiots amongst the sporting civilian populace, the antics of balance and sheer acrobatics performed in efforts to remain upright whilst endeavouring to make progress were really very funny. We were left to our own devices for what seemed a very long hour, on relatively flat ground, to get the feel and become accustomed, master the balance, familiarization, all of that and more, after which a small walk on the slippery runners was the go with tightening of laces, adjustments of straps and correction of style. After a short break and further walking exercises and turning and more practice at all it was lunch time.

In the afternoon of day one we tried our luck on a very gentle slope, having been taught the rudiments of the plough position/stance whatever, feet apart and toes turned in to form an arrow point with the skis, a method of slowing down/stopping, for beginners maybe, one tended to lose direction and balance at the first attempts, and since there were pine trees around they seemed quite an attraction. Few of our bunch remained upright, I was laughing at them, they were laughing at me laughing at them, it was quite hilarious. The instructor appeared to lose control for a while laughing at me laughing at them, usually the saying is if you enjoy what you are doing you should become good at it, but in this instance it would be more true to say we had lost the plot the ability to concentrate. However we continued on, some guys losing patience with their inability and their associated remarks initiating further outburst of laughter.

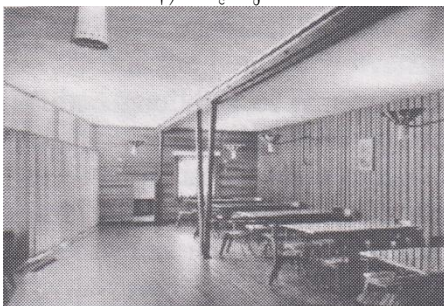
Day two was a repeat of day one and day three partly so with longer walks on the skis. Day four on longer slightly steeper slopes, turning, stopping and keeping the skis parallel and further practice, now the efforts of walking back up were having effect. Glad of the long break at midday the afternoon was much the same, except more energy was spent on physical exertion than humour. Day five revision of day four and a long afternoon walk on skis, the continuous slide type walking with the use of sticks proved very tiring and there was nothing to laugh at. Day six, another area with humps and bumps preceded by a downhill run and pine trees everywhere and a given route to follow. Initially we walked back up, very time consuming but for the last two runs of the day permission was given to use the chair lifts now available. Day 7 as for day 6 but with rucksacks and no chair lifts. Day 8 with rucksacks and haversack rations, "langan, loufan" or that's how it sounded, meaning a long march on skis, a very tiring long day. In the morning of day 9 some classroom work, lectures and information, first aid safety and survival, and a short ski run before the midday break before afternoon ski work with loaded rucksacks. Day 10, early start, long march with loaded rucksacks and in the afternoon all lead on longish fatigue order light skiing trek with turns humps and bumps and small jumps, involving a long walk back, thereafter handing in kit, a farewell talk and advice - no exam, a late meal, few beers and bed. The day following the next we awoke from a sound night's sleep back in barracks in Hameln. The course was enjoyable, rough, tough and tiring, although weapons were taken and stored in the course armoury, I cannot recall them being used on the course. I never ever used skis again.

Skiing course in the mountains



Kreisjugendlager Wettermarkt  
Torfhaus Harz 811m

Bad Harzburg restaurant -  
Cafe Hubertus



On one of the divisional exercises whilst acting as the enemy, the troop was given the task to destroy as many tanks as possible in a known harbour up area (pretend of course) this was to be achieved under the cover of darkness in the form of section foot patrols through enemy held territory to a given map reference destination, where the supposed targets were to be found, and to simulate the attack and destruction, each tank and/or armoured vehicle was to be daubed in white paint with a large cross on the turret or some other prominent place. The chosen night happened to be a filthy wet one, all were dressed lightly in musketry order (ammunition pouches/light webbing braces), works dress and weapons with bayonet, boots and anklets, selected ones carried gym shoes, others small sealed containers of paint, old tooth brushes rags and whatnot to apply the paint, cap comforters (short woollen type scarf that could be inverted and worn on the head) were worn in lieu of beret or helmets and faces were blackened.

At the briefing all section commanders and their 2 i/cs were given the outline of the task, unmarked maps and one map reference that they were to memorise. I was to be the overall commander for the exercise and to brief accordingly. I took a section myself, there was to be no talking except for whispered orders, reports or warnings, no smoking, no rattling or noise at all, trip wires and sentries dealt with as appropriate, no blanks (blank rounds of ammunition) to be fired until the order given by section leaders and then only as a last resort. Estimated time to destination, one and a half hours, form up at midnight, move off 00 15 hrs. onwards. Four patrols of ten men, each patrol split with a leader in each half, half patrols to follow within sighting distance or around fifty paces. An FUP (forming up point) short of the actual destination given, All patrols moving roughly in line 150 to 200 yards apart until the thought-to-be well defined FUP feature reached. When runners were to make contact thirty minutes after expected arrival time at FUP, with the challenge password to report states and await further

orders. Failure to meet up meant attack time at 0240 hrs., proposed plan 1 section north of target, 2 section east of target, 3 section south of target and 4 section west, each to move in at perimeter of target area.

That night patrol proved to be very interesting, one of the more interesting ones of my career, walking through woods and fields at dead of night, my youthful poaching days came to the fore. I took it in turns with my lead scout to lead borrowing the trip wire stick, weapons held at the ready left hand as normal but holding the trip wire feeler as well. We encountered one tin can trip wire (designed to rattle when tripped) but it was detected and hence not tripped, but indicated we were in the immediate vicinity of manned trenches and quite likely to be in a field of fire and I reckoned if 'they' were alert we would have been seen and signalled accordingly and carried on with stealth. My leading scout pointed out and down, put his hand to his ear and pressed on, I heard the snoring and did likewise. We were in a sparsely wooded pine plantation with a fair amount of grass under foot, we were all wet but not to the point of squelching visibility at a push 35 yards, I turned to see the last man hand over to the 2nd half and proceeded on, in the open I took over the lead and after 15 minutes was zapped, my exclamation halted all who dropped and took up the 1st IA (immediate action), all round observation. I had walked into an electric fence, higher than the expected trip wires, being decidedly wet the result was immediate and shocking, although only 24 volts it gave a considerable 'wack'. I knew of them but it was furthest from my thoughts just then, I ducked and crawled under and signalled on. and heard the sniggers, each watching the other to follow. The cattle seen a little further on all resting stirred to observe and my boyhood learning steered me to avoid them, walking on their seeing side some distance away so as not to startle and cause a disturbance. Remaining on the bearing another zap wire had to come, eventually reached and treated with respect we continued, at one stage hearing voices and seeing a Varye light way behind us.

The RV reached almost on time, a long straight dyke and hedgerow to boot, the patrol rested with all round observation, the other patrols were to have come in on my right. I sent an NCO and one forward to recce a route in and to check on any defences that could be around the harbour area found to be amongst tall pine trees, no defences found. Two sections reported in on time, the first all present, the second had walked through a dug-in position the half section was spotted, challenged and chased and one man was caught. The last section runner fifteen minutes late reported a detour had to be made; half section had been lost after being dispersed on detection. All were moved off at pre-arranged time in file and spaced in sections, but I had decided all should make the same entry point if the first got through the second would follow etc., with the exception that one section would remain outside the perimeter to create diversion tactics well away from retreat route in two groups if required, others to proceed to designated areas to commence work and cover the fourth area if time and retrace steps to entry point and previous RV a maximum of twenty minutes in total. NCO and one man from diversion remained at a point ninety degrees from exit route and twenty five minutes after attack start time fired a vary pistol flare into the harbour area to simulate the explosive charges detonating, all were instructed to return to base avoiding contact areas on approach and separately. One section ran head on into a four man patrol, had a shootout, split up and managed to return My own patrol challenged by a single sentry, we split up and at the double cleared the area and by sheer coincidence met up again just before entry to base.

All were back as daylight broke except the one man caught the lost half section went to ground and bided their time admitting being lost until too late and then cautiously made the return journey. Tired, wet and hungry and yet feeling good. I reminded that early breakfast would be available at 0600 hrs, there would be a debrief at 1200 hrs. look after your weapons and dismiss. I had a quick breakfast and crashed out myself. Umpires with the armour confirmed the successful raid early same day. Such exercises provided realism and good experience and many enjoyed the little adventures despite the discomfort of cold and wet, unfortunately they were too infrequent where an active opposing force existed, perhaps the infantry practised such events more often this was after all our secondary role and a means of getting to targets on foot.

Perhaps the tank corps got a message about security, this couldn't have been the norm. Working with the 'tankies' provided us with another point, military point of view, we saw their reactions to minefields and simulated demolitions, i.e. bridges and roads that umpires had deemed did not exist or were impassable, such work and/or operations in reality would have been co-ordinated with say field artillery to direct an advancing force in to a field of fire, such are the tactics of the commanding top brass. Camouflage was also rather more of a problem for the tank squadrons since even single tracks would appear like a road on aerial photographs.

The Engineers did have at that time, an armoured engineer regiment that had armoured dozers, flail tanks for clearing mines, flat tops that drove into gullies so that others could cross over them, others that carried large

rolls of 'fascine' used either as gap fill-ins or as an improvised trackway for wheeled vehicles over soft ground. Much later in service, bridge laying tanks were introduced, laying quite large spans with hydraulic arms that they carried into required areas themselves.



MY FIRST CAR 1956 FORD PREFECT  
(New) 400 English Pounds with tax concession (\$900)  
In front of the barracks block

The Purchase of my first new car indeed any car - during a brief spell in barracks, a car salesman appeared in the WO's and Sgts, mess and attracted my attention around early to mid-August. I still enjoyed my AJS bike although long rides in the biting cold were not looked forward to in the same way, and I suppose I did not need much persuading for the travelling comfort then being offered particularly as it was tax free. A motor car, Ford Prefect New Model, 1200cc if my memory serves me right for four hundred pounds. I signed up and it was duly imported to Hamburg in Germany between the 3rd and 5th September 1956. I collected it with a friend Bob a few days later, having previously received permission to purchase and keep the car in barracks. I still had the bike, I was still heading the unit motor cycle team and practiced with them when time permitted. We had already entered one competition finding the course very challenging but we were on a par with the other entrants fairly average. I had a nickname for a short while as the "Regimental Plutocrat," new car and almost a new bike. I kept both for some nine months before disposing of the bike, I still had the army bikes to ride and many times conflicting interests, on recreational afternoons I liked to play sport in particular football, but this was also a time for the trial riding practice. Somehow I managed and kept up my involvement with both rarely having free weekends as I also played badminton and put in practice for the regimental swimming team, and had also been asked to take the squadron boxing team under my wing, the latter involving some very early rising, in the darkness for road runs around the back roads and woodland tracks. We trained hard having long since learned that a change is as good as a rest so a break from running was used as a short period of shadow boxing, the actual art of boxing I left to the APTC Warrant Officer and his staff at other times. Surprisingly at that time I was surviving on four to five hours sleep as I still enjoyed the company of my opposite numbers in the mess, and it helped to keep up the fluid content of the body. Bottles of Falkenkrug? were the favourite of the day, and I also enjoyed Senior Service cigarettes, at that time a packet of twenty lasting well over one day, I enjoyed one with a 'cuppa,' meal, or over a few drinks, and always kept the habit to organised breaks within the troop. Little was known then to the likes of myself about the effects of smoking, my parents smoked Dad having a pipe earlier on. I only really started sometime after joining up, the PT course that I had attended advised against, saying ones stamina could be improved by not smoking but the pressure was only there for the duration of the course and a short time after.

New exercise tactics were starting to be introduced, practical for the top brass and planning staff no doubt, but very boring for the man in the field. Nuclear warfare, simulated attacks supposedly took place and exercise umpires would appear on the scene and inform us that we had all been wiped out, instructions were then given for us to remain in our harbour area for maybe four or five days and sit the time out, after which we would receive instructions to continue on with the exercise as though we were replacements just arrived to replace those wiped out. The time out was cold, wet and boring, we organised a little section in-house training to keep the men occupied. I guess in a way it made us all realise how vulnerable field forces were to such threats of action, but exercises as such began to lose the interest aspect, as most NCO's liked to practice what they had preached and build and train on virgin sites.

October and November were very active months with exercises before we returned to barracks for a reasonable period of so called civilised soldiering, a bit of square bashing. PT periods, kit layouts and room inspections and bringing kit up to scratch, classroom instruction and perhaps get in leave entitlements for those so allotted or allowed. I've no idea how the chosen few - were - for the Christmas period, but it came and went with ah the usual traditions being observed and often a blind eye being turned to some forms of behaviour that would attract much attention at other times of the year. Christmas usual was like an extra-long weekend off regarding time, and likewise the new year.

It was about this time that a very unusual incident occurred late one afternoon. A Centurion tank, one of several in the barracks at the time for what reason now I am not sure, was rumbling around the road that surrounded the large barrack square the regimental guard and squadron duty NCOs were off duty. This was very soon a spectator event for almost everyone who had remained behind. there was lots of arm e mg and men running back and forth, the presence of the Orderly Officer and the Orderly Sgt made no difference as the tank slewed around the comers tearing at the tarmac and in some cases the cobblestones. Some men jumped aboard and were hammering around the drivers compartment but the tank continued on with the engine notes high and low accompanied with associated puffs of black exhaust as though there were constant gear changing. The episode lasted for what seemed like a very long time, and raised many questions. How does one stop a centurion in such situations, how and why was it on the move, how does one communicate with the driver? No one appeared to know. The potential for damage was enormous and yet all movement, although far from straight driving, had remained on the barrack roads, nothing could have stopped it moving outside the barracks in any case, but it remained within, it appeared a decision had been made to observe and accompany, perhaps until the novelty wore off, which happened some forty or fifty minutes from when it was first observed. With the tank stopping half way around the square, the latch opened and out stepped, fell, stumbled an individual who had words with the Orderly Sgt. who had by then approached to join members of the guard, they then walked off casually to the guard room and so endeth the story of the afternoon. We heard later that the offender was in fact a Cpl from the regiment, who had had a rather longer than usual lunchtime session in the Cpls. mess and was in a very inebriated state, a very knowledgeable NCO by all accounts who was duly dealt with. As a SNCO i.e. Sgt. or above, although not a requirement as a first class field engineer, it was considered an asset to be able to drive any vehicle on the units strength, or other vehicles if the opportunity arose, and since engineer teaching was to always know the man's job above you, that would have filtered down to section Cpls. I know I personally learnt to drive all sorts, including the seven ton Coles crane. I had also been shown how to move a centurion tank but had never practised or had the chance to do so.

Having time in barracks allowed us the opportunity to follow up on our schooling of army education. At that time I still required more tuition to get the remaining subjects of my army first class, a requirement to get the substantive rank that we all strove for, as it guaranteed the pay packet of the rank where ever one was posted to. Unit courses took place; radio operators, field engineering grade two, driver training, first aid, Junior NCO cadre courses. There were always a turnover of personnel inter-unit postings, men leaving the services, men straight from recruit training, although there was an Engineer Unit, No 4, turning out drivers at the time, there never seemed to be sufficient, hence unit driving training. Men not required or selected for courses carried out an annual revision of the basics. There was time for sport and recreation generally, this was the only unit that I served with that had access to a riding school for all ranks (horse riding that is!). I had so many interest that something had to go amiss and this was one of them, there had been a riding school at Brompton in Kent, but as busy trade training recruits we neither had the time or an invitation. I did my early morning runs chasing the boxing team, some evenings were spent swimming for the regimental team training session, a couple of evenings at ACE 1st class instruction, one evening a week there could have been a mess function of some sort. On Saturday afternoon and/or Sunday I played football either with the squadron or the troop, some games were arranged against local civilian teams in the villages surrounding Hameln. These were enjoyable occasions as invariably we were invited to stay on for the village dance in the evenings often held in the local guest house or a hall which was very close by, although we were anything but experts with the language dancing appeared to be the same and I wasn't expert at that either but I got around with the waltz, quickstep and something similar to the paly glide and other easy to learn movements to music. One or two of the lads formed long standing relationships with girls they had met at these times. I also kept abreast of the trial bike riding training programme for which I was responsible and gradually notched up a few skills myself, learning from the lads with whom I was training. There was little spare time as regimental duties always took priority and everything else organised around them.

The Sgts, mess bar was always open until midnight and every night I would spend an hour or so there, sometimes

playing snooker or billiards after the earlier evening activities and before bedtime, being always active and thinking back, the few bottles of Falkenkrug were a good way to keep up the body fluids, as I've said before, I must have believed in the idea, we certainly did not drink with the idea of getting drunk. The mess bar, like a lot of pubs I guess, was the social centre where we would meet friends. The only bad thing at that time, as we now know, was the habit of smoking more smoked than did not smoke, quite the reverse of that in today's social circles.

As troop Sgts, we still had to find time to write out our lecture notes, troop training programmes, and if selected as assistant instructors on any of the regimental courses in progress there was always preparation required for the forthcoming days activities. My time was always booked on the extra curricular activities as previously described, and therefore I was not available for the regimental courses, so in a way I was selecting and enjoying the things that I did.

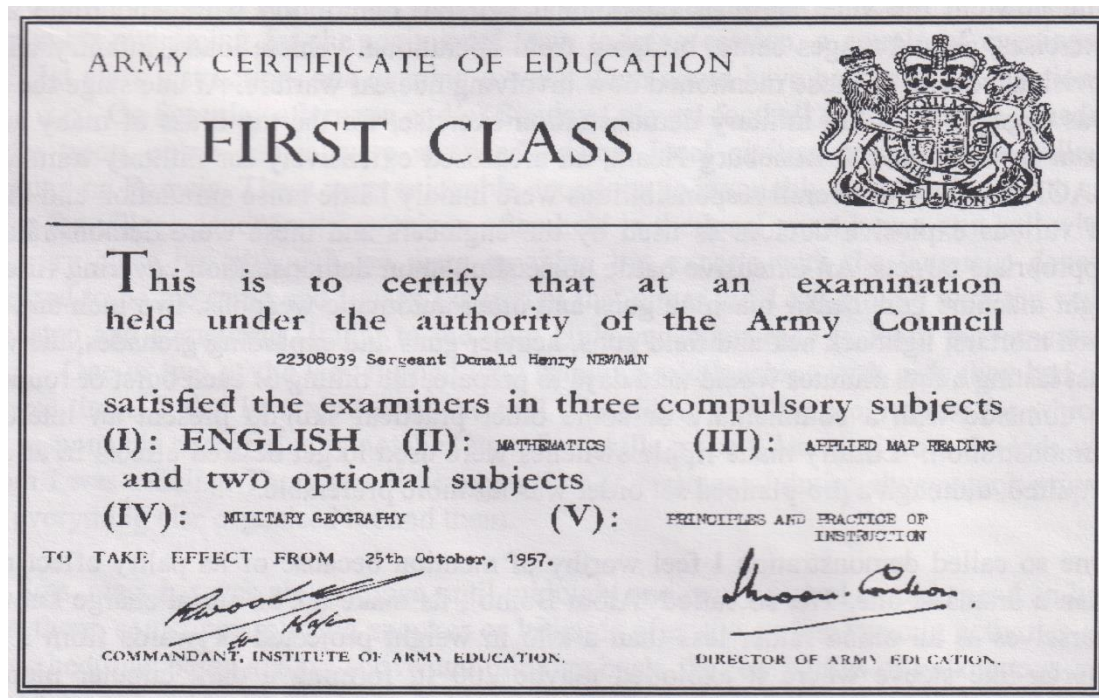
Reading and writing anything but military rarely took place, I had a good selection of pamphlets and notes from courses attended and always endeavoured to read up prior to any training, just to revise myself on the facts and figures. The field of knowledge required was very extensive and sergeants were expected to know the answers to whatever questions were thrown at them, If I did not know I always said I would find out, and of course learnt myself in the process of doing so. I had long been practising the development of words of command as given on the barrack square, as suggested by a more senior Sgt. who said I had the ideal convenience for it, my motor bike the AJS 350 cc, so as I was roaring along the Autobahns (large concrete motorways planned and constructed under 'Hitlers' orders during World War II for the movement of his armies, or so I was told) at 60 miles per hour average = 112 kph, which was not a bad speed for an overall journey, I would shout at the top of my voice, "Parade - attena shun, slope arms, parade general salute pree-sent arms, slope arms, order arms, parade stand att-ease" the long drawn out cautionary and the quick sharp executive words of command. Such practice ensured that the vocal cords withstood the strain and did not croak up and at the same time developed a distinctive voice that would carry such orders of course, those above, were applicable to the old .303 rifle still in use after some 70 years or so at that time. I carried on the same practice for many years whilst driving my car. Practice brings perfection, well in my case it certainly helped a lot.

As the weather improved in the spring of 1957 more time was spent out on manoeuvres. The now, too very familiar, operational call out demolition work and route denial exercises, annual ranges camp, bridging from operational vehicle loads, infantry training revision, several of those mentioned now involving nuclear warfare. At one stage the troop was engaged in a big military demonstration exercise, for the top brass of many armies from far and wide at Luneburg Heath, an area used extensively for military training for BAOR troops. Our overall responsibilities were mainly battle noise simulation and the use of various explosive devices as used by the engineers and these were demonstrated on appropriate targets. An extensive battle noise simulation demonstration covering rifle fire, light machine gun, heavy machine guns and other automatic weapons, two inch and three inch mortars, light ack ack and field guns, heavier guns and exploding grenades, the whole just lasting a few minutes would take days to prepare, the timing of each burst or round had to coincide with a commentary or some other practical skill to present an interesting demonstration. Locally made ripple switches were used to get desired effects in an order required, although a pre-planned set order was far more preferable.

One so called demonstration I feel worthy of mention because of its paltry effect rather than a dramatic one. The so called 'Atom Bomb,' its makeup, an aerial charge known to ourselves as an onion rather less than a kilo in weight projected skywards from a basic mortar like sleeve where it exploded maybe 200ft. forming a dark circular plume of smoke. A ground charge of 14 lbs. of high explosive had to be detonated at exactly the same time as the aerial charge. Stop watch practice had decided on the time delay to get the right effect as directed? The demo, as such, went off without fault - luckily, as practice runs found the 'onion' failures were not unusual. As stated, we the users, thought the effect was anything but! Such work was all pretend stuff, but it did give the sappers the experience of working with live explosives and live explosive devices, handling detonators electric and otherwise, primers, detonating cord, the various fuses, high and low explosives in slab plastic and powder form and the various shaped charges, the implementation of safety precautions with examples of why.

During some of the military exercises aerial photographs were taken of different units in their harbour areas and as a result emphasis had been placed on camouflage training. The order also resulted in green towels and underwear being issued instead of the white as previously, (one would have thought the lesson would have been learned long ago in the Red Jackets era). It appeared many wartime experiences and lessons were quickly

forgotten, post war soldiers however were then taking it all in their stride to rectify what could have or maybe seen from the air, as examples, foliage as overhead cover is only good for a couple of days whilst it remained fresh, even flattened grass showed up a different shade of green, highly polished items were in effect 'sign posts.' Common sense of course often prevailed in the ranks and most of the above was known, however at that time soldiers were still being told "yours is not to reason why" and as a result lots of daft things were done in carrying out superior orders. I certainly had my own thoughts and applied what I thought was right often having private 'discussions' for the want of another word with my immediate superiors, after all any cover is better than no cover at all, dirty brasses and equipment with the exception of weapons were certainly to ones advantage, and that can be adhered to without any disrespect to personal hygiene. I always listened to the view of the guys in the troop and felt that they felt better for being able to air their opinions and quite often an idea would surface worthy of further follow up. I not only instructed what and how but added the additional explanatory scene of why, which eventually became the norm, rather than the exception, method of instruction had become one of my optional subjects in my endeavours to get my army first class education.



In late summer back in barracks, I sat for and passed the Army First Class Education examination and was presented with the long awaited certificate. I had also volunteered for the Army Air Corps, as being a pilot had become one of the things that I wanted to do. maybe I had started to look for new fields of adventure the idea having been prompted by a call for volunteer applicants as displayed on regimental orders to all ranks. I had the required qualifications and filled in the forms provided by the chief clerk, my interest was queried by the troop commander, then a Captain and also the second in command of the squadron. I heard nothing further of this until the following year which must have been at least five months later.

All the exercises, barracks activities, the preparation for and the annual admin inspection itself were carried on in 1957 in much the same way as for the previous years. The only exception being the addition of nuclear warfare as an extra consideration, it just appeared to emphasize the fact that if ever we were within range of 'the bomb' we'd all be wiped out anyway and it would be end of story, however we carried on with this new concept of training.

Whilst in barracks I continued on with my other after duty interest whenever there was time. Around early September there appeared on orders, regimental orders, a request for volunteers for the Special Air Service. A high standard of physical fitness was required, accepted applicants would have to undergo a very selective course that included arduous training and other ranks also be prepared to relinquish any rank held on acceptance to the SAS Regiment. The next selection course to commence end of October 1957.

I was informed by the chief clerk, that it was an ACI (Army Council Instruction) that no applications could be refused by the unit. Having been turned down previously on two occasions to try my luck in Airborne Forces I applied and had to attend an OC's interview and was told that there were far better career plans for me within the Royal Engineers and that I should give the idea further thought. The failure rate for all applicants was said to be very high, regarding fitness I certainly had a better than average chance, but if accepted I would lose my rank and the resulting loss in pay. I did look into the matter in more detail assisted by the Chief Clerk to find that in fact, I would retain the substantive rank of Sergeant in the Royal Engineers and, depending on my length of service with the SAS if accepted, would regain the rank on return to the Corps with maybe some loss of seniority. The addition of parachuting pay compensated somewhat the loss of Sgts, pay and I would have been the equivalent of a five star infantryman being a first class tradesman and therefore on the top pay of a private, sapper, gunner or in the case of the SAS a trooper.

Here was a challenge. I'd always loved a challenge, but on the other hand there is a fair bit at stake here and I asked for the application to be sent on. Some of my friends said I wanted my head tested, a couple of superiors said it was silly bravado, some wished me luck and others said see you back here by Christmas. My Parents could not understand. - 12 originally signed on for five and seven (five years with the colours and seven years on the reserve) on completion of the five I signed up to complete twelve years regular service and, having achieved the rank of Sergeant, I was now prepared to throw it all in and start again. I was single and carefree and I guess the exploits of wartime airborne soldiers were still with me. It was a new challenge a new adventure, and I was prepared to accept whatever lay ahead.



## CHAPTER 7

### The Special Air Service Malaya - 'D' Squadron 1957-1960

The present-day SAS, the direct descendant of the World War II SAS, was formed in 1952, and began its career with a series of campaigns against guerrillas operating in the difficult terrain of countries such as Malaya, Borneo and Aden. In recent years, however, the SAS has become more associated with the war against terrorism.

I had previously told my girlfriend about volunteering for the SAS and what I thought it involved. I had on a previous short leave to UK become engaged to her, anyhow no plans had been laid, everything was on an 'it all depends basis.' I had applied to return to the UK early several days before the commencement of the SAS selection course in Wales and this was OK'd by the OC 29 Field Squadron RE and I left with everything, kit and personal items, obviously with no intention of returning although I had no way of knowing that. I kept up my daily road runs around the triangle of the road network around my parents' home in the village of Shepherdswell, just inland from Dover in Kent as I always had on previous home leave. Fitness had long been an asset in my book and I had chivvied the unit boxing team along right up to and including the day that I left the Squadron in Germany.

On the due date I reported in to Deering Lines, the Headquarters of the Special Air Service Selection Centre, not a very impressive military establishment, occupied by other units as well, one of which I think was an RASC unit, a very old camp with wooden accommodation huts, a large brick cookhouse shared by all units and one or two other buildings of a like construction, the various ablution blocks were serviceable and as clean as one might expect of an aging service facility. An NCO took my details and queried my personal kit list and directed me to a wooden hut to select a bed space, wardrobe and bedside cabinet, all the bedding was up to standard with a reasonable mattress, the hut already occupied by some men of a parachute unit going by the red berets and camouflage jackets lying around. I voiced a hello to those I brushed by, and heard in the background, that which I was obviously meant to hear, " what are these 'F----- CRAP HATS doing here" an expression that I had not heard before and seeing that I had entered on my own I looked in the direction from whence it came with disapproving thoughts if not looks, and marked him, and then continued to sort out my gear and make my bed, there were still empty bed spaces at the end of the room. I grabbed a towel and soap and went for a freshen up, on return I engaged in conversation with a couple of guys, both paras one a Cpl who commented on my engineer badge, "did I know any para engineers in Aldershot?" "Not to my knowledge, I had met some five years earlier in Egypt, anyway who is the big mouthed little runt with a chevron on its arm." They endeavoured to pass it off as a joke but I made my point.

Another character arrived at the entrance and I recognised the badge on a blue beret from the other end of the hut, a REME Sgt., I beckoned him in and introduced myself. He settled in opposite and I listened for the crap hat comment above the buzz of voices but heard not I moved around to find out who knew what, and was shown a notice board that gave information on routine for the following day, I also learnt that some of the men present had been back coursed and were about to make a second attempt. This had happened in the engineers, but only to the guys who maybe were a bit thick, hadn't learnt, didn't grasp or who missed out for some other reason, with the exception of one who I eventually found out had had a motor cycle accident towards the end of the last course the remainder were paras, who just didn't pass. I was somewhat surprised at that; however they did offer a little insight as to what to expect including a comment from the little runt, "anyone who tries to keep up with the Captain is a f---ing idiot' you'll be knackered before you get anywhere," he was referring to the officer in charge of the course. I mentioned to a couple of guys around me that "he sounded as though he wanted a mouth wash,, wonder if anyone has changed his nappies today," an outburst of laughter caused the remark to be repeated. It then appeared to me that perhaps I was one of the older members on the course from those that I had seen around me, I'd give most of them at least five years maybe eight for some, at twenty eight that made quite a difference in that age group which much later in service would have gone unnoticed.

After an evening meal I cleaned up my kit for the morning parade and went out for a walk around the camp, I had seen a few men coming and going from the hut adjacent to the one that I had settled in and had assumed that they were on the same course. I guessed perhaps the three chevrons on my arm did not invite conversation from some of those present, however on return I did engage in social chit chat to learn a bit more about the

course, some of the related past events sounded rough and tough stuff and I thought possibly exaggerated as some young braggards are apt to do.

On the morning parade, roll call took place, I noted there were five blue berets and one greenish one, all the rest were red paras, all members of the SAS permanent staff were present. After a brief introduction to the officer in charge, his sergeant and staff, we moved to a classroom to get an introduction to the course, the type of physical exercises to expect type of country, type of men they were looking for, what was expected from each and every man, the failure rates were by far higher than those who successfully completed the course to date. The reasons varied, lack of physical ability, endurance and stamina or will power to carry on, adverse conditions, cold/wet, mental approach because of, and the mar; medical reasons. Note there was a medical room within the camp.

Any man was free to make the decision to quit if he felt he was not able to ease. After a few questions asked and answered on invitation, there was a revision period: navigation aids as we were all assumed to have knowledge on the subject. I am sure from the queries that arose, that several knew not of true north, grid north and magnetic north or of the magnetic variation. Most of course would have got by if they knew the prismatic compass for the type of work anticipated and had they been capable of absorbing all the information a military map provides, and then transforming it into a mental picture of hills valleys re-entrants spurs and cliff walls and marshes etc. Reference was made to sketch maps (mud maps previously in my book) where contour lines, rivers and streams were shown but no roads or tracks or railway lines and the barest of other features on both sides of a proposed route, with maybe target areas and RVs marked

My initial viewpoint had not changed. I still regarded it all as a good challenge and looking around at my new associates just gave me further encouragement. The first half day passed getting us all mentally prepared and/or confused whatever and for some, seeds of doubt sown too. Kit required was drawn, with two empty sandbags, and advice given on weather conditions expected, type of going and the rest was up to us as individuals. Whereas most army training, and I guess it applied to all arms, emphasis was placed on team spirit, team support, teamwork, here the emphasis was to be on the individual, to travel and navigate alone, overcome obstacles, find sketch and report as directed, RV on time, observe all restrictions given. Those failing to comply with the latter would be RTU without further question if caught. (Returned to Unit).

After a light lunch and a longish lunch hour we were to parade in light fatigue order for a warm up exercise. A short run found us next to an area of familiar structures, usually found in most base training areas of military establishments. It was an army directive that all men in all units under the age of thirty five were to undergo an annual physical efficiency test, part of which was to negotiate an obstacle course (like the one that now faced us) plus the long marches in a set time, the ability to carry a comrade his kit and weapon fifty meters or so and then carry out a marked shooting practice on a live range. To a man we had all done this before. Our immediate objective was the obstacle course only, we were to do a 'few' circuits under the supervision of our now obvious Irish Sgt. instructor, when asked, no one had any questions, we were to start on the verbal go ahead and stop when told to do so.

On the "way you go then" or something similar, there was a rush to get away, with over two dozen of us in the group I didn't see the point and waited until there was space on the six foot wall ahead and also waiting for an instructor like comment that did not come, a few others had like thoughts and soon all were moving, I immediately thought stamina and commenced on a not rush pace. Within thirty minutes tired effects were beginning to show on some, there were words of encouragement and many other comments, humorous and otherwise from the Sgt. in charge and two or three of his staff who had walked around to see the goings on, the whole affair seemed very informal as were the mornings revision classes. The weather was cold but there were many rosy cheeks, I was beginning to work up a bit of a sweat myself, I had been overtaken by at least half of them, but was reasonably comfortable and felt in good form and continued on. It is quite a distraction to have to laugh in such situations, two or three were getting shots of almost verbal abuse in the form of Irish wit, he was an older man and already one was appreciating his authority and sense of humour. The REME Sgt. and one other were the first at walking pace that I had noticed, although there was a slight resemblance to a trot, the rot was setting in, human beings are much like sheep, the very attitude not being looked for, with each circuit numbers were gradually thinning, the nine foot ditch getting wider, the ropes longer, the single pole more difficult, or so it seemed. Those running through or falling off were chastised into the right method and some humour with it kept the remainder going, those falling out had been ushered off. I didn't mind running in fact I

quite enjoyed it, but this upper body arm work was very telling, I was aching shoulder wise. In normal circumstances that was nature's way of saying enough, but half were still not giving in and how could I in front of these junior soldiers, three non paras were still going when rather less than half of us were told, that will do. The little group that I was in got a reassuring wink from our Paddy Wack (Sgt. Newgent as I remember) as we passed by getting advice on a shower and a change, as I said to the other guys a wink is as good as a nod so consider it well done.

I guess to keep us all on an even keel I cannot recall rank being used for course members, with the exception of the very first roll call, from then on we answered to surname only, whether I missed a statement to that effect I do not know, but that's the way it appeared to be thereafter. The informality bothered me not at all, some of the guys uttered a friendly 'hey Sarge' when attracting my attention and so it remained for most.

Back in the hut the day's activities were under discussion, with the odd minor injuries, sore arms, the odd blister, muscle cramp in one case. Comfortable footwear was an essential, mature soldiers would/should have known, rubber soled boots had been issued to units as far as I knew, I had come to know them as 'cobbly wobblers' and had two well worn pairs with me, one pair exhibiting the highly 'bullshit' toes and heels and previously used as best boots. I had anticipated that conditions there in Wales would require the second pair and stories heard so far confirmed that. The following day was to be our first march and with scales available we were required to place twenty five pounds of sand in a sandbag to be carried in each mans bergen rucksack, along with any other essentials.

The Captain was there as we assembled for the first march. The briefing was to follow him to the top of the hill where we would individually get instructions to proceed to our first RV, at each succeeding RV further written instructions would be given out. This was the man we should not try to keep up with, he was a six footer around my age, he looked a healthy specimen and got his height from his long legs as I saw him. I had not at that time met an officer that I could not keep up with, including the Mad Major at Chatham, in a physical way that is. The morning was dry with a chill wind and I stayed a short distant behind and weighed up his technique, he meandered a few paces both left and right up the steeper parts of the incline, without being derogatory real animal behaviour whether he had the twenty five pounds of sand I can only assume that he did as the sand did not take up much bulk space and most bergens looked empty. I was taking two paces to his one. he had a long gangly consistent stride but I stayed with him, and he knew with his not too frequent backward glances. I was breathing rather heavily but all was well within my capacity, I thought of the views behind and satisfied my curiosity with a quick glance, the course was way back in one body but straggled out in a long line.

That first leg was only a fifty minute hike for the Captain and before he had time to reach and maybe select a piece of paper for me I was at his side. "Well done Newman. I've your next RV here, don't talk to anyone on the next leg, make a quick assessment and be on your way." I was almost too breathless to answer but managed a "yes sir," flipped the compass open and after a minute was off having fixed a point ahead. I then contoured towards it, all was silent the wind cooling the going now easy and then somewhat relaxed, decided to set a fair competitive pace. 'Twas a lonely walk right up my alley on looking back and to my right I saw two figures on the skyline way in the distance, only about half the height of a foresight on a .303 Lee Enfield (the range, perhaps an ex infanteer would know?). Having set off at eight a.m., it was way past ten before I laid eyes on a Land Rover way ahead right where I had estimated my piece of paper stated, at ten forty I passed through, received fresh instructions, declined the offer of a drink having my own and pressed on. Having descended to RV I then had to climb again up and up to the top to find decidedly marshy-like ground with large bumps and tufts. I looked to see if there might be a way around, possibly but a very long way round, it was a large expanse of tasty flat ground to the eye my route almost across the centre with no tangible point ahead on which to make a fix. I noted the direction of the clouds and attempted to keep the approach angle in line with them, just as accurate as meandering around the bumps and holes with a compass. Actually I had done the cloud trick before whilst riding my motor bike with much success in Belgium, Holland and Germany in the big cities where in some cases one lines up eight abreast at the traffic lights and you do not always go where you drink you did on roads half the width of a football pitch.

At one p.m. I found a welcome pint mug of tea and a couple of doorstep sandwiches, having traversed the marsh I was wet through from the upper legs down and wet from there upwards with perspiration. I had not noticed prior to stopping but the wind then started to pick out the wet spots with the heat generation having stopped. With fresh instructions I was told the next was the last leg for the day and so with renewed vigour and a chance

to warm up again I set off knowing two men had already gone through and another was approaching as I left, not all, apparently went through the same RV's. The last leg proved to be a real up and downer, reasonably straight forward but hard going, there was a reminder to leave all gates as found as sheep were to be found in many areas. The animal tracks were more prominent, sheep tracks that is. As a country boy I had known that domestic animals anyway, never walked directly up or down hills but took the easier route by contouring or walking diagonal up the slope, even goats meander as an easier method of climbing, maybe the method was something to do with self-preservation since if chased by a predator, less effort is required to move more quickly diagonally up or down.

Around four p.m. I found myself climbing into the back of a three ton truck to join three other guys already there after having booked in and was told there would be rather a long wait as the remainder made their way in. Names and times of all persons passing through the RV's were recorded. After eight hours on my feet I described myself as pleasantly tired and the cross country route as a bit of a 'doddle' (no trouble at all) it did not appear to be viewed by others in the same way as I learnt later. It had started to get dark before the truck pulled away leaving a Land Rover behind. Very much later whilst dismounting in Deering Lines we were informed a late meal was available and we were left to our own devices until the morning.

The next two days the routine was much the same with the going hard, wet and cold, all a question of stamina and endurance as I saw it. We were gradually getting to know one another, the REME Sgt. had been nicknamed 'The Cockerel' because he was always crowing, off duty his conversation always in the negative, critical concerning this course, not my type. As most people do in similar situations I would think, I made my own personal judgement on certain individuals and he was one I had decided that would not make it. The colour of our berets, the blue ones, no longer made any difference, we may have stood out more as there were rather less of us, two of them were real goers a large Cpl in the Glosters and another fellow from the Green Jackets and, from some notion I have, could have been an NS man, (national service) the other two guys had not come to note in any way.

Blisters were bit of a problem for some, half a dozen were just not fit, personally I was a bit sore with the shoulder straps but did not let on to anyone I had seen two others inspecting each other's shoulders in the hut, pride I guess kept a lot undisclosed, two paras were limping along. On one of the following marches we had remained in a group for some reason, I think it was just after our sand load had been increased, we were all climbing a very steep hill when I heard the 'Cockerel' proclaim that "when we get to the top of this bleeding hill he was going to make it a foot higher." It sounded quite funny to all around who chuckled and sure enough, at the top he emptied his bergen of the sand and said "that's it." On the way down someone reminded him to shut the gate, "bugger the gate" came the reply, reminded me of the old rag and bone man that I used to know in my school days.

At the end of the first week there was a decrease in numbers voluntary and otherwise I had presumed. Gradually the distance was increased in the daily exercises, on some we carried our own rations on top of. We crossed the big River Wye and smaller streams at different times, bridges as for roads were not to be used and as I had seen for myself were manned. I remember having to sketch a railway station and report with a plan to render it unserviceable, I also had to get my instructions stamped at the local Post office in the same settlement, I wondered at the time how some of the other students would have answered the station question as none as far as I was aware had the sort of engineer background as myself.

There was the story of the two guys who called at a lonely farm house and asked for a drink of water, when produced one said, "do you think you could warm it up a bit and put some tea, sugar and milk in it," "oh you'd like a cup of tea would you, come in, would you like something to eat." The story goes they finished up with a large cooked meal. Another two maintained they had spent an evening in a pub. I certainly knew of one chap who went to the road and got a helping hand lift and remained on the course right to the end. Such ventures of course, if caught, meant an immediate RTU. At the time my early school years came into focus, if I had had the cane at school, which was not an irregular occurrence, I dare not tell my father as I would get another lot for getting caught. Certain aspects of military activities do of course promote that theme, as a POW escapee for example, forward penetrating patrols in fact any ventures of high risk, it was as we lower mortals understood it, just a case of screwing the nut.

Sleeping out was an uncomfortable experience in Wales in November! In an open bam one night with another

guy whom I had been tramping along with, I had kept my wet boots on. he had taken his off before we had both found our own spot amongst the straw bales. It was a hard frosty night and the morning found his boots likewise and somewhat inflexible, in attempting to bend the uppers a large chunk came away in his hand, after a 'cuppa\*' we continued on.

On another occasion I endeavoured to rest my weary body on the rough concrete floor of a brick building, the wind was bitterly cold outside and it was a very long night. The lightweight blanket and groundsheet were of little use, so much for the theory 'that a bed of stones is like feathers for the weary' not when you are bloody cold it ain't. There were a couple of voluntary retirements during the second week and a couple were called forward so I understood for interview with the OIC of the course which resulted in them declaring that this wasn't for them.

Escape and evasion were all part and parcel, both as the hunters and the hunted and over time I took part in several such exercises and whether the undermentioned event took place on the selection course or at some later date I am now not too sure. However on one such exercise we had to search the countryside in efforts to capture "enemy" pilots of me RAF 'known to have bailed out in the area, over a couple of days. We had our orders and treated the captives accordingly, quite senior officers some of them all dressed in their flying gear. Eventually I, along with two others, escorted four back for interrogation in the back of a three ton truck, we relieved them of their cigarettes and watches etc and said "come on guys this is only an exercise" to be greeted with "this is for real mates and you had better believe it'

At another time as the hunted we moved under the cover of darkness with an objective to reach in thirty six hours, lying up by day we never saw or heard the searchers. I had joined up with another and we stayed together after the start as no instructions to die contrary were given, there was some comfort and advantage in having company on such an occasion, I thought, two pairs of eyes and two pairs of ears

The exercises became very much more tiring, legs (the distance marched) had been extended, the bergens that much heavier, some of the sketch maps were very scant in information. Permanent staff manning the RV's came to know us all as individuals and became quite chatty. I had thought personally from day one that there might be 'implants' amongst the students and had kept my guard accordingly, whether that was so, to this day. I do not know. I later found I was not alone with such thoughts.

Somewhere along the line in prior service life I came across a little phrase I'd always remembered 'familiarity breeds contempt,' somehow I felt it may have had some bearing on potential adverse reports picked up via 'chit chat,' at the time I had also thought perhaps in the selection process, individuals were being graded for personality traits in addition to the abilities required to pass that particular course with previous service skills maybe weighing in their favour, yes I was a thinker.

The days of 'don't do as I do, do as I tell you' and 'yours is not to reason why, yours is but to do and die,' were expressions long since discouraged and only rising in bouts of anger or when patience was wearing rather thin. One man was taken from an exercise against his wishes for injuries not acceptable to the staff for him to continue, his feet were said to be in a terrible raw state, such men I guess would have been likely candidates for recourse.

By the time the course was nearing its end I thought I had come to know four or five very well, two other berets, not maroon types, and three of the paras, each of whom had good staying power, always came in before or on time and were cheerful and positive in attitude, with no apparent problems. The first two, Lofty as he had become known and the young light infantry soldier, both had country farmer like backgrounds, so I guess that's where we had something in common, the paras all junior NCO's.

On the final afternoon gear on loan was being returned to stores, it was sweep up, clean up, pack up and in the process all remaining members were called forward for an individual interview and course results in turn, and left quickly afterwards. The results as to who passed and who had not were not made known to myself at that time, but the number of guys who came out and said "no I didn't make it!," by far outweighed those who put their thumbs up when queried.

I had passed but I never saw that which was written down in the summary. Lofty and the young guy mentioned above with one para that I had come to know quite well said they had passed. Some three to four weeks later I learnt another four paras had also passed. Out of the eight successful ones, four were at the second attempt one being lofty for medical reasons, so only four had passed at the first attempt from a starting course strength of twenty seven. The figures could be disputed as personally I saw no official results, so for any ex-soldiers who may be reading - that's what the crap hats were doing there - three passes out of six, rather better percentage wise than the main source of supply for the SAS.

On the 23rd November 1957 I married in a register office at High Barnet Hertfordshire, incognito, at somewhat short notice, so short in fact that my wife-to-be coughed up and produced the golden band, I think I squared up with her later and then proceeded to Butlins holiday hotel at Cliftonville in Kent for a seven day honeymoon. It was still very cold, but I managed to my bride's surprise to fix the room gas fire to run all night on one shilling. I was also asked to look the other way a little later, which as a gentleman I did, and after a couple of minutes to my wife's second surprise she saw me watching her, starkers in the mirror on my wardrobe, with pink shades of embarrassment and laughter she slid between the sheets minus the flimsy yellow nightie, which I said would only have kept her neck warm anyway.

Next morning at breakfast, "let's pretend we've been married for some time, one lump or two?," the waiter appeared - "ah, ha a bright and shiny new ring, congratulations to you both are you ready to order." On a walk along the beach I forsook the wife for a stray dog throwing a stick in the water for him, a little episode that I have been reminded of so often since. The week passed very quickly and before I got myself back into gear I found myself aboard a large airliner with Lofty bound for Singapore. After a stop in India we arrived and were met by personnel from 22nd Special Air Service Regiment.

At Wadiburn Camp, towards Klang Gates, north of Kuala Lumpur, we were shown to a bamboo basha, the fresh air equivalent of the wooden huts in England, the walls did not touch the roof or the floor, the floor raised above ground level, windows were square holes in the walls and thankfully the roof which protruded way beyond the walls and the concrete base, was waterproof. All buildings within the camp, except for those requiring some sort of security, were of a like structure and this was the home of the overseas base of the SAS the only regular unit of its kind in the British army.

There were four squadrons A, B, D and HQ that included attached personnel amongst its numbers, drivers and cooks etc. perhaps numbering in all two hundred and fifty men at that time, could have been less. The camp looked decidedly vacant as we settled in. still having the Sergeants stripes on my arm, I thought I would go and have a butchers at the Sgts mess and ordered my evening meal there. I ate in solitary splendour meeting two of its members as I was about to leave, knowing only too well that the tomorrow would see me promoted to trooper, as the saying went for the new arrivals. We had already drawn the essentials, bedding, mosquito net, plates NFS and mug and within a day or two we had been fined out with JG (jungle green) uniforms, calf length canvas rubber soled jungle boots, floppy hat. parang and a bergen rucksack. Weapons were also allocated, mine a Belgian FN P62 automatic that had been adjusted to function as a semi-automatic along with 20 round magazines, the weapon that was the fore runner to the self-loading rifle that eventually replaced the .303 Lee Enfield rifle on issue, general issue to the army.

There were other 'new boys' at Wadiburn awaiting further training I could only assume that they were from previous selection courses, as all aspirants to the SAS as far as I knew, in addition to passing the initial selection course had to undergo further training: a) as a parachutist and (b) at that particular time a jungle course to assess and prepare individuals for future duty.

The parachuting course took place at Changi, adjacent to Singapore under the auspicious directions of the PJI's of the Royal Air Force. It differed from the courses run in the UK in so much that there was no balloon jumping, all the initial jumps were direct from aircraft and also there was training and instruction on jumping into trees, in other words the jungle. The course commenced with about twenty, not all were potential SAS troopers, and surprisingly we the SAS potentials had all been issued with the red beret complete with the 'Who Dares Wins' badge prior to the course. There were aircraft drills to master, exit techniques, flight drill and ground approach procedures along with all the ground training. Varied apparatus existed and was available to enable all of the above to be carried out with surprising realism, the appropriate reaction to all known malfunctions were taught over and over, the object of which was to get an automatic reaction to any given situation.

The parachutes in use were known as X types khaki or white circular and twenty eight feet in diameter, capable of delivering a soldier and his equipment with reasonable safety from an aircraft to ground level. Speed of descent varied with the total weight earned and or atmospheric conditions the average was said to be 15 mph. but horizontal wind speeds could increase that quite substantially and accordingly decrease the safety factor. 15 mph wind speed meant cessation of parachuting, jumps were normally made from 800 ft with or without equipment packs. There were a variety of equipment and weapons containers the bergen rucksack being the main one for the SAS unit. The four lift webs gave a certain amount of control, that of avoiding collisions, turning into wind and slowing ground speed but nothing like the rectangular parachutes that were issued a few years later. Reserve parachutes were always worn unless there was an operational requirement to drop at very low altitudes.

Tree jumping equipment, this involved the wearing of a tree lowering harness worn in all jungle para drops to enable a parachutist to reach the ground should his chute become entangled in the treetops, a torture like device worn in a bikini fashion with the friction ring adjacent to the lower abdomen, however it was a means to an end and tree drops as such were rare as the expected injury rates were said to be twenty five per cent upwards but still an option to get men on the ground quickly. Although suffering a twisted ankle on the course I managed to complete the training unfortunately missing the course photograph. Course completed we all returned to Wadiburn camp for further training, a short intensive instructional jungle course to cover patrols, rations and other edibles, hygiene, rubbish disposal, bashas, weapons maintenance, use of parang, bergen packing, first aid and equipment required and a very lively sharp shooting exercise. The latter involved a simulated very alert leading scout patrolman and instructor, each man taking the turn of scout patrolling a preset area jungle path where wooden men stepped out, popped up, dropped down or remained still in view, the expected reaction was to pump two shots into each target as it appeared or when seen, failure to react or not act quick enough meant a short burst from a Stirling machine gun that was fired into the ground behind the heels of the student - which does tend to sharpen ones wits. This was all new to the likes of myself, good soldiering stuff that attracted our interest and kept it, this was all preparation for our training course proper. Back in camp, local maps were given a good going over, all they showed were water, land and contour lines, a few supposed tracks, grid lines northings and eastings and that was about it.

Parachute Course  
Photo at Changi  
Airport

(Missed having  
sustained an ankle  
injury and was  
away for local  
treatment.)

The guys with  
whom I  
completed my  
Malayan training



Then the day came to move out we were prepared as much as we could be, live ammo, grenades, smoke grenades and weapons were drawn/issued, some carried first aid kits, there was a marker balloon and small spade. A signaller and mate and four instructors all carried fourteen days rations which turned out to be quite a heavy load, fourteen times 2- hr ration packs plus all the other kit advised and ordered. All piled in to the back of three ton trucks to the training area and drop off point.

From here on in it was 'shanks' pony - on the hoof, we saddled up to use a long remembered expression, organised into parties and set off in single file. We had thought the sand loaded bergens of previous times heavy now we were experiencing the real load, all the necessities for survival and we only had fourteen days rations on our backs, we were to learn the hard way which I guess is the better way to learn and more likely to be remembered. I had, having been in the company of the same fellers for a few weeks, picked up the tag (nick name) of "Dad," I knew I was going a bit thin on top at the early age of twenty eight, but I was rather older than most if not the oldest undergoing training, maybe Lofty the tall guy from the Glosters was nearer to my age.

To date I had found nothing really over bearing, difficult on the odd occasion yes, but always accomplished with a smile. I found the new tag quite acceptable in some ways I thought there was a twinge of respect there somewhere, perhaps my past learned traits unknowingly to myself were seen by others. After around two hours of plodding along uphill and down dale in the humid atmosphere on a sodden track and the of back beginning to feel the effects of, we were given a non-operational halt. Those who wanted to smoke did and those that wanted to pee peed whilst we all listened to a short chat on adapting to our new surroundings and then informed that we were all carrying too much weight, this we assumed to be a reference to our bergens and that would be discussed further at the night stop. On your feet, and away we went in a different order of march still in single file, another couple of hours and one or two were beginning to lag, I was either fifth or sixth and encouraged those nearest to keep going thinking no way would I cany their weapons and thereby putting another on the lagging list. During the second halt normal patrol observations were carried out, the instructor meanwhile having a short chat with each individual, asked how I was going I said fine, but actually the shoulders were a touch sore and I knew my shins existed but I wasn't about to broadcast that. Instructed to take the lead I moved forward as we moved off.

After what was now considered by myself, at that time anyway, a fair time on the march especially with our unaccustomed loads, time seemed to drag along. At some later stage was quietly told to "move it along a bit" (speed up to the uninformed), "OK Sarge changing the pace as I stepped forward with pepped up vigour thinking oh well a change is as good as a rest, but it didn't last long I looked back to see the line now very extended and the rear enders being goaded along. I was tiring but still had plenty of go, on being asked again how I felt, I could still keep going but remarked that "as a patrol I did not think we would be much cop as a fighting unit at that stage" "alright fair comment, well keep at it." As a patrol we struggled on. struggled was about the right word and eventually I heard the words behind me, "have you had enough yet?" I never heard a reply to that I guess most were in a state of mind over matter and pride still ruled. After two men fell down for a rest we were given the word to halt and informed this is where we would stay for the night, in pairs ten yards apart "so get moving there'll be heavy rain shortly and don't forget your weapons" (a reference for cleaning). Weapons were only cleaned one at a time after the bashas were completed so that there was always a weapon between two ready for use, whether the area surrounding the night stop was cleared on that occasion I don't know I just remembered it should be from our recent training.

The rain came down as I prepared my own meal on the little Heximine tablet stove, a small five inch square folding very useful item issued in certain ration packs. Our leader looked in and said "looking forward to that?" as he glanced at the simmering mess tin, "yes, by the way do you know where we are?" a shock question, I wasn't prepared, I took the map from the underside pocket in the top cover of the bergen and took a punt. "Not a bad guess but we haven't got that far yet." I was about a mile out I'd thought, but was quickly corrected that all distances, travelled estimates and reports were in thousands of yards, progress was reported in one, two, three or four thousand per hour. I had slipped up I had not kept a check on my whereabouts, apart from memory it was exceedingly difficult anyway for the newcomer, time and motion coupled with recent terrain usually enables one to be fairly accurate with experience, and of course the latter none of us had. 'Where's the nearest water?' actually I'd heard it before the rain started and pointed, "OK." All the questions came my way, not the other guy then there was some advice on bergen loading, "fourteen little jam jars, fourteen little packets of boiled sweets, fourteen of this and fourteen of that, do you want it all, consider the weight and your priorities, you will certainly be carrying three weeks supply when you get posted to a squadron." Darkness fell quickly and silence reined as the rain stopped, the candles flickered and there were a few curses uttered as some found that their groundsheets had cradled a puddle of water, we were all sleeping on the ground at that stage.

As daylight came, a few were waiting for it, fortunately I had the habit of tuning into nature, waking at daybreak which I still do now at the time of writing. The insect life made its presence known with such a variety of noise that created its own special buzz of choral music, as having camped in their vicinity we were accepted by them,



nature's own security alarm as I was to learn later, as anyone approaching the encampment triggered a silence, and thus a warning to its occupants, as though hundreds of little eyes turned their attention on the intruders.

After a mug of tea and a couple of hard tack biscuits, we packed up and cleared up, rubbish of any kind buried and any signs of habitation covered over. We did not wash or shave, use soap that is, or clean our teeth with tooth paste, such smellies would drift in the jungle air and be picked up beyond the distance of sight in many cases. The air was dank, damp and humid, rarely windy except on the peaks of high ground, smoking generally was to be discouraged although in the heat of the mid-day sun the jungle became steamy and smoke for example rose in a vertical trail and by the time it reached the canopy of the trees above would have dispersed in the rising steam, not to be seen by would-be observers on high ground, the trees varied in height up to two hundred feet, and density, the undergrowth in certain areas off the beaten tracks was often impenetrable.

By the time we moved off we had adjusted to the wet socks and boots and clothing that we had put on with a shudder after inspecting it for creepy crawlies. I made sure I had my map available in a cellophane bag in my map pocket for easy referral and had made minor adjustments to bergen straps. The mornings march was relatively easy, all on tracks, tracks seemed to abound everywhere, we were after all in the training area and possibly known by the instructors like the back of their hands. I picked up my first samples of leeches, I thought it amazing at the time as to how they had reached my rib cage and nestled in for a feed undetected, an itch and following fingers found them arranged like the petals on a daisy, heads to the centre. We had been warned not to pull them off as an infection may result with their heads rotting on the surface of the skin. Talking on the move was not on, whispering at stops OK, on the next one there were feverish movements and inspections, even non-smokers carried cigarettes to bum off the 'stowaways,' the ideal removal treatment.

It struck me that our behaviour was anything but soldierly, but at that time allowed, but that was the last time, if ever a bunch of blokes had been venerable to attack, that was it and we were reminded sharply about it, none the more for that it was rather frightening, first time, to see these swollen black worms sucking away at one's own blood about the thickness of a fountain pen and yet they were about the size of a match before they latched on. On removal the blood flow continued for a while, the little blighters were said to inject to prevent clotting once accustomed they weren't so bad as first thought, the very object of getting us jungle familiar. Stories to keep us aware prevailed, one about the guy who had one enter the tip of his penis swelling up blocking and causing agony until operated on, authentic who knows, but I guess the story serves a purpose! We were warned of bull leeches, the larger variety said to extract a quarter pint of blood each and hence treated more seriously, personally I never saw one but did hear tales.

By the afternoon we had had our introduction to some unusual plants just off the tracks en route to wherever we were headed, one of which was the 'wait a minute bush', on reflection could have been *Atap* but the given name was very appropriate, a plant with very long tentacle barbed like growths, if caught up and one heaved or pulled to free oneself, it latched on more firmly, so with patience, the initial barbs could be released easily with minimal damage to clothing and skin. Cutting in some areas was permitted, in others not, any cuts of course were jungle signpost as were any dropped foreign objects, food wrappers or whatever, 'tail end charlie' of patrols would often pick up the unintended odd trail blazer.

The second night stop around four p.m., the timing was governed by nature as rain would have been expected within forty minutes of that time. All were still in tow as we came to a halt, but all resisted the temptation to rest, it was a break anyway to rid oneself of the bergen and make preparations before rain and the following darkness. A very convenient location, obviously used before with a clear water stream nearby, a bog area was pointed out and two of our numbers were asked to dig a hole and provide a suitable structure, a marvellous effort with a jungle type hat rack and spar to rest the rifle against, a hold on straining pole and another on which to rest the thighs. One meal a day seemed to be the in thing, under flickering candle lights body inspections were taking place once again and very soon all was quiet, very quiet.

On day three there was a pre-start talk on bergen packing to eliminate rattles and having all that was required for the day easily accessible. All took a turn at leading scout, hand signals being the means of communication with the exception of the instructor, who chatted questioned and kept an eye on individuals, all round observance when halted every hour or so, the going relatively easy, one's clothing was constantly wet, if not from perspiration from dripping foliage, it did not dry overnight either so putting on wet clothes in the morning was to be expected and something yet to get used to. On the high ground the air was more dry and the clothes

dried too. leaving white salt marks around the armpits and down the spine and around the waist, another little message for those conscious of the facts but those that weren't were eventually told about salt intake that was a necessity in such conditions. The night stop was reached rather early on in the day and all were informed that we would be staying for a few days and to take a little extra time in selection and preparation of basha areas. A central waste pit dug and a comfort area provided, with the exception of a few parang chops to select poles soon after arrival all was quiet, most were setting about the task of providing the evenings cuisine. Myself having always been rather partial to curry, this situation was ideal, curry and rice to one's own taste and mixture with the obvious limitations, and a mug of the army's finest home brew bush tea and a smoke in leisure with time to observe all around in daylight. Smoking had become a bad regular habit in Germany, cheap, it went down well with drinking, another social custom that was over indulged in by many. I liked my drink but always tried to keep within my own set limits mainly because of the sporting and physical side of responsibilities that I had had at the time. And the fitness required was still there, I felt I measured up OK as good as any in our bunch anyway.

At sunrise human life stirred, later than the insect life, most put on a brew and maybe had a hard tac biscuit. I splashed water over my face to freshen up, put on clean socks, wet trousers and canvas boots. The night air differed little from the daily temperature, all were advised to keep covered from insect attack. Each man had his own supply of anti-malaria tablets 'Paludrine' or it sounded like that. We were assembled and given a bit of jungle ear bashing learning more about our surroundings and the life within it, all sorts of weird things abounded. I had thought bird life pretty scant and small animals almost non-existent but my knowledge like my experience was very limited, I had much to learn. I listened intently, there were edible plants and wildlife, Malayan ABO's (natives) existed in certain parts of the Ulu and were quite happy and content with their lot, so we were told. Cuts had been made in nearby vegetation on our arrival at the site, now fifteen hours ago, this was an introduction to sign posting of cut branches and slashed undergrowth, these were then compared with cuts said to be three weeks old, these were vital clues we should get to know and eventually hopefully be able to assess as being fresh, within the hour, hours, days or weeks old and pass on such information when found, note animal and human waste, know the difference and if the latter whether it be male or female leftovers, footprints broken branches or any other sign of human passage or presence. Drinking water good sources and bad, we all had our little sterilization kits. General hygiene treatment of boils sores and blisters, help each other it was partly revision of some earlier instruction but far better than any classroom tuition less formal and down to earth stuff.

At midday all were paired off, or in some cases threes (why?) and given bearings to march on for two hours and report anything unusual seen, natural features or whatever, weapons ammo, water bottles hanging alongside parangs on the waist belt, all other items left in the bashas. We set off with instructions to be back in four hours, it was freedom to walk without the back burden, the jungle seemed quite open with little undergrowth beneath the high canopy, visibility thirty to forty yards and sometimes more. I suggested to my companion that we should record the going as well, "on what," "here" I produced a note pad and short pencil in a cellophane packet, we passed on over a few streams gaining height gradually to the top of some high ground where there was a good view out over and looking down on the tops of trees below and beyond. After a few minutes of taking in the views we pushed on and down to a couple of streams that met up to our left and became one, a little further on the two hours were up so adding 180 degrees to the bearing we about turned. On the way back things looked so different that at times it gave rise to doubt but the compass ruled and a few sights confirmed our direction as being the way we came, a nice little jaunt and back in on time, no problems and reported in, time was ours 'til next day.

All were briefed prior to the training op that some light reading would pass away long dark evenings reading by candle light, there could have been two or three paperbacks per person going the rounds on a swap basis, personally I preferred to write in a sort of daily log like fashion which eventually became the main body of letters back to base when this was foreseeable for onward transmission to my wife, who at this stage was still in UK. Not a desirable trait for active service.

I had also come to learn that the instructor of our group was in fact an ex engineer from the only regular airborne Engineer Squadron, the 9th Independent Parachute Squadron RE. he stood all of five feet six inches tall, very sturdy and obviously very fit, I suppose I might have been just another crap hat to him, I certainly did not expect or receive any favours, but I was certainly of the state of mind that anything he could do, I could do also, and did my best at whatever the task in hand required. We were at this location for several days on ever extending patrols, all taking turns to be leaders all experiencing the company of different group members. Our training dictated that all members of patrols should know where they are and where they are heading at all times unless

some special operation for security or whatever requires otherwise. Bergens and full kit were brought back into daily use as patrols had overnight stops, checks were still being made on the parang cuts whenever we returned to base, the style of map reading was beginning to sink in, contour lines and water courses seemingly the only indication to our whereabouts, in the course of conversation with our teachers I found that this was certainly not the case in very many areas as a double check, whereabouts could be assessed on time and motion, a far cry from my previous studies when it was applied to engineering construction tasks, as stated previously, now it meant progress in hundreds or thousands of yards per hour, difficult on active service since a member of the patrol has to keep a check on yards/paces, another on time keeping, I learnt later estimates from experience seemed to be the rule

All had now crossed deep water, it was slipped in as we took turn and about covering the various pre planned routes, to my knowledge only one patrol was late in on returning which raised a little concern, they had by passed the base on return and spent an extra unexpected night out arriving mid-morning the following day, I was not around when they returned. On the thirteenth day out base location was moved a day's march away, our back loads now very light quick progress was made. Towards the end of the day we passed through a clearing and made camp in a sort of re-entrant two hundred yards further on almost adjacent to a clear flowing stream where we settled in, half our numbers scouting the perimeter to clear the area one hundred yards around before darkness and the usual heavy rainfall.

After an uneventful night we were briefed on the air re-supply of rations, some clothing fairly early on an orange marker balloon was taken to the centre of the clearing and prepared for use at the pre-designated time. Two men were left in base camp all others watched both sides of the dropping zone as the balloon was released to ascend and act as marker for the aircraft then expected, the engine noise signalled the arrival, a twin engine job, whether it was a Dakota or a Hastings I am now not sure, the wind as I remember was almost non-existent at the time and the drop fairly accurate, the despatchers giving a wave as they flew over after the drop. All was quickly gathered in and taken to base for sorting and allocation, whilst all round watch was maintained mainly for our benefit as trainees I thought as we were still in the training area. Another thirteen days rations plus fresh food for one day for all, some clothing was distributed, as a training session no other supplies were required.

It was explained to all present that in some situations a move may be desired and expected immediately after a para drop had taken place, for obvious reasons, in our case we stayed put and it was declared a day off. We were advised to consume all the fresh food that we could as it would be useless within twenty four hours, any items not required were to be pooled centrally for burning prior to burial, this also applied to any chutes for which no purpose could be found. We had all heard the whisper on the use of parachutes so of course none were burnt, they were heading for a future as sleeping bags and hammocks, any webbing or rigging lines not taken for use were to be burnt and some were, as new boys we all wanted to be equipped as per.

Now that we knew the score we could be very select regarding our individual requirements from the ration packs, most had accepted the evening meal as the daily nosh up time with maybe a nibble at other times. I kept all meat cheese and rice, a few hard tac biscuits, tea bags and tubes of nestles milk, all else was discarded. Some kept boiled sweets (tinned) to make a toddy to go with the rum issue that came with every drop, strictly medicinal purposes you understand, but more refused the 'medicine' than accepted and I found myself with a water bottle full (each man had two water bottles). I had become rather partial to the flavour earlier on in service and certainly had come to value its medicinal purpose in the freezing conditions in Germany. A water bottle cap full per day saw it last for quite a long time and a few others did likewise. During the course of the day steaks sizzled, baked potatoes and cabbage was dealt with and apples disappeared with gusto. In the afternoon a pit was dug by myself and another and a bum up took place for everything requiring disposal after which the remains were covered in and preparations made for an early move out the following day.

With loaded bergens we started, endured and finished the day trekking, the latter part through untrodden areas, the leader having been given the go ahead to cut and slash, before nightfall we had settled in from a day that had gone on and on and on. There's one thing about carrying out long tiring arduous repetitive tasks, it's great when one stops and as young men in their prime it didn't take long to recover. Daily routine became a habit, all knew how to get the best out of what little they had, comfort was an art form, food an essential, good soldiering and a master of weaponry a must, and then all compatible fell into place.

I slept well and long, rifle strapped to my wrist besides me, the days of stand to at dawn and dusk now far behind

us, it just wasn't required in our present situation and I guess little would have been achieved to practice it. The following days patrolling was different and further experience, impenetrable bamboo has to be seen to be believed it is after all a giant type of grass and presents a barrier in most cases that can only be bypassed, a natural obstacle, but on the other hand has its many uses and was valued by the local inhabitants as a source of building material, long straight strong poles, also used for primitive plumbing to divert water, making spears/pig traps and even human booby traps, the army also found it useful for constructing LZ mats (landing zone platforms for helicopters). Thickets of vegetation, unnamed because I know not, also presented formidable barriers some passable some not, personally I thought very time wasting, however if orders required one to go direct, one assumed there was a reason. The shortest route between A and B is quite often not the case, for mankind anyway. Patrols were varied both in strength and length, all having the opportunity to lead and make decisions and report on, on completion. Night and day we were obviously under assessment, reaction to discomfort for many of us was no longer considered so, life was accepted as it had to be, we were learning to make the most of the combined knowledge available. Raised voices were never heard, patience and understanding, questions and answers, the ability to get along with all types, accept the differences of opinion, agree to disagree, accept a leaders decision, the latter we were informed was based on a majority agreement in a lot of cases. The last week was hard, long and tiring being fully occupied all daylight hours and beyond and we began to look forward to civilised living, all body washes to date were cold water and no soap the suntan acquired in the short time since our arrival had now gone.

The final patrol was yet to come, a long haul but with lighter bergens in threes and fours, sent off at irregular intervals at points desired to deceive by the instructors as they deliberately meandered. I had some doubt about my own start point as a designated leader but when asking my allotted companions as to their whereabouts, they both differed and seemed quite ready to accept my version, in full confidence I set off thinking I could correct my route via map reading as I progressed which worked out very well relaying my thoughts and interpretations to the two guys with me at my decided rest stops. The final RV reached there were smiles all round, just general satisfaction that to all intents and purposes we were out, finite, the course was over, the three ton trucks were hard and bumpy the sun bright and continuous, there was a sense of achievement by all, results and reports were to come later.

Back in Wadiburn camp a thorough cleaning of weapons, magazines, ammunition and any grenades we still had took place before handing in. clothing still serviceable was sorted out for dhobi and what wasn't was discarded, all other items cleaned and laid out in the sun to dry or lightly oiled as the case may be before we ourselves took to warm showers. Skins were white and soft, all needed haircuts, if our previous unit standards were to be maintained. I would have thought all would have lost weight, I had already taken up a couple of notches on the belt and must have lost a few pounds. I felt alive and fit. Meals at the cookhouse were varied and plentiful, we may well have been minus a few vitamins on our 24 hr. ration packs although all the necessary were said to be included and bearing in mind that we had not consumed all that they contained, no one appeared to suffer from the experience, and being constantly wet and donning wet clothing each day has no apparent bearing on ones health to our knowledge. A weeks leave had been arranged and pay parade to take place on the tomorrow when leave passes were issued. One did not need pay in the jungle four weeks' worth due to us all, as a new arrival as indeed we all were, few had places to go to and used the camp as a base for the short leave period going the rounds of Kuala Lumpur seeing what there was to see etc., it all passed very quickly.

Just passed second SAS Selection Course, Malay version, prior to parachuting course, red berets were 'in vogue' at the time.



I cannot remember a parade or a presentation of wings, maybe I had missed it for some reason but soon after the training op I was wearing the apparel that showed I was a qualified member of the Special Air Service. Some more training came our way. demolitions for all and medical for a few. I did both of the small courses.

A short demolition course took place, the very basics, the types of explosives, detonators and accessories and how to use them with some practical experience, a real eye opener to myself but to the uninitiated it would I suppose have been an interesting subject. Most like to play with the big fireworks, blowing things up etc. Whether the instructor was a temporary stand in or one not qualified I just did not know at the time but I made the point of having a chat with him after the short course to find in fact he was an ex Sgt. RE and very much out of date with his knowledge on current plastic explosives and slab explosives, calculations OK their use was not mentioned but covered by the expression "when in doubt lash out" to make sure the job was complete, however he got the men familiar with handling and general usage. He was interested to learn of my experience in the subject and appeared almost to welcome my constructive criticism of his course.

On the unit medical course with two others, we went through all the basics again and then further into the treatment and attention to wounds, stitching, use of the tourniquet and what we then referred to as % morphine syrettes, injections, breaks and general diagnosis and symptoms of whatever and advice on treating local natives, all very useful information, as a qualification possibly not, but it eventually found me carrying the patrol medical kit.

Soon after that I was posted to 16 troop 'D' Squadron, about fifteen men in the troop commanded by a Lt. Ian Cartwright generally known as 'Biffo' looking somewhat overweight with a generous covering he certainly proved be could lead and/or keep up with the best. There appeared to be more than the normal compliment of NCO's that I had been used to, the squadron had been put on notice for another jungle operation, it wasn't long since that they came out from the last one. About that time I received information that my wife was due to disembark at Singapore and would be housed in the transit camp prior to the move to Pataling Jaya some fifteen miles from Kuala Lumpur where a bungalow had been arranged as quarters for myself and a friend, we had agreed to share since the wives would be living on their own for very long periods whilst we were away on jungle patrols. We were given seven days leave to settle in etc. we also had an 'amah' each, a young Chinese girl employed to do the laundry/cleaning and whatever else was required, so whilst we were away there would be two young amahs looking after two young married women and no children 'what a life of luxury,' still that was the entitlement one per family, I guess it created employment for the locals.

Leave over, immediate preparations were underway for 'D' Squadron to move in, it was partially to be a hearts and minds venture to win over hopefully some support from the jungle Abos who were thought to be supplying the CT's (communist terrorist) with food etc. The very types the British military were trying to eradicate, we were also to look for and check on courier tracks as well as CT base camps or any CT activity.

With three weeks rations (then carefully selected) plus all the other requirements to assist us in acting as we were required to do, and in addition I found myself carrying the medical kit, as one in a patrol of four. We moved by train as a troop to a given drop off point and then marched into a given area and set up a base camp. Four local natives were employed as porters carrying the radio communication gear plus their own food of dried smelly fish and rice. We, those of the recent selection process, had now been sprinkled amongst the operational squadrons, and myself and Lofty found ourselves together in 16 troop, this was the guy with whom I had arranged to share quarters with and so really it sounded like an ideal arrangement, besides being more economical, it gave our wives company in a strange country to console one another in our absence.

My basha mate was Scottish, a very quiet guy not over talkative even when there was time to do so, he was married but no children, a ginger haired L/Cpl and Garry made up the patrol and we would go out daily from the base camp, they were fit blokes and would keep up a good pace all day long. I practised on my whereabouts whenever we stopped for a breather if it was OK to do so, and accepted the others decision if it differed from my own, I did not feel it wise to do otherwise although doubtful at times. I got on well having basically decided to play the three monkeys (eyes and ears open and mouth shut) and as one would expect picked up quite a bit of info as we went along.

We were in a black area (where it was known that the CT were active), our job, to search for tracks or possible courier routes, base camps, night stops or any signs at all of human habitation, so a state of alertness was a requirement for our own good, in light marching order we would have been ready for anything at any time and it was all taken very seriously. I remember being put in my place on about the 4th patrol we were climbing a steep incline, I was chuckling to myself, the jungle was very open at this stage and visibility could have been a hundred yards, a bird which had almost a human laugh as its call sign, appeared to be laughing at us, the others noticed as I say the funny side of it with a burst of laughter, our leader, quite rightly so made his point, to the amusement of the other two and I got the message.

After a few days the troop moved base, at the next camp long patrols full gear lasting four or five days took place and then the troop base moved on again and so on until a given area was covered. Some patrols were only three strong, there were four patrols in the troop out searching and there were four troops and a headquarter troop in the Sqn. all doing likewise in any given areas. In the troop base camps there were two or three SAS and perhaps four Abo porters, troop signaller, maybe troop comd. and one other sometimes more for various reasons. I was a patrol medic and often called upon to look after others when in base. On one occasion as part of the hearts and minds side of the operation, I was called upon to assist natives in whose area we had to pass through, one very mature but nonetheless young girl, bitten it was assumed by a snake had one arm almost twice the size of the other at that time it was still a case of cut and suck, but obviously too late in this instance, as a first class amateur inexperienced 'Doc', I searched for swollen glands in all the appropriate places much to the amusement of my mates, without finding any and then proceeded to stroke the upper arm, under the elbow and what appeared to be the bite for no physical medical reason whatsoever, but the attention alone of course did the trick, my only means of reassurance since there was a language barrier, and then a look of delight and satisfaction when I gave her a Paludrine tablet to swallow in water and put a sticky plaster over the bite. The ol' Paludrine was used as a cure all for anything and everything with the natives. I kept Aspros and the like for our own. Very soon after that I was taken to another youngish woman sitting by the side of a stream dousing an eye with the cold water, I had a look at her and guessed it could be what I knew as pink eye (the colour of course gave me a good clue). My answer was boiled water with salt added as a bathing lotion, two young men were watching me, so to get the message across. I boiled some water, let them taste the salt (salt was much sought after so this they knew) then I produced some magic cotton wool and with the lotion gently dabbed the eye and for good measure gave some Paludrine tablets. With a small supply of salt and magic cotton wool I left them hoping that they got the message and to do it every time they ate anything. Some ten days or so later passing back through the longhouse village I checked on my patients to find that they had both recovered, they and many more seemed very pleased to see me and escorted us along the track for quite some time, treating those young women was much more interesting than slicing blokes boils with a razor blade or inserting a couple of stitches where a parang had bounced.

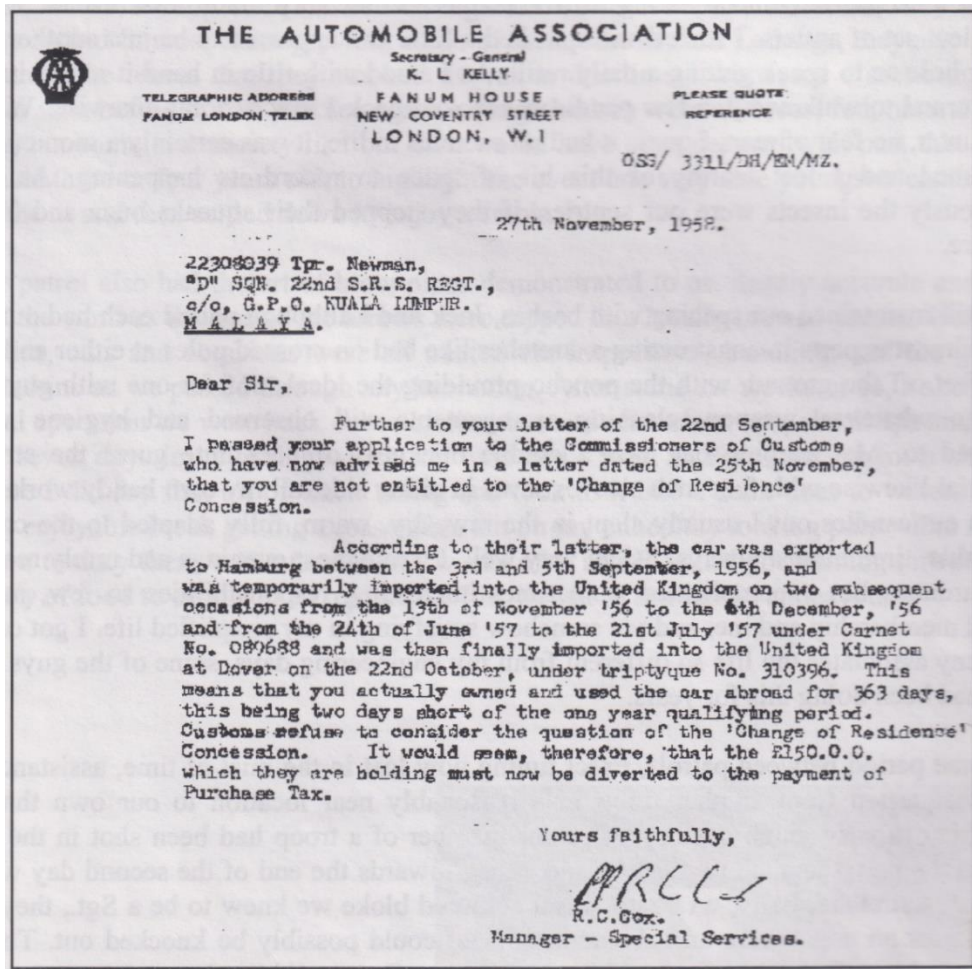
I was very interested in the natives way of life, so simple, they appeared to have nothing except a loin cloth, maybe a spear or blowpipe and/or a large knife, the kids seemed happy, some of the guys had saved their boiled sweets for them and they really liked our tinned issue chocolate a rather bland cooking type but full of whatever keeps one going.

The longhouses were built several feet up off the ground and each housed several families, much like the layout of old army huts, but with bamboo partition walls between family bed spaces, except that there were no beds as such just patches where they slept in groups, with a walkway right down through the centre, some actually had chicken and pigs roaming under the building. One aspect of life that really struck me was the way they looked after the elderly; they have to there are no pensions. I remember seeing an old man in a cage literally, a bamboo cage, naked, coughing and choking on whatever he was smoking, sitting in his own mess, apparently put there for his own good, so that he wouldn't wander off into and get lost in the jungle. He was supplied with food and smokes and could "please himself what he did," as they said!

We were warned that the men were very jealous of their womenfolk, some of the young girls appeared quite good looking, but as they say the longer you go without the better they look, at the time I wrote many pages on the natives of Malaya (now known as Malaysia), I was very intrigued.

Other aspects of our work did not hold the same interest although I endeavoured to do that which was required of me to the best of my ability, we were covered and guided by the unit SOP's (standard operating procedures) standing orders and these were supposedly our bible. We did find tracks, foot prints and fresh cuts, all recorded and eventually reported and with sixteen/eighteen patrols all doing likewise, I can well imagine it all being plotted and perhaps presenting a picture of information on an operational map. There was a distinct difference between the natives and the CT's, the latter were clothed, armed and normally wore sand shoes/hockey boots as footwear, so a manufactured footprint meant more to us than otherwise would be the case! We were often in pursuit on hot tracks but it was rare that it led to a successful conclusion from my own experience, we did find night stops and base camps because of, but live bodies no. Others in the unit did succeed as many newspaper reports of the time made it known.

An air re-supply on this particular operation really went astray, the drop being way off target for whatever reason. The troop had come together for the occasion, and a search was commenced to find the missing loads, one of which was a 'packet easy' (PE - plastic explosive) two of about ten chutes landed on the DZ and the others were eventually gathered in after more than much effort, green chutes in green trees, one was located in a very high tree, the tree was dropped only to see the chute transfer to another on the way down and it happened a second time before coming to earth. Another package hooked high above brought other ideas, I thought perhaps I could set the chute alight with a flare, and fired a Vary pistol only to hit the branches above and have it fall back on myself, a magnesium flare that set my hair alight, I immediately dived into the river pool alongside fully clothed, only to find on climbing out that it started up again so it was headfirst in again, as recorded in "One Mans SAS" by Lofty Large, my friend's first successful attempt at writing, he did in fact get another published, "One Mans War in Korea" written at the same time and originally intended both as the one book. The flare idea didn't work, we used explosive to drop the tree and recover a container of rations. The only days off on operations were the air drop days operational commitments allowing, the fresh food was consumed and it was a chance to sort oneself out and, if received, read the letters from home. One that I received whilst on ops will be hard to forget, it was from the UK taxation office, as stated earlier I had bought my first car during my service in Germany, tax free as was the concession for serviceman but with the proviso that it be owned and driven abroad for twelve months. From my own calculations I had done that with time up my sleeve, however the letter stated that the qualifying period for the taxation was for 365 days and. having checked on my movements since ownership, they said I had only owned and driven the car in BAOR sectors for 363 days therefore I was liable for the one hundred and fifty pounds purchase tax, the Automobile Association of UK eventually acted on my behalf, but without success.



The troop moved on to a further pre-planned area and patrolling continued, as previously with several night stops out and a large area to cover, these were long periods to remain alert but our continuing existence depended upon it. or so we had been led to believe. News had filtered back to the troop base on occasion about contacts made by other patrols in the squadron when shooting had taken place and this tended to keep one thoughtful. A scare did erupt one morning on patrol, we were well spaced when the leading scout shouted ?IX!ETS, the three of us had all immediately thought the same running for cover on alternate sides of the track, ditching our bergens and taking up listening watch, after some fifteen minutes I heard an approach and then an audible signal that required a reply. On making contact I learned our gallant scout had walked into a hornets nest and was attacked as he shouted what we believed to be 'bandits.' Looking around I'd lost my bergen and time was lost to find it, an experience that got the old adrenaline working but it proved the reactions worked OK. Hornets can deliver a combined deadly sting and one is advised to run through thick foliage where possible to avoid.

Distractions would occur quite often, wildlife in its various forms seen but not heard, if an animal was heard it was likely it had been startled, so it was wise to be wary of the cause. One night just before dark, I had made my way down to a stream and was filling my water bottle and a fabric container, when I heard steps, I slowly laid my hand on my rifle and looked up to see a large stag ambling forward, it stopped just three paces away looked directly at me and then commenced to drink, I continued filling my conical fabric container and placed the water bottle on my belt whilst remaining in the squat position. In height and length it would have been as big as a Friesian cow but very much less in bulk with an excellent set of antlers. I stirred and splashed a little and appeared to be just another at the water hole so to speak getting a daily refill. As I stood with rifle in hand it raised its head as I turned to walk away, a few paces on I looked back I saw it doing likewise. What an encounter, no fear of man, I guess it had no enemies in life, it was certainly a moment to be cherished and I feel worthy of this bit of space to record its happening. As stated previously the insects were our sentries, if they stopped their squeaks buzz and chatter, beware.



We still maintained our spacing with bashas, Jock and I although paired each had our own, now almost experts in constructing a stretcher like bed on crossed poles at either end some two feet off the ground, with the poncho providing the ideal roof for one with guy ropes tied to whatever, weapon, cleaning arrangements still observed and hygiene strictly adhered to. My sleeping bag was a double thickness of parachute gores the stretcher material likewise with four inch sleeves sewn in either side, all my own handy work. After lights out/candles out I usually slept in the raw, dry, warm, fully adapted to the comfort available, tired almost always, I slept very well. I wrote most evenings and rarely read, life was arduous but uncomplicated, sometimes interesting, responsibilities so few, just my patrol membership and me, and yet somehow satisfying in my simplified life. I got on well with my associates the life so different from my engineering days, some of the guys in the unit had been doing this for years.

At some period between patrols, exact timing now lost in the mist of time, assistance had been requested from another troop in a reasonably near location to our own that was operating in very rough country. A senior member of a troop had been shot in the leg, I was in the party detailed to meet up and assist, towards the end of the second day we met up with a stretcher party, on board was a coloured bloke we knew to be a Sgt., they were aiming for an area where an LZ (landing zone) could possibly be knocked out. The guy had been hit with a twelve bore shot gun, friend or foe we did not know, but as there was some reluctance to discuss the matter we assumed to be the former, they had a part time medic with them much like myself who invited me to have a look, the wound smelt awful. My thoughts at the time were gangrene but it was less than three days since it occurred, I could only suggest cleanliness and a light scrape he'd already had a hit of morphine, he also had his own ideas on the treatment as one would have expected him to have. I made my kit available if required and assistance if wanted. I did attend the evening treatment just as a bit of back up support. I took my turn as stretcher bearer, the slopes were rocky, the terrain steep, and water courses to cross, there were curses, stumbling and groans from the patient. Lookouts to the front rear and around had the easy part with those in front to select the better path, positions changed every twenty minutes or so, it was tiring just to convey one's own body in this area and progress was slow, after a couple of night stops, medical attention and another syrette of morphine administered. A small party that had been sent on to reconnoitre what was thought to be a suitable area for a chopper to come in, found it alright along with a reasonable area for a night stop, and work started right away, the signaller set up and made contact, the area selected was mainly small timbers and then I learned that it was said to be an old 'Ladang' (Abo cultivation) the ETC was given as early the following day with confirmation to be sent at daybreak. Parangs swung into action some cutting some clearing and all was finished in time. The whirly bird came in and the patient departed, nothing further was heard of the incident and all made their way back to rejoin troops.

As the patrols ended we all had the opportunity to have a say, add or remind of some particular event before the report was handed in to be recorded. At the end of the search areas, we as a troop back tracked through known native inhabited areas, they appeared quite settled in most cases growing crops of some sort in their Ladangs, they also grew or acquired the leaves that they smoked. It was at this time I witnessed a scene that I had never seen before or likely to see again, young children were all breast fed, natural enough sure, but some in a society like our own would have been deemed well past that stage at around three or four years old, to highlight the event one very able youngster came straight off the tit and then settled down to enjoy a smoke.

Our patrol also had the art of blow pipes demonstrated to us, deadly accurate and deadly was the word as the tips of the arrows were dipped in a locally brewed poison. Headaches, sprains, cuts and abrasions were all treated via inspections, handling, and the good old Paludrine as we passed through any habitation. After some six weeks or so, a shorter than usual operation we were back out to civilisation and after clean ups, check-ups and pay we had seven days leave during which my wife and I went to Port Dickson for a short stay where I did my first bit of water skiing and took to it like a duck does to water. It was a very enjoyable break getting a reasonable tan on my unhealthy looking pulp white skin. On return to duty there was a further two weeks of R and R with light training thrown in and plenty of food to enable us to replace the lost weight of our jungle endeavours.



Above – Taken after the first active service operation in the Malayan Jungle when Enid had arrived

Left – Surfboard riding on a spot of leave

With compliments to Brian Connell of the "Sunday Dispatch" dated 6th September 1959, extracts from his published story:

### **The Special Air Service, and action during the past 10 years**

#### **THE QUEEN'S GUERILLAS**

Trees taller than church spires soared out of a tangled mass of saplings, creepers, thorns, and sword grass. Beneath, it was hot to suffocation, dank and dim. This was the Malayan jungle, almost as big as England. And over it ruled Chin Peng, O.B.E.

He had been given his decoration for helping the British to fight the Japanese. But Chin Peng was a Communist; he hated the British and all they stood for. Once the Japanese were beaten he spent three years building a Red "army", 5,000 strong and armed with captured Japanese weapons.

Then Chin Peng struck. His terrorists bombed tin mines, burned rubber trees, killed planters. No one knew where their hideouts were, for no white man, except an odd prospector or butterfly hunter, had been into that maze. So the terrorists had the jungle to themselves, but for the scattered aborigines, strange little fold, four feet nothing, with fat noses and fuzzy- hair, who had no choice but to get along with the Communists as best they could. Regular troops could not hunt the terrorists through the jungle.

#### **It was deadlock. THEN SOMEONE REMEMBERED "MAD MIKE "CALVERT.**

Mad Mike, a burly man of fierce energy, had fought as a volunteer in Finland, he had ranged behind the German lines in Europe. He had commanded a brigade of Wingate's Chindits in Burma.

Where was he now?

Calvert was, in fact, leading a humdrum life as a major in Hong Kong. Sir John Harding ordered him to Malaya. Mad Mike took one look at the situation in Malaya and said it was going to be a hell of a job. But he devised a plan. Part of it was that the regular forces should confine themselves to forming a cordon just round the jungle fringe against the Communists. The job, he said, would take five years. That was the start of the post-war Special Air Service.

They had the best equipment the Army could buy, but the full pack of a man ready for the jungle weighed 90lb. - and even the Duke of Wellington only expected light troops to carry 60lb. They learned to live off mangoes,

durians and bananas; or the yellow-bellied gristly mudfish, packed round with leaves and cooked inside a thick green segment of bamboo. But mostly they ate rice with curry. They learned that if the curry was made hot enough it warded off fever. They splashed ahead through the thick mud of innumerable little side rivulets.

On sodden ground there were half a dozen leeches to every square foot; brownish worms the size of a match standing on their tails, waving their "heads" in the air in search of flesh to fasten on to. The leeches worked through every rent in their clothing, sealed themselves to their skins and became bloated with their blood.

But it wasn't always the terrorists who lost. They were masters of ambush. On a jungle track they would fell a tree so that it blocked the way. Then they would cut half way through a second trunk standing beside the track.

A patrol came up the track. It was stopped by the felled tree. A hidden terrorist flung a grenade at the half-chopped tree. It crashed down across the track blocking retreat. Ana through the dense undergrowth the Communists started to fire.

Hard, bitter, deadly work. And the fact had to be faced that little headway was being made. For all his brilliant ideas, Mad Mike was a poor administrator. He kept too many "canteen cowboys" on the strength - men too ready to boast in the bars of Kuala Lumpur of their prowess in the jungle, but of little real use when they were in it.

**Discipline was lax and was not helped by Mad Mike's curious notions.**

Certainly the SAS were highly mobile. But they barged across the mountain jungle much as regular infantry would have done leaving trails like a herd of elephants, dropping debris everywhere, blazing trees, advertising their presence so that the Reds kept well out of the way. Mad Mike had supplied his men with orange marker balloons and tins of hydrogen to inflate them so they would float above the treetops as guides to planes dropping supplies. But that too warned off the Reds far and wide.

Casualties on both sides were still running at 1,000 a year. In 1951 terrorists slashed 1,000,000 rubber trees. The High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney, was ambushed and killed in the Pahang Hills.

The blunt truth was that in its first two years the SAS failed in its job. And Mad Mike Calvert was a very sick man. At the end of 1951 he was invalided home with dysentery - The SAS were pulled out of the jungle and used as ordinary infantry on the fringe.

Was it the end of Calvert's brilliant concept?

Most people thought so. But General Templar thought not. He was sure they could be retrained.

A new colonel named Joan Sloane was appointed and two officers who were very tough old hands at guerilla warfare were brought in. Both had been in the war-time SAS. One, John Cooper, had been David Stirling's lance corporal navigator in the Western Desert. The other, Dare Newell, had dropped into the Malayan jungle during the war to fight the Japanese.

Newell had known Chin Peng well in those days - "a very astute young man, always neat, clean, and well dressed." Now the "astute young man" was a ruthless tyrant who garrotted his own followers for the slightest breach of orders, who burned, bombed, and murdered almost daily. For three years, with the jungle as his fastness, he had got away with it. Even the unorthodox genius of Mike Calvert had failed to break him. But now the SAS were ruthlessly analysing where they had gone wrong.

Hard men were being trained to be harder still. Old tricks were being improved. New ones were being invented. And now men were learning jungle lore as a white man had never learned it before. They found that they could not trust maps; for where the map showed a river flowing east, it would be flowing west, driven back on itself by an overflowing lake. Even compasses played wild tricks. One troop was lost for three days because iron ore in a hill had swung the needles almost south. Only the age-old art of the tracker, the reading of every tiny impress on the jungle's floor of leaves and sodden vegetation held the key to finding terrorists.

The expert could tell that a footprint was made by an Aborigine because, as they never wore shoes, their toes were well splayed. The toes of the terrorists, educated men once used to shoes, were close together. Sometimes the terrorists wore plimsolls, but sharp eyes could see the difference between the impress of a Communist's plimsoll with milled edge and the ones which had diamond patterns. A favourite trick was to walk in elephant's footmarks. But a first-rate tracker would spot the slight indentation left by a human toe or heel in the middle of an elephant's track, or a tiny crumbling in its wall.

Men of the Sarawak Rangers were brought to Malaya to help the SAS as trackers. With the best of these, Anak Kayan, Sergeant Bob Turnbull from Middlesbrough struck up a friendship. Turnbull knew all too well the importance of being able to read every sign in the jungle. Once he had come suddenly upon terrorists and they had escaped by throwing cooking pots in his face, spoiling his aim, and then vanishing into the bushes. Had he been able to read the signs, he realised, he would have known terrorists were near. So he learned all that Anak Kayan could show him, and more besides that experience taught him.

One day, in the jungle with three troopers and a Sarawak Ranger, Turnbull found tracks in an abandoned clearing. They had, he decided, been made by four men. He started to follow them. They led up gradients of one in seven over mountains, brutal going for armed men with packs in that steaming heat. Through all the daylight hours they kept going. Sometimes the tracks disappeared completely but always Turnbull picked them up again. Back and forth, winding and twisting went the tracks. And grimly following them, day after boiling day, went Sergeant Turnbull and his four men. On the fifth day he was tracing the footprints along an elephant trail. He was sure they were fresher now. THE COMMUNISTS WERE NOT FAR AWAY.



**MAJOR JOHN WOODHOUSE**, one of the greatest jungle operators the regiment ever had. He developed a system of marching by compass and dead-reckoning, with the occasional fix from the top of a tree or hill. He would thread his way across miles of jungle, with a single escort, to visit each patrol in turn, and rendezvous on the dot. Always there was a cup of tea ready for him. If his soldiers broke standing orders in the jungle he fined them on the spot and sent the money to squadron funds.



Sergeant "Bob" Turnbull—the job was his.

Turnbull and his men moved forward inch by inch, up a rise. Crisis point was on them. For the torrential rain which poured down at the same time every afternoon was almost due. Five more minutes. The rain. Then darkness. It was now or never. When the rain began any sentry the terrorists had posted would be driven to shelter. That was the moment to surprise them.

As the rain came down Turnbull topped the rise. And there, in a clearing in the bamboo, was a Communist staging hut. Then, barely 50 yards from the enemy, the Sarawak Ranger tried to take the lead. He felt his

honour demanded it. But Turnbull was quite sure that it was his business to go first. Silently he grasped the ranger by the scruff of the neck and swung the man behind him. Turnbull had his gun at the ready. Some of his spare cartridges were wedged in his map pocket, the rest he held in his teeth. Behind him, scarcely breathing, was the Sarawak tracker. And behind him the three other men with carbines.

**He could hear the terrorists chatting in the hut. Silently he moved up to a five-yard range and let them have it. The men in the hut never knew what hit them.**

It was all over in seconds. And Turnbull was standing looking at four dead terrorists, his gun empty, his spare ammunition still in his mouth. One of the terrorists, he found later, was Oxford-educated, he was chief radio operator in the area and always wrote his messages in English.

Later Turnbull's troop was dropped for a drive in the hill east of Ipoh. Somewhere there, in a 30 square mile area, were the notorious Ah Tuck and his terrorist band. Ah Tuck was a very tough character. He travelled always with a gun ready cocked. He shot on sight. And his aim was deadly.

On the second day. Turnbull (who was leading a five-man patrol) found human tracks in an elephant track along a hillside. Thick growth made it hard to see more than a few yards. Turnbull's senses were super-alert as he edged forward. Among the growth between two trees less than 20 yards ahead something moved. It was a man with a Sten gun. his finger on the trigger. By a fraction of a second Turnbull fired first. The Red fell, with seven bullets in him - one in his head, one in his throat, three in his chest, and two in his stomach. When they picked up the body, his finger was still under the trigger guard It was Ah Tuck himself.

#### **THIS BAND OF MEN...**

Every officer and man in the SAS is a regular and a volunteer. Sergeants drop to tr per to join. Officers must prove themselves men to last. Their experience and example \* they return to their parent regiment is helping to build a new sort of army.

Our next little trip, the following operation lasting weeks took place in swamp like country, it was an experience and one that I had no ambition to repeat which fortunate? I did not have to. Getting wet with rain and/or perspiration is one thing, but having to wade through rotten smelly water half of every day or more is another. Our drinking water was very suspect but we had no choice, it looked like coffee before one did anything with it and was full of sediment. We never stayed anywhere long enough except overnight to allow time for a sedimentation process and any movement of course kept the water full; stirred. We always strove to find higher ground dry spots for a nights 'kip', stories abounded with hammocks in trees I never had one or ever tried to improvise one with my homemade stretcher material. Wading through waist deep water, or deeper presented its problems, as number one, one could see to a certain extent below the surface, but to those following with the stirred up silt and sediment it was a case of stumbling and tripping over roots, bearing in mind our footwear were only canvas lace-up ankle boots with rubber soles, our skin became a soft pulpy white and the slightest abrasion would remove patches of it. On one occasion with a full bergen heavy on my back I tripped overbalanced and fell, luckily I wasn't the last man as the guy behind me had to literally lift me up to get my head above water, the bergen had pinned me down as I found that I was somewhat temporarily incapacitated. I carried at that time my rifle in my left hand clear of the swamp, on stumbling over roots beneath the surface I endeavoured to put my right arm forward to lessen the fall, however I was unable to move it. the weight of the bergen having cut off the blood supply to the arm which was quite numb and useless, and surprisingly without my knowing it. The two of us received a quiet rollocking for not keeping up, at the time I let the ignorance of the remark go without comment but made a point of stressing the incident at the night stop as I thought there was a lessen there.

It was noted that the maps we were using were published in the War Office in 1949. from surveys carried out up to 1928 in this particular area.

The troop was moving through in four patrols, I thought at the time 'who the hell would choose to cross such country unless they knew a route through it,' we were disturbing clouds of insects including the dreaded malaria mosquitoes, always wet some things swelled and some things shrank, one humorous comment that came forth some guy saying "that all that he had left was foreskin." Tempers were prone to becoming frayed but I guess we

all knew this, and only personal discipline prevented anyone from 'losing it.' We were in fact looking for a courier route thought to cross the area as we were informed rather later after setting out. Fourteen men plus four Abo porters and one interpreter had started out in sixteen Tp. at a pre-arranged RV, a map reference, the troop was to meet up, we were about a day late in getting there, there was some disagreement as to where we actually were, but I didn't get involved, the last patrol to RV did so at last light on the same day as ourselves. We learnt that two men had fallen sick and could not continue, I thought it could have been food poisoning from what I was told they certainly looked very ill, it was a case of case vac (casualty evacuation), a suitable area was found and cleared and a chopper called in and the two departed.

We all split up again and started off in patrols, ourselves with slightly higher ground or more of it. Within hours we came across a well-defined track with recent use, we had the interpreter with us now and with heads together we decided that the helicopter activity had probably advertised our presence and we should proceed with extra caution. There was no contact with the troop Comd. and no point in back tracking to find him, we weren't due to RV for another three days and in any case it was likely the track would cross the paths of the other blokes so, with brains in high gear, eyes alert, and legs in bottom gear we carried on with a little extra spacing. A hand signal from the scout brought us all to a halt, the L/Cpl went forward whilst we adopted the all round. The rest was welcome, the silence daunting, after a short while he came back and over to me. There was a large tree trunk lying across a fairly wide stream obviously used as a footbridge, knowing my background I was asked to go forward and 'sus' it out for booby traps, OK, I took a drink of my cold boiled water from my water bottle (I'd made the habit of boiling everything I drank since we started out on this do), dumped my bergan said I would signal with my left arm if anything found and with my right when thought to be all clear. Two moved up part the way as cover and the other two stayed back a bit, I went up, no point in creeping or whatever, if it was under observation, the fact did cross my mind, I was alone and anyone with common sense would wait for bigger and more targets. Carefully searching the ground approach to the tree trunk nothing disturbed nothing seen, about to step up I noticed a rusty wire over a root slack, could be? Then with my parang made a sharp cut and folded the wire back. Towards the other side in amongst the foliage ankle high well covered a very fine taut newish looking wire, having stepped over I carefully searched the far bank and assured myself that all was OK there, back to the wire, I neutralised the first end then traced my way to the other end just to find an anchorage. Although wary I went back over and put my right arm up, nipped into the cover just off the track and waited for the two coming up, told them that there was a taut wire on the far side that I had exposed and made safe. The NCO wanted to have a look at the improvised old can BT, so we both went to it, I checked it over and detached it, a crude affair but it would have worked either way, whether it was cut or tripped, it was tossed in a deep part of the stream and the wire cut back. I went back for my bergan telling the scout to go over, all OK and then back to the other two who had my gear, then widely spaced we went up and crossed over met up and continued on. Another two hours or so along the track we decided to start looking for a decent night stop area. After the bashas were up, weapons cleaned and hunger pangs satisfied, I wrote out what was found at the natural bridge crossing ref. no. (whatever it was) and the action taken, such incident reports were required in detail. I heard nothing further and was never asked to verify, a little odd I thought at the time but perhaps it was nothing new.

The following day we continued along the track knowing a fairly large river should be found ahead. Prior to starting out in the morning our 'Interrupter' as we called him had made it known that he was feeling unwell as did one of the other guys, I became the tail end Charlie and amongst other things I had to keep an eye on the two 'stragglers' as they had become. Early afternoon found us at the river edge and a 'T' junction of tracks. Animal tracks were often found leading to and from and along water ways, they always knew where the better water was and the better route to travel whatever the terrain, so being jungle wise humans tended to follow such tracks. We turned left to follow the same way as the current, the water was still very dirty and moving very slowly, the track was good but going the same way as the water obviously downhill, so we were heading back to the swamp in this area. Three of us were already lagging far behind, the two sick members having become very tired so I caught the eye of the leader on the straight and signalled a break, as he came back I did not have to tell him why, they were really rough, after about twenty minutes discussion we had agreed on our location the two said that they could continue on but only to look for a night stop. Some forty minutes later way back off the track we settled in assisting the ailing and doing all else as per. It rained every day early afternoon, something that all become accustomed to and as always efforts were made to set up camp before the weathers onslaught. Next morning as daylight filtered through the overhead canopy we were to very soon learn that we would not be going very far. the two sick men had become worse overnight, Garry had heard foraging during the night and had ascertained why, so we had a get together regarding our next move, going back along the main river track hopefully to find signs of other patrol movements more in the central search area where HQ patrol and the very

necessary signals setup existed. The sick insisted on carrying their own gear although obviously weak an early start at a good pace to make the most of the cooler morning air, myself in the rear we made good progress. In jungle terms the river track was like a main road so walking was easy, after a break and a visual assessment that indicated that we would not be going much further with our quickly tiring sick who had agreed reluctantly to carry on a bit further.

Later on, whilst turning a fairly sharp bend in the track that was right on the river's edge, the interpreter appeared to throw himself in the water with an almighty splash that sounded worse in the quiet surroundings that was our world on patrol. I dropped my bergen and my rifle in that instance to grab the guy before the current moved him away, assistance came quickly and three of us had him up on the bank almost as quick to find he was still clutching his rifle. On removing his bergen, belt, pouches and rifle he was rolled on to his side to expel the filthy intake of water. Although conscious he wasn't really with us. I looked around to see the other guy just sitting in a daze and then left the other two to attend to him, he appeared to be in a delirious state very similar to the others who were recently flown out. Moving all just back off the track, we decided we'd all make a brew having made our mates as comfortable as possible in the circumstances and then decide our next move.

I stayed behind although I felt there was little I could do I did have the medical pack with me and whilst the other two trundled off in search of help I used my time to put a roof cover over the two now almost unable, tempted them with food and drink and only partook of my boiled water which I set about to replace in the meantime knocking up a basha for myself, checked my rifle and prepared myself a meal of curry and rice, the common dish containing my daily nutritional needs.

It was a long night; I did not expect the others back in any case until the following day if then. In the very late afternoon, as though some would say by divine guidance the remainder of the troop moved into the area in pouring rain. How they all came together I never did find out but it was certainly a very quick response. After the departure of the last two case vacs the four patrols had become three and it was 'Biffo' who led the way in with our patrol leader, the troop signaller, two others and their four Abo porters, the second patrol which now had two NCO's followed and they had two very weary sick members who were both walking wounded so to speak. All busied themselves with settling in for the night; bashas, weapon cleaning, knocking up a meal. Troop Comd. made his way over later on to find out about and have a look at the two men ill that I had been looking after, one had become really delirious and it was decided that he be put into a form of straight jacket i.e. tied down to a homemade stretcher made out of his own pole hammock and because of the sickness it was thought a listening watch throughout the night would be a good idea. With two other volunteers I took my turn, the midnight watch, to keep an eye on those unwell, talk to or assist if required, bloody awful in that situation so I consoled myself with my own wellbeing. A signal had been sent back to the OP's room at Wadiburn Camp I presumed to notify of our situation and that once an LZ had been prepared, four case vac cases were required ASP (as soon as possible). At daybreak I went out with the NCO's from the other patrol to look for possible LZ sites, a couple went the other way, we were all to be back within an hour, a decision was made and work started with all available hands. By midday the chopper was landing and I noted that five of our numbers were leaving, leaving us rather thin on the ground as a troop. The signaller had appeared to have a busy time and his mate who had to peddle the hand powered generator (bit of a Heath Robinson idea I'd thought). I had a go at it just for the experience.

We were now half strength, having two patrols of three and a headquarter group with the Abo's, staying put for the remainder of that day. Our lieutenant Cartwright had quite a long conversation with me, the longest I'd had with him since my posting to the troop in fact, could have been a filling in time 'natter,' or it could have been a getting to know you, whatever I got to know him a little better, he was surprisingly fit despite his appearance - a bit podgy to say the least.

That evening we all had a get together, it had been assumed, or someone had come to the conclusion, that the cause of the case vacs was a lack of personal care, in particular the preparation of drinking water, one of the very things I had spoken about with the 'boss' earlier on in the day, as I had said to him, it was an engineer responsibility to supply drinking water from natural sources and as a first class Field Engineer (as it was known at the time) I had often had to instruct on the subject. As it was every man on ops. had his own little sterilization unit with instructions on the small bottles, two kinds, one to sterilize the other de-taster tablets, the latter known as 'Theo' tablets from memory, anyway as I have said I had preferred to boil the water. An area of search was to continue and instructions given accordingly.

Little flames flickered in the early dawn of a new day in preparation for the morning brew, bedding as such rolled up and stowed, bed poles up rooted and thrown in the thicker bush, ponchos folded/rolled and strapped below the bergens, wet clothing shaken and inspected prior to putting on along with wet socks and canvas boots as we sipped from our airborne mugs. Those that wanted a nibble of a hard tack biscuit nibbled, weapons were looked over, wiped, brushed, flicked and blown. Once the two words "five minutes" were heard, we packed up, cleaned up and saddled up making sure all was secure and that required was easily accessible and nothing rattling.

In silence with just a hand wave to the others we departed, now three in number at five yard spacing, it was a habit to walk without talk, with constant observation all round and communication by hand signal or movement. We were fresh after the break and glad to get going, nothing worse than lying around in virtual silence with little to occupy one's self with, short breaks are appreciated, but a day sometimes seems too long in such conditions, flies, mossies, bugs, leeches, and nearly always very little sunshine if any at all. Each watched the others, occasionally an interest was pointed out as an alert tree climbing goanna watched us pass, a snake seen, or some other form of life worthy of a glance was noted, as the last man one was more prone and accordingly more alert because of. We made a good and yet comfortable progress, there was no rush for it was necessary to be very alert. I certainly believed, that with the practice enforced, our senses became much more sensitive, sight, hearing, smell, not so sure about taste or feeling, there was little variation in the food intake, although we had tasted snake cutlets, baked rat and goanna that our Aboriginal porters had prepared. Other meats were available if one was desperate in addition to fish found in the bigger rivers (a good soldier had to be able to live off the land). Regarding feeling, I often found that small cuts and abrasions existed and wondered how and when they happened, as did others. We changed position in the march order for no other reason than that of giving all the experience of leading scout, earlier signs of fresh tracks no longer existed in the well-trodden pathway, the heavy daily rain removed all trace on a regular basis.

It was an uneventful three days of foot slogging, the river had become a narrow stream when the track took a different bearing from the water, this often happened over small distances where the water detoured as nature directed, but now we were moving away from the water course. Collectively we decided to continue having agreed on our position, being within a day from the given, our search boundary. Having reached the end we turned towards the RV, a given map reference, where we were all to meet up as a troop, or what was left of it. Another days' worth and this was achieved without anything untoward happening and good dead reckoning and overall since starting out nothing to report.

This was rather a short operation, much less time than we had expected, whether it was terminated early because of lesser numbers or what may have been seen as a health hazard or the fact that a few CT's had been captured including their leader was successful was not really known as far as I can remember.

Soon after we had arrived back, information came our way about the case vacs, apparent they had all been diagnosed with Leptospirosis (or that's how it sounds), a disease picked up from stagnant water that had been contaminated with rats urine, a source that I never used to my knowledge, flowing water was a far safer bet. I had wondered if my earlier childhood upbringing had played a part here, having had to live with muddy well water containing newts (water lizards), worms and various other species in the English summer months, and remembering the water inspectors remarks, had I developed an immunity to such water? Although very cautious about the drinking aspect. I was immersed daily at times and with cuts abrasions and leech bites to contend with, such open invites, I would have thought, would have put me at risk.

The following article is with compliments to Brian Connell of the "Sunday Dispatch" and his story published September 13n 1959.

They called Ah Hoi "the baby killer." And he had come by his nickname in sinister fashion. He was the leader of a gang of Communist terrorists in Malaya. From a village called Sekinchang, which lies among the coastal paddy fields, where he obtained rice to feed his desperadoes.

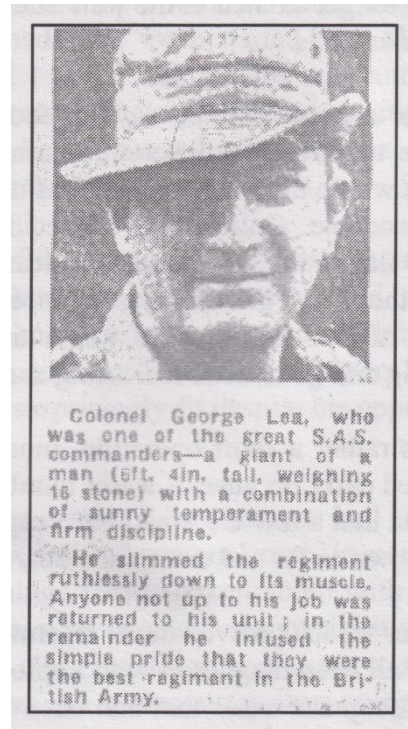
One of the farmers turned informer. In revenge Ah Hoi seized the farmer 's wife who was cm expectant mother, had her held down on a table in front of the assembled villagers and slashed her with a knife. After that Ah Hoi was "wanted" very badly indeed. But he could never be caught. For inland from the coastal farms the valley of the Tengi River is a vast, appalling swamp.



It is like jungle, only worse. The towering trees, the sword grass, the undergrowth are all there. But their roots are in squelching slime covered with tea-coloured water, neck deep at some seasons. In places are peaky islands. Here Ah Hoi and his men build hideouts under the vaulting roots of trees. For years these had given them safe bases from which to blackmail, rob and terrorise the farmers near the coast.

Then, in the spring of 1958, the Special Air Service - the "Queen's Guerillas" — were ordered to get Ah Hoi dead or alive. If any human beings could do it, the SAS would. They were quick witted, unorthodox, ruthlessly efficient.

The hunt for Ah Hoi was to be commanded by a jungle fighter with fierce red hair and a boxer's nose — Major Harry Thompson, Royal Highland Fusiliers.



He decided to go in by parachute. That way they would get to the heart of the wilderness fresh and not leaving tracks. The drop took place at seven o'clock on a February morning. All three troops and squadron headquarters - 37 men - were out of the aircraft in 18 seconds. Thirty-six men reached the ground safely. The 37th didn't and was rescued by helicopter. Now the hunt could start.

Captain Peter de la Billiere led a troop along the Tengri River; that was, they guessed, the terrorists' main highway.

Even in the swamp the expert trackers of the SAS could see where terrorists had been. The Communists, in places, had had to cut through spikey "grass" 10 ft. high. Sometimes, beneath the water, dents in the mud could be seen where a man had walked. Sometimes their bare feet rubbed the bark off exposed roots, leaving a trail of yellow marks under the water. For ten days de la Billiere and his men squelched on. The spikes tore their clothes to bits. Some of the men's boots fell to pieces; they went on barefoot. But they found plenty. They followed the trail from one abandoned Red camp to another; each littered with shells of turtles the Communists had eaten.

Then Sergeant Sandilands with another troop took up the search. He moved only by night sniffing the air for fires lighted by the terrorists to cook their fish and turtles and looking for the glow under their cooking pots. By day the troopers "holed up." They were careful to leave no tracks. In the first days they found

only traces, but no Reds. Then, at dusk, Sandilands saw two terrorists not 75 yards away across the water. Sandilands and a corporal floated a log out into the stream, creeping behind it. Sandilands fired twice. One terrorist fell dead. The other disappeared.

Next morning the troopers followed tracks for four miles. They found where the Reds had camped, but they were gone.

Now Major Thompson was getting a clear picture of the movements of not one but two bands of terrorists. If only he could sandwich them both between two halves of his own forces they could be harried and squeezed into surrender. For 20 days Major Thompson and his men pushed on, never seeing more than the length of a cricket pitch ahead. Thompson's thorn-torn legs became a mass of ulcers. Daily they were soaked: but each evening they took spare vests and pants out of their waterproof packs and changed into them. The others were still damp next morning, but it was too hot for anyone to care much. They never bothered to search for a dry spot to hole up for the night. If anyone did discover what looked like solid ground he was liable to find that under his weight the surface crust broke and he was sinking through into water again. So they cut long sticks, four to each man, pushed them down into the water and they' took a firm hold in the mud, crossed them over into two pairs and swung a hammock between them. If they were going to stay at a spot more than one night they built platforms

Then they suddenly broke out to the riverbank. They could see 300 yards downstream I: looks like the Thames" Thompson exclaimed. It didn't but that was the way he felt at the moment.

Each evening Thompson heard by wireless from de la Billiere who was by this time tracking Ah Hoi's movements away down river. Now there was no longer need for secrecy; Obviously the Reds knew the squeeze was on in dreadful earnest. So the SAS sent orange balloons up through the treetops as markers for helicopters. And along came the "choppers ", They dropped food, ammunition and clothes almost on the heads of the waiting men.

Now everything was set for a final push. Regular troops and police were moved to form a cordon along the edge of the wilderness. At one place barbed wire was laid parallel to the coast, with signs warning that anyone found on the wrong side of it would be shot. A curfew was laid on the paddy planters. No more rice for the Reds.

Two days passed. Then out of concealing undergrowth into a paddy field walked a woman barely 4ft. 6in. high. She spoke to a Special Branch officer who was there. Her name she said was Ah Niet. She was ill and hungry, but had plenty of cheek. Ah Hoi's terms for surrender she explained, were 3,500 pounds "compensation" for each terrorist and an amnesty for those already in jail.

The police officer cut her short. The Malayan Government, he told her. was offering terrorists a peaceful return to civilian life or deportation to China. "Ah Hoi" will never agree." she said. But she went back to tell him.

Now all was ready to bomb out the terrorists. Every track and camp was pinpointed. But in the evening ah Niet returned to say' she would bring out the whole band. A radio signal was sent at once to Major Thompson. He took a troop into the paddy field and waited It was pitch dark by now. Then lights were seen. And out of the wilderness by torchlight, came the terrorists. One of them was a curious little creature, wearing a woman s blue silk jacket. "For heaven's sake who is that?" Thompson asked ' That he was told "is your baby killer. "I don't believe it." the Major said. "That's a woman."

But when the "woman's" hat was taken off there — all 5ft nothing of him — was the diabolical Ah Hoi. He was still arrogant, still ranting that the Reds would win in the end. He would give no information about missing members of his band.

Ah Niet was more co-operative. She undertook to lead Harry' Thompson and a patrol to a point in the jungle beside a waterway where another group was ready to surrender. They made an extraordinary pair, the 6ft. 4 in. major and the 4ft. 6 in. woman terrorist.

Ah Niet.  
She was  
only 4ft.  
6in. tall, but  
she was as  
strong as a  
man, and as  
savage as a  
tiger. She  
led a British  
patrol  
through the  
jungle to  
take the  
surrender



She was horrified at the noise the patrol made swimming across the canal. "She was like a fish " remembers Thompson — not a sound. She had been swimming in and out of the jungle, not 300 yards away' from a police post for years and had always got away with it. "We got inside the jungle and she made a whole lot of noises, clucking like a jungle grasshopper - one of their jungle code signs - but no one appeared. We were falling about all over the place in the dark and in the end Ah Niet collapsed because of her beriberi

In fact the other terrorists were not there, but they surrendered 48 hours later, and when the last couriers from the inland group found their comrades gone, they too gave up. Three months to the day after Thompson and his men were dropped, the last of Ah Hoi's thugs surrendered.

And Ah Hoi himself? He chose to be sent back to China. At the last minute he wanted to change his mind and stay' in Malaya; but he was firmly put aboard a ship. There is no record of his reception when he reached China.

Today' the terrorists in Malaya are down to a few hundred, pushed up against the frontier of Siam, deprived of arms, ammunition and supplies. Their power almost gone. It was a great victory for the SAS and no other troops could have won it.

Now they were ready when needed to fight elsewhere....

Recording and relating operations would be a case of constant repetition of words and experiences, however I thought it worthy of mention to record certain highlights of interest in which I was involved during the various later jungle patrols. My added responsibility of patrol medic gave me further experience at one stage having to stitch a thumb back in place, the man had been involved in splitting green bamboo poles to be used for an LZ mat, these were made to increase the ground bearing pressure, the split poles were woven in a basket-like fashion, a very successful method of providing a substantial and safe landing platform for helicopters, anyway this character had a parang go right between his thumb and forefinger whilst holding the bamboo he was splitting. I had no gut left (the normal stitching carried in small bottles of fluid) so used button thread.

Having cleaned up with sterilized water whilst he held the digit in place, it was a very deep cut down towards the wrist, another feller assisted by holding the hand while I stitched it up and then bound firmly. It was to be a week before the Medical Officer saw him by which time it was long due for further attention, the MO appeared quite satisfied with my effort and said that I had saved the thumb which should have full function in due course.

At one other time we had the Squadron Sergeant Major with us on quite a big gathering of squadron members, a single man I remember him once saying something about young married troopers were better off than he was, I guess it struck a bell with me because I had had exactly the same thoughts myself as a Sgt. in Germany with my young married sappers. Very wrong I thought and still do, if a bloke gets married that's his problem why should he get paid more. But that's the way it was. At another time he stopped a large marching group and made two individuals unpack and repack their bergens on the spot to stop some rattling, subjecting them to much humiliation in the process, saying they had "already told the enemy where we were so his voice wouldn't make any blood) difference."

Just before starting out early one morning as we all prepared to move, the silence was shattered by a single rifle shot (by a young 'Nig Nog Rupert,' I was later told) - such carelessness is always unacceptable - with officer commanding and SSM present - no evidence was required.

On that same trip I was given an unusual task with my usual basha mate Jock, we were to act as patrol members with an inexperienced YO (young officer) as the patrol leader, actually this happened twice concerning myself with different YO's, to a certain extent we were told to act dumb and let them lead at all times, we assumed this to be some sort of selection test for the regiment (as to whether officers did the same sort of selection course that I went through I did not know then). Certain individuals were commissioned from the ranks. The young 'Ruperts' were getting their first jungle experience, especially as patrol leaders, was quite a testing time for them, in theory they should have known the score as we saw it. Anyway Jock and I walked side by side where this was possible nattering away to each other about anything except the task in hand absolutely disregarding SOP's. our new leader just checking now and again to see if we were still following, we'd ask for a break every so often never refused during which the progress was discussed and questioned, but we never knew where we were! At the night stops we ignored the new leader and bashed down too far away from him, kept an eye on his reactions, taking the odd notes. We occupied ourselves in candle light for a while before pinching them out and observed the solitary light some thirty yards away, realising that he was the only attraction he followed suit, the quiet of the jungle can be quite deafening to the unwary, imaginations can run riot with the falling down of a dead branch or the rattle on an unwashed mess tin as some marsupial has sniffed out what smelt like tucker, we weren't being fair, but hell he was an officer, a leader of men. Day break was often very welcome for the newcomer, always being the first to stir and become active one way or the other. I've seen some guys actually making a brew without getting out of the sack, not the prescribed way of doing things, but it happened. Our first morning out with the new leader he told us "we'd make a start in twenty minutes," "where to" we asked, he pointed it out on the map, so we drew a big cross on our map! He mentioned something about not seeing the point if we didn't know where we were or what route we came by, "OK where are we now then?" so we marked that with a big cross! Actually we reckoned he was spot on at that time. We followed him all morning, no break for five hours, he'd left the track and was heading on a bearing of which we kept a check on, despite the fact that the track that we had left contoured and consequently detoured in the wrong direction but led to the map reference he had pointed out (the one with our big cross!).

As the going became rough we suggested a break, the vegetation was pretty thick and the mossies very active as the maps came out, he reckoned we were where we obviously were not, progress had become very slow, and to throw the cat amongst the pigeons, I suggested that maybe the compasses were not accurate in the rocky terrain like that around us, an utter look of surprise confronted us, "well where the hell are we?" "Dunno!" we

pondered over the map, we came uphill, downhill, uphill, downhill, uphill and downhill, yes but it's like that in all directions if you look at the contour lines, he was confused and after a little while suggested if the compass needle was being distorted because of magnetic attraction, it would be the same going back, so if we took off 180 degrees we should get back to the start point. "Yeah but we are supposed to be going the other way." However he took control and back-tracked, some signs of authority and confidence which were worth a few plus marks, it was quite likely that we would have made the RV had we kept going, in the event we followed the track around but more as an outing than that of a searching patrol and marching into the evening darkness in pouring rain, causing much discomfort, settled in for the night, wet and dark. Doesn't do much for one's contentment of mind, perhaps a lesson there in itself. There was satisfaction that the RV had been reached as we set off the next morning. Destinations as directed were visited on the return journey, our leader making his own notes, some legs on well-defined tracks, others on cross country diversions, four or five days thrown in at the deep end certainly gives one an insight to the type of life to expect. A testing time for the young YO's as well as the selection officers, both to decide their suitability.

All volunteers for the SAS had to have a minimum of two years' service and preferably three years as I understood the requirements, but like everything else in life I guess there are exceptions to the rules, the national serviceman on my course in Wales, I had been led to believe he was NS, as an example.

I was instructed for a second time to take part on a similar patrol later, circumstances were much the same as were our instructions, the other patrol member had also been involved on like patrols previously and appeared to lean towards encouragement of temporary new leaders without actually assisting them. I came to agree that this was more appropriate and that we should act with more responsibility in line with our training, but we had to be led and we always had to be unsure of our whereabouts! To cut a long story short the officer on this occasion just lost the plot when confronted with bamboo thickets, unsure of his position, unsure of the situation, having two patrol members who couldn't help out, he broke down, lost his temper, threw his rifle down and sobbed! After a short time we took over, made a brew of tea, settled him down and told him we were relieving him of the duty as patrol leader, explained where we were and that it was pointless to even try to penetrate bamboo and invited him to suggest solutions etc. There was no point in continuing on so we made our way back to base camp. He called us bastards on the way back and queried our rank, not believing we were troopers, and that this obviously wasn't for him. Needless to say he was RTU pretty smart as we heard later.

When the re-supply came in by parachute, spirits were raised, there was the mail, some fresh food, re-supply of rum, an issue of recent papers, cigarettes in small round tins of fifty in the rations and an extra bonus for the married blokes as the wives were invited to make up and deliver parcels, within given limitations, to the regiment for inclusion in the re-supply. Packing of the parcels had to be a learned skill to cater for the hazards of hard knocks and bumps in their transportation, but surprisingly a dozen eggs often reached me intact, quite a luxury in the circumstances with quite a variety of other goodies, sharing what could not be carried with the single members. On rare occasions as far as I was concerned we would supplement our diet with stunned fish from the larger streams and rivers, secured by throwing in some prepared plastic explosive that went off under the water, the stunned fish just floated to the top where they would be skimmed off by the previously located Abo porters downstream.

I became involved in patrolling by helicopter on only one occasion although I understood the method was used from time to time when specifically required for some reason, the task in this instance was (a) to drop leaflets warning the locals of action, one assumed they the jungle dwellers (the Chinese at least) could read, and (b) to pick up individuals, mainly Chinese gardeners working on their isolated vegetable patches, push bikes and all. and take them back to a given point for interrogation. We sat in the choppers with legs dangling outside and loaded rifles on our knees, flying just above tree top height, keen eyes searching the undergrowth for any sign of human movement. This proved to be an exciting and very interesting way to patrol, a sighting would involve steep banking, the centrifugal forces welding us temporarily to the deck of the craft as a quick descent was made in order to apprehend.

At one other time we came across a fortified habitation surrounded by a very tall barrier of bamboo poles lashed and tied together with native vines and with a very narrow entrance, guarded by a uniformed man with a slurred English speaking voice. It turned out that was an Australian base camp, deep within, a place one could miss by fifty yards and not know you had passed it and yet it would have probably housed eighty odd men. We took a break on invitation within its bounds and a few goods exchanged hands with a bit of quiet banter, we left within the hour, our task and route through the area made known as I'd thought by the exposed maps in one corner.



Preparing for a call for assistance



Photographs of LZ's, hand hewn in the ULU whilst working with helicopters

Captured terrorists sometimes proved very useful, one patrol that we met up with for some reason was being led, or rather shown, the way by a very skinny female CT who had given information on storage dumps said to contain arms and ammunition amongst other things, including food stocks. We were led past old habitats and what we thought were old Landang clearings. We, our patrol, stayed a fair distance behind although our scout kept those in front in sight, eventually at a halt we closed the gap somewhat, a store had been located. I was one of those sent out in all directions as a listening watch, we stayed there for what seemed like hours, sitting still with all the creepy crawlies, the winged buzzies attracted to us in the steamy heat. As darkness was due to descend we moved in closer to the main party and bashed up for the night to learn that a chopper would come in nearby at first light to remove some gear and we, the second patrol, would be moving on. As to whether the female was tied up for the night or whatever I never knew.

Along one quite prominent river lived a number of Aboriginal groups, growing food in their ladangs and hunting in the locality, all were full of smiles when we passed by (and they did appear to be happy with their lot). Longhouses seemingly favoured as the general accommodation, some of the natives were wearing a form of conventional clothing, but many young men wore only the loin cloth or something similar and the young children nothing at all. The names of leaders remembered were Long Jim. Alang Simpoi (I think) and Parak, they were living at the time along with six or seven other groups in the area alongside the Sungai Plus (the river) in the Korbu Forest Reserve which was known as the Plus Temer Aboriginal area.

We were rather smelly, my wife said stinking, on return from Ops. On one of my last patrols in the ULU, we were directed to the scene of a helicopter crash, the pilot had been taken out by another chopper, we assumed had been winched aboard, there was minimal damage to the decked aircraft and our job was to construct an LZ in order to bring in fitters and spares, a DZ was also located just over a thousand yards away for other supplies. The LZ task involved the making of a bamboo mat as the area was very mushy and soft under a real tangle of undergrowth and vines. We were to stay until the big bird could fly out under its own steam, by also building a track mat from under its wheels to the main mat and with much levering and improvised tackles we were able to position it level and stable to work on and eventually take off, the whole taking over nine days in an area adjacent to Sung Telom within the Cameron Highlands.

At some later stage, having been prior informed, I was promoted to L/Cpl and transferred to RHQ, one of the main reasons being to run explosives courses for the unit and in the meantime to fill in time I was to be employed in the operations room, the nerve centre of the unit that was manned 24hrs a day. My wife of course was pleased to have me around on a regular basis having become rather bored with the coffee rounds and afternoon teas.

There was a rotation of duties so that I took my turn with the remainder of the staff to fill the midnight slots. Daily sitreps came in between 1700 and 1800 hrs. in Morse Code. I knew just a little of the subject having been taught it in my cadet days, but I was anything but proficient at it, in fact I had failed my PC's badge because of it as I remember. We had had members of the Royal Signals regiment attached to us for their expertise in communications generally, the Ops. Officer at the time was also a dab hand with Morse, he would write down messages as they came in having overheard them in an adjacent room and on receipt would say "well let's compare," far above my head at the speed they would receive and send. One of my jobs I quickly learnt was to type out all sitreps (Situation Reports) on stating at my introduction to the job that I had never been taught typing. I received a very curt reply, LEARN, and since mistakes were not acceptable many balls of screwed up A4 found their way into the waste paper bag, which incidentally were always burnt. Since the night duties were generally quiet, I had the time to type and retype and retype and was quite surprised to find how two fingers can actually ache, and to this day I still type with two fingers only.



SOME OF THE MEN FROM RHQ

Another part of the routine was to plot all locations and movements daily of the troops out on operations. Every day excepting Sunday in base camp there were “prayers” for all officers before first parade, actually a daily update for the CO downwards on all troop activities within the unit. Sometimes extra parachute supply drops would be requested or case vacs had to be arranged, all duty personnel were expected to be able to organise same and notify the Ops Officer who would decide whether his intervention was required or otherwise. Clerical work was never my cup of tea, however for a while it became my lot. I organised a small course to familiarise some new recruits with explosives and accessories and some practical experience in handling it and its uses, all of which was a rather basic knowledge, but time allowed did not permit otherwise, promotion to Cpl followed. Later I had to organise a similar course for the Royal Airforce Crash Rescue Team, which was mainly a practical course living in the jungle, constructing landing zones, dropping large trees, three of their members to my knowledge had had some previous experience which eased my thoughts on the matter as this was quite some responsibility.

Majority on the course were NCO's and Officers, two or three seemed very senior Officers who I thought at the time came along for the 'swan' holiday/experience, however to me they were all students and they all 'mucked' in where manual labour was required. We carried out a couple of longish hikes, they doing the map reading, they had their own signals 'set up' and the 'admin' side of it was theirs. Although an operational exercise carried out in a designated training area, they each carried weapons and loaded magazines, safety was high on my list of priorities and this I had to emphasize frequently in the circumstances. A very enjoyable exercise/course of ten days, the last but one day on which liquid refreshments were brought in with visitors by helicopter. During the evening I was thanked for a very informative and interesting course. Next morning all was packed up, cleaned up, waste buried endeavouring to remove all trace of our having been there before moving off. Back in Wadiburn camp before they dispersed from Regimental HQ I issued each person with a precis of the course syllabus basic though it was.

Back in the ops room routine duties took care of our time, daily sitreps at times became quite interesting. I recall one particular report that had me foxed for a while it followed a given name and just stated; 'could not follow a London bus in thick snow.' I pondered over names it was either a Gurkha or an Iban and they were usually employed as trackers and that of course was the clue, then it made sense.

Soon after my posting to RHQ my friend Lofty had been given time out to study for his first class education certificate, so we both had a civilised job for quite some time travelling to work in the back of a three ton truck, that made its daily rounds morning and night from Petaling Jaya, a suburb I guess of Kuala Lumpur, to our camp north of KL some fifteen miles. As my hours of work were irregular I eventually bought myself an old Standard Vanguard car for fifty dollars, a very similar type to the discarded staff cars that I had become accustomed to in Egypt that we had as troop transport. It came in very handy for our social life as well travelling to and from Kuala Lumpur as and when time and finance permitted. We would often eat out, 'T' bone steaks, eggs, chips, mushrooms and glasses of milk “to charge our batteries” as Lofty said. Actually we had both lost a fair bit of weight over the past year, I'd often gone below ten stone seven pounds, two and a half stones below my pre



SAS weight. We used to put a bit on and then off it came again. But this was not a new experience for Lofty, he had been a prisoner of war in Korea, having served with the Glorious Glosters, living on a fifty cigarette tin of rice a day he was reduced to a seven stone something, and for a guy way over six feet he'd be rather flimsy in the less than arduous life, we began to fill out our service dress rather better. Our number one dress or 'Pea Greens' as they were known, were made locally and were peculiar to the Regiment. Local tailors, of which there were many, were very good and we also thought very reasonable. One could see a suit or a dress in a magazine, take it with you and get measured up and collect the finished product within a couple of days or so.

However after quite sometime of both being home based, the two bedroom bungalow/house became too small and as the quarters next door became vacant I applied for possession and myself and wife moved in. We remained friends both realising that the others appreciated their own private space, so our address changed from number 11 to 13 Jalan Anak Gasing, our Chinese amahs now having a house each to look after.

After Lofty's educational stint was completed he went back to the Squadron and on Ops again and I remained put in the operational room. Soon one of the squadrons was withdrawn from the jungle and with a lot of hustle and bustle, re-organisation and issue of clothing and whatnot they departed under a cloud of supposed secrecy. Shortly afterwards a second squadron did likewise and that was the last I ever saw of Lofty. We eventually helped Ann, his wife to pack belongings for return to UK. for which the for which the whole unit remaining received orders to prepare for.

During this period of preparing for unit move, amongst other things I was given the task of disposing of rifle grenades, the modern PIAT. (projectiles infantry anti-tank! weapon, a far cry from the PIAT that I had carried in Egypt. With an associate and a truck and its driver we went to the jungle training range at Klang Gates and returned at the end of the day with very many empty boxes, never before or since that time have I had the chance to practice with such a weapon, since there was very much a restricted supply on such items. The unit incinerator was kept going disposing of for many days. Transport and the like were left and presumably handed over but not being involved I took little interest

We travelled back to the UK by ship, but married families were separated, well the other ranks were. wives and children sleeping in separate accommodation away from their husbands. It was a relaxing trip until we had to start wrapping up as we came nearer to the green seas and the cold climate of Europe.

Back in the United Kingdom, we moved into surroundings that were very familiar to myself, it was the very same camp where I had completed my basic training in the Royal Engineers at Malvern, just a little over nine years previously. We, the married guys, moved into some older types of wartime prefabs now allotted to the army as married quarters. Despite their plain outward appearance (some said like cow sheds) they were quite comfortable on the inside with most modern facilities available at the time and situated on reasonable sized blocks which suited some like myself still having an interest in gardening.

Lofty's wife Ann had secured private accommodation not so very far away from the married quarters and made contact on our return. Being present on the birth of our first son Paul, I had left the Unit before Lofty's return to it, but we have kept in contact ever since.

On the working side of the unit, retraining started to take place, military training in all its aspects, but entered into very light heartedly by instructors and students alike. Senior NCO's started off with drill parades under the RSM, perhaps the best way to describe such parades was to say that all were very, very rusty. I had been promoted Sergeant as the mine warfare and demolitions instructor to the unit and took my place on the RSM's parades. Foot drill was hardly passable and arms drill a shambles, the RSM once, falling over when demonstrating the ground arms, followed by an outburst of laughter on one such parade. There was a great deal of experience amongst the senior ranks, having been drawn from the various units of the British army, but collectively on drill, no, this just wasn't their roll and I guess it was a bit much to expect otherwise without a fair amount of practice. Within a very short time such training periods were discontinued, weapon training and live shooting on the ranges was entered into with much more enthusiasm.

The unit was still two squadrons light, away on operations, some members of the unit were still away on leave having held the fort earlier on after arrival when the majority went on leave. I was given an unusual task as an individual to accompany the reserve SAS units, the 23rd SAS Regiment TA from Birmingham and the 21st SAS TA

(also known as the Artist Rifles) from London, I had assumed that there were men from both units. My instructions were to attend as an observer on an exercise in Germany to commence with a parachute drop at 5 am on a given date. I met up with the exercise Commander on reporting to the emplaning airfield, drew my parachutes and before midnight attended a briefing. A wrapped sandwich pack for immediate consumption was issued along with three 24 hr ration packs, water bottles were filled, all other gear I had packed in my bergen, my weapon was a Stirling machine gun, and I was allotted a stick number, we eventually boarded the Hastings aircraft one of three for the exercise. The outward flight, on board drills and checks, exit, descent and landing all went very smoothly and orderly and spot on. On the LZ chutes were quickly and silently rolled and secured and placed temporarily on top of bergens as all made their way to the RV as planned, no casualties came to light on the roll check, chutes were stacked under direction of a member of LZ party, and within minutes all had left the scene in pre-designated patrols en route, I was impressed.

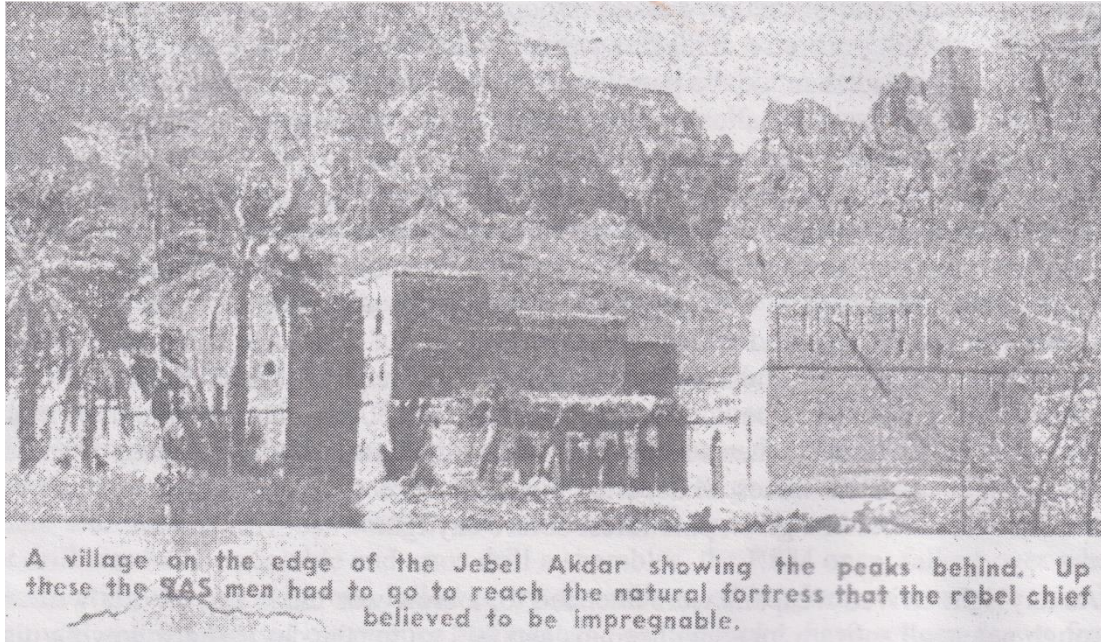
The group of which I was a member was well in the cover of woodlands by complete daylight, where we had a briefing, tasks were allocated in the event of our being surprised, with up to four IA's (immediate actions) as possible reactions, we were then split into four smaller groups to make further progress. As an observer I guess I was not given the destination, however in line with previous training I kept tag of direction via compass and position by map and endeavoured to mentally record the route, which by lunchtime was not making sense to me. We were moving fast (on my judgement) still inside the cover of nature, but had traversed in a semi-circle, perhaps a deliberate detour I thought at the time to take advantage of the cover, only to find at 4 p.m. that we were not where we expected to be. There was patrol discussion and argument, I sat quietly and listened, the leader I assumed to be a junior NCO (unlike the regular army, these men were rather older and no one wore rank), one of the guys asked my opinion, I replied by saying "I'm not here, but since it's a training exercise, I suggest you let Blondie lead" having heard his explanation, he seemed quite adamant on the patrol position and was in line with my own positioning. I therefore asked the destination and suggested the patrol proceed with more caution and attention to direction and position. At 10 p.m., knackered, we had drunk water on the move, we sat down under a hedgerow along a blacktop road, whilst two of our number went off to confirm location. Within half an hour we were seated in a guest house (pub) alongside another patrol, well over five hours behind time. Our embarrassing late arrival greeted with laughter. At this location several supposed targets were to be subjected to recce with reports required which was to be carried out under the cover of darkness. We had a meal and several drinks at the pub, most of the men had civilian pullovers of varying colours and there was to be no movement out until 0130 hrs. Rest the previous night was very scant and prospects then seemed even worse, however fortified by snapps and a good hot meal, in twos and threes all departed in various directions around the smallish built up area, to reassemble in a given pine forest before daylight.

As daylight arrived weapons were attended to, a brew was made and reports written from rough notes, all split up into small groups and laid up for the day. The following night we marched right through, the country was more open and in small sections we made our way to a given point, at which new positions were given. As daylight appeared, so too did a large military establishment, and that was to be observed for the day from points around - ample time for rest in shifts. Another night on the move followed, punctuated by a refuelling stop at a country guest house for an hour or so, at daybreak in woodland a break was given for a meal etc. before moving on through forest. That night the whole exercise party assembled, only to split up again and meet prior to daybreak, when a short rest period was had by all. At this point three ton trucks appeared to start us on the journey homeward. Back at base I handed in my report and got a train ticket back to Malvern and heard nothing more.

At headquarters preparations were being made for a complete unit exercise in Germany, something to do with military rehabilitation, two squadrons were experiencing active service in Arabia, some UK papers published their exploits, the remainder of the Regiment, one operational squadron, RHQ and some attached personnel were to be involved in BAOR. On a personal note, my wife was getting towards the end of her time and expecting our first child towards the end of the proposed exercise. Leave was not granted as my presence was required on the German trip.

With thanks to Brian Connell and the "Sunday Dispatch" for his report (dated 20 September 1959). Where the squadrons went:

**“The Queen’s Guerillas the Astonishing Epic of the SAS”**  
(Sunday Dispatch, September 20, 1959)



From his fortress on top of the green mountain Suleiman Bin Himyar looked down at the troops roasting on the desert below and laughed.

The crack-whine-ping of a rifle shot, and a bullet ricocheting off rock, came from beyond a jutting crag. Its echo was lost in a short, sharp chatter of machine-gun fire. Suleiman was undisturbed. The firing was only from an outpost of his "Omani Liberation Army" bickering at long range with the Sultan of Muscat's forces. No serious danger to his power in that. And soon the velvet Arabian darkness would descend.

Then Suleiman would order his men to slip down from their eyries and plant mines on the desert trails. They were very good at this. They had blown up more than 150 vehicles. A squadron of British Life Guards sent to watch them had lost every one of its 18 Ferret armoured cars. True, Suleiman on his Green Mountain was ringed round. But the almost vertical sides of the Jebel Akhdar rise 7,000 ft. and their rims enclose a great irregular bowl where pomegranates, apricots and grapes flourish. Storms, which burst against the peaks, provide an all-seasons water supply, hoarded in underground caverns.

It was 1,000 years since this natural fortress had been carried by assault. Then the Persians did it. They started an attack with 10,000 men. Only 1,000 reached the top. To defend this redoubt Suleiman mustered a permanent army of 180 men, all crack shots; he had mortars and machine guns in plenty. Five hundred more tribesmen would rally to him when summoned. And he called himself lord of all the 5,000 Arabs who lived on the plateau. Rightly he should have been only a tribal chief. But he had risen in revolt against the sultan of Muscat, with the aid of disgruntled religious leader, the Iman Ghalib, and his brother.

Suleiman was too wise and wily to risk battle in open country since the Sultan had asked for — and received - British aid. But up in the hills he was cheerfully defiant. His fierce pickets manned all the 12 passes by which alone the plateau could be breached. For Oman this rebel stronghold in its midst was a running sore. And that was how things stood when the War Office decided to send for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Special Air Service Regiment to see if they could winkle the rebels out of the hills.

When D ' Squadron was ordered last November to fly to Oman they were deep in the Malayan jungle near the Siamese border. They treaded their way out on foot, aboard rafts, and by helicopter. They abandoned the jungle-green uniform, which had become their hallmark for khaki drill and battledress and went through a lightening course in mortars and bazookas. Within a fortnight they had been flown to Muscat, their base camp on the Oman coast.

The regiment's CO. Lieut-Colonel "Tony Deane-Drummond, went with them to reconnoitre. He liked little of what he saw

There were no reliable maps and aerial photographs were deceptive. Where they showed two peaks apparently about equal a man on the ground found one was 4,000 ft, the other 7,000-ft. and the precipitous canyon of a dried-up water-course ran between them. Information was of the scantiest. The desert tribesmen pretended to know nothing and refused to act as guides.

The first job of D' Squadron was to find a way up the mountain. This meant probing up every possible track to see what was waiting for them at the top. In the desert by day the men were baked. In the mountains by night they were chilled to the bone. Blisters covered their skin; deep cracks in their lips.

Wherever they went up roads in the 60-mile perimeter they were shot at. And the rebels were almost invisible. They wore brown jellababs, a sort of long night shirt and their faces were tanned the colour of the rocks.

But the SAS persuaded an Arab to show them the way' up the Persians' old route. One troop reached an 8,000 ft. peak separated from a rebel position only by a deep wadi. A Sergeant and five men were holding a series of sanara, loose stone bunkers they had built., when they were attacked by 40 rebels with rifles and two Bren guns. Covering each other flitting from boulder to boulder the rebels gradually closed in on the isolated SAS men. The sergeant, completely cool, told his men to duck down in their sangars and hold their fire. The rebels came within 150-130 yards, they had closed their semi-circle to 100 yards and were preparing for a final rush, when the SAS opened up. Bullets poured into the attackers. Nine rebels were killed in a few minutes. The rest slowly withdrew. Not a single SAS man was even scratched.

There was another wild scrap in that area when an SAS patrol tried to get up a cleft in the rock to attack rebels in the cave. The Arabs were shouting down "Come on Johnnie" the SAS were shouting back, bullets were flying everywhere. Things were hot. Then Captain, Rory' Walker climbed part of the way up the cleft on a rope and lobbed a hand grenade over the top. One rebel was killed, and the troops got up. They killed another eight rebels again without loss to themselves. Only one man was killed in all those probing operations - Corporal "Duke" Swindells. He straightened up out of a sanger to take a drink from his water bottle and a sniper shot him straight through his heart.

Two more troops were harrying the rebels on the opposite side of the Green Mountain. The main pass was guarded by a cave with a wall running right across its mouth.

The SAS reached the opposite slope in a ten-hour night march by a long detour. They got into ambush position without the rebel pickets spotting them. At 6 am, as the first rebel came out of the cave, stretched his arms and yawned the SAS loosed off with rocket launchers. Some of the rockets went right into the mouth of the cave. Caught by surprise, out-lying rebel pickets retreated slowly and the SAS picked them off one by one. The rebels still had a mortar firing from a crevice behind the cave, but the SAS had laid on air support. As Venoms came swooping in, one of their rockets made a direct hit. Mortar and men were destroyed completely. "Right down the chimney" the SAS shouted as it went up. And again not a single casualty picked his way back down the mountain to the operational base.

By the time 'A' Squadron were flown in from Malaya as reinforcements — though the SAS never mustered more than 150 men in Oman - a pattern of information about the defences of the redoubt had been built up. Colonel Deane Drummond decided on a daring double feint for the final attack. First 'A' Squadron, who had only arrived in the country' five days before, were taken in trucks to the north side of the Green Mountain. Then they climbed 6,000ft. or more with all their kit and launched an attack. They kicked out the rebels and took the position. But all this was just for deception.

Next day' they started down from the peak. The going was wicked. And, often, at especially bad places, the troopers had to carry both the donkey loads of ammunition and the donkeys themselves! They not only had to get down, they then had to march right round the other side of the redoubt in darkness, ten hours of very' hard going. It was a brutal, punishing, night march that seemed to go on forever. Only the fittest, toughest men could have stood it. But 'A' Squadron were at the rendezvous on time.

Meanwhile another deception had been carried out. Four donkey handlers had been told in strictest secrecy and under pain of death that a certain track was to be followed. Exactly as foreseen, this "information " reached the rebels within 12 hours. They moved their men from other passes to meet the expected assault.

Now 'A ' and 'D ' Squadrons were together. They piled into trucks, drove 60 miles in a detour to dodge mines. And surprised the rebels. They stopped east of the redoubt. The rest of the job must be done on foot, and in darkness. The track was so faintly marked on their maps that two troops lost it. They dumped their heavy rucksacks and stormed for the top with only their weapons and ammunition.

An Arab picket which should have been on watch abandoned their Browning gun and retired to a cave for the night. The leading squadron dug into their holding position and just after dawn the Venoms swept in, blasting every cave and hut in sight with rockets. With them came Valettas, filling the sky with the parachutes of a supply drop. The only SAS casualties in the final assault came from a sniper's bullet, which exploded the grenade hanging under a trooper's pack. It killed one man and wounded two others.

Suleiman and his two main henchmen were soon in flight towards Saudi Arabia. Outfought, outmanoeuvred, the 1,000 year tradition of impregnability shattered in one blow, the rebels just gave up. Not a single further shot was fired as the SAS spread out across the bowl searching villages and seizing dumps of guns and ammunition.

Today the SAS are back in England after fighting Britain's secret wars for ten years. Their rank and file, all volunteers, are helping to build a new sort of army when they return to their parent regiments. One squadron is being trained in amphibious warfare, one in mountain and arctic warfare, and the other as paratroopers.

But from this last operation they took an almost unprecedented series of awards for gallantly. Their CO Lieut-Colonel Tony Deane-Drummond, MC, was awarded the DSO; Captain Walker got one of four MC's; there was one DCM, and two Military' Medals

### **The Rehabilitation Exercise In Germany**

With the exception of a small party that left early, mainly non-paras, the unit parachuted into Germany. I remember it very well, it was exceptionally early morning, just after daybreak and I was surprised to see, as I prepared to come in for my favoured forward right, women out in the field looking up at us as we crumpled in, they were out pea picking in typical German fashion of the time, making the most of every bit of dry daylight.

Various exercises took place over fourteen days or so, but I did make a note of several episodes that at the time I thought incredible, at times amazed and utterly astonished v the behaviour of some, I still have those notes as I write now.

I would ask readers to bear in mind that the unit had been employed on jungle warfare for many years, at which, most had become very expert, but they worked in very small groups, threes, fours and fives and were left to work and patrol as they saw fit but mostly quite diligent from my own short experience and the sitreps and the reports that I'd read. Personal habits may have left something to be desired for we were all expected to behave animal like, no soap in washing (being constantly wet few washed anyway) no shaving, pasteless tooth brushes for those that bothered to clean the pearlies, hair combed if long enough to get rid of whatever might be there. They did the job that was required of them and extremely well as was recorded at the time.

Officers on patrol experienced the same luxuries as the men, there wasn't any, they worked closely with them, confided in them, shared often decisions with them, they were expected to be tougher than the tough, stronger than the strong, enduring when others would tire, they never received the outward shown respect of salutations, they were not called sir and did not wear the insignia of their rank, for the simple reason that they should remain incognito. The responsibilities however remained with them for all things untoward or that which remained questionable. Such traits for all ranks endured over time are bound to stain the characters of some and so it was!

The notes are brief but need no explanation, although at the time I titled them 'Behind The Scenes Ex In Germany' some are in fact public displays. The unit obviously required military rehabilitation.

On reflection, and in the best of interests, it has been decided to omit all incidents/reports and let them remain as I believe they have, unreported over the years, with the exception of that mentioned involving myself that I feel is relevant.

My essential presence on the BAOR trip was not used within the capacity for which I was promoted as I saw it, I was RHQ based to do anything, come organiser available for Orderly Officer or whatever. We managed to get in on all the jumping exercises but did not follow through with the ground training that was supposed to take place.

Whilst on a night duty I investigated lights on in the other rank's cookhouse find a rumpus at around 0130 hrs and quite a number of Senior NCO's including the RQMS (Warrant Officer Class II) all cooking themselves a hearty meal, the RQMS was an extraordinary overweight, very much obese, individual by no means an advert for the unit, could well have been seventeen stone. In the circumstances there was no alternative but to include the incident in my Orderly Officers report. I later found myself verbally detailed by the RQMS to find a working party and clean up the disgusting mess found in the Squadron sleeping accommodation, he made a point of being present himself. I had managed to find brooms, shovels, cloths and buckets but nothing to empty the pans. I refused his order to me personally to empty by hand and ordered the men not to, he went into a rage and left. I eventually got the water turned on and all was cleaned up. I did not report to the RSM as he was good mates with the RQ. but did confront the latter later when no witnesses were present. I never did find out if he was para trained, but thought he wore wings, but some said no, at some later stage (years) he took his own life I'd heard.

By the time of my return home, I had a son, Paul. My mate's wife Ann had helped in the process and a midwife had been in attendance, no complications and my in-laws arrived -1 appeared on the scene. A welcome spot of leave was granted, Enid, my wife received a congratulatory letter from the Commanding Officer's wife, which incidentally she still has.

The leave was good for both family reasons and also to get myself mentally acquainted with my utter disillusionment with the Regiment, or part of it. I knew very few in the unit, men in squadrons would get to know their own, but rarely work with or even see the other squadrons. Those that I had come to know quite well in 'D' Squadron were then overseas, 'A' Squadron had joined them and 'B' kept in reserve I had assumed. It was a real 'Fred Camo's' army (I cannot think where that name originated). In one way I was beginning to think of the absent Squadrons as I did of the one present, putting them all in the same basket, but I knew my friends in 'D' at least would not have approved of that which went on.

We had all heard of previous CO's and OC's having a clear out to raise standards, perhaps the process was still going on at that time, from my own observations it should have been started at the very high levels, but who was around or in the know to do that. It is quite likely that any of the many reports never got very far. As has been said many times before, there are no bad soldiers, only bad officers. I have very rarely voiced my experience of that short rehabilitation exercise, it was nothing to boast about and better forgotten, curiosity though can sometimes be enlightening or maybe disturbing to see the other side of the coin. Men of the unit were proud of the regimental insignia that they had had to earn the right to wear, all had passed the very selective selection course, albeit some at a given second attempt, however the reputation of the SAS was sorely tested at that time and I am sure remembered by the many who had cause to come into contact with it.

My employment although defined on paper, was not so. My immediate superior (who had his good points) had been the Operations Officer, but I hated sitting on my backside all day and I was not particularly good at it, clerical work that is, and he knew it so nothing good would become of it by continuing. I set up my own training aids and had the use of a classroom when required, which was not very often. I spent a fair bit of time with the signals wing. At some later stage the chief clerk called me over to see the CO Lt. Col. Dean Drummond (an ex Royal Signals Officer) in the course of an informal chat, he suggested that I should wear the RE cap badge in my capacity (up to that point I had always accepted that a request from an Officer should be taken as an order), being very reluctant in the circumstances to change my badge (note all the attached personnel were wearing the fawn beret with their own unit badge at the time) I did ask if that was an order as I had joined as a trooper not as an RE Sgt? He understood, saying it was more appropriately a request, and that I would still be wearing the SAS wings. For a short period I wore the RE cap badge before again stitching on the cloth badge for reasons

now forgotten, and it remained that way until I left.

I requested a posting to a Sabre Squadron and was denied same, I therefore a little later on followed it up with a request for an RTU (return to former unit) in December 1959. I was asked to explain, my life then was not what I thought it might have been, I was not fully employed and somewhat disenchanted with the then recent past and thought my best option to be out of it all. Some two months passed when I was called to RHQ to meet a Captain from the RE Airborne Squadron, in a nutshell, I was asked if I would like to join the 9th Independent Airborne Squadron RE and within a couple of weeks or so I reported into Aldershot, rather less than two and a half years with the SAS never to be forgotten.



Above - the return trip to the UK by sea  
(right, Derek Liversidge and wife Irene)

Right - married quarters at Malvern  
Wells



**The following article was found in a London newspaper whilst writing:**

#### BLONDES IN SPY UNIT DRAW ATTENTION

The women of an elite British surveillance unit have been the focus of unwanted attention since one of them accidentally shot a policeman after a high-speed chase in Belfast last week.

The police suspected the woman was a joy rider and she is thought to have believed they were pursuing terrorists. The policeman was still critically ill in hospital at the weekend and the woman was in disgrace at the Special Air Service headquarters in Hereford. She was a member of the 14 Intelligence Company: a little-known unit formed in 1974 after a series of botched security operations in the Army. It is the only special service to recruit women on an equal footing to men. Comprising about 24 soldiers, the unit is known as the Detachment, or Det., and is usually commanded by an SAS Officer.

In Ulster, their main area of operation, the women blend into the local community. Chewing gum at bus stops, parking down lovers lanes with their "boyfriends" or pushing prams around bleak housing estates, few would realise the gum chewing was a mask for whisperings into a hidden radio, that the embracing couple were staking out a terrorist leader and the pram concealed a submachine gun.

Former Det. soldier Sara Ford wrote in her autobiography, *One Up: A Woman in Action with the SAS*, of carrying bags of nappies on operations and making sure her dyed-blond hair always had its roots showing. A former SAS man says, "Some of the girls are real lookers, but we make them eat more so they put on weight. You don't want to be walking round with a stunner so every terrorist is watching her." Michael Smith, author of *New Cloak, Old Dagger*, says, "They carry out covert searches of offices or houses for weapons, which they jark by leaving tiny transmitters inside, which provide warning if they are moved."

Of an average 160 candidates who apply to join from other branches of the armed forces, only 14 will pass the gruelling six-month training program. Three to five of these will be women. Training emphasises psychological strength, vital in a job with a risk of kidnap and torture.

"No two days were the same," Ms Ford said. "Except in three consistent respects: relentless mental torture, physical exhaustion and verbal abuse." After selection, SAS soldiers regularly ambush the women in training exercises to keep them psychologically sharp.

"We grab them on remote country lanes and then we treat them the way the IRA would treat them," one said. "We kick the ... out of them. They are knocked about like the blokes. We blindfold them, gag them, rip their clothes and totally disorientate them." Later the women can expect to be stripped and interrogated for days.

The women serve an average of two years and are often recruited by MI5 and MI6. Others became the first women to join the SAS and served in Bosnia, Central American and the Middle East. A female Det. was behind the controversial Gibraltar shootings in 1988.



## CHAPTER 8

### 1<sup>ST</sup> Tour, 9<sup>th</sup> Independent Airborne Squadron R.E. (1960-1962)

I reported in as a Sgt. to number 3 troop that already had a troop Sgt. I was to learn the ropes, acquaint myself with the routine and I soon became aware that I was an outsider coming in. All promotions from sapper to squadron quarter master sergeant occurred within the squadron, even the Squadron Sergeant Majors. I had therefore, put a few budding corporal noses out of joint, as I explained I had been invited to join I did not apply.

The junior members of the squadron were rather more mature than the sappers of any previous unit that I had previously served with, the squadron of course having its own selection procedures in addition to the pre-para course run by the parachute brigade, those who passed the squadron training found the brigade course relatively easy so many could compare with the soldierly fitness attributes of the SAS, in fact there were half a dozen ex SAS members already there and I guess it was this that helped carry me through the early stages. One of my new early experiences was balloon jumping (not used in the Far East a different sensation, but the only real training benefits were cost and availability, still dependent on weather. The troop soon became my own responsibility along with the troop commander, Captain Robin Jordan, and then along with the other troop sergeants, we were all promoted S/Sgts together there having been a change in RE promotions policy, the S/Sgt. in No. 1 troop, a Frank Mowatt had been my training Sgt in the SAS (younger than I) one of my section Cpls. and a sapper were ex SAS. The training was what I referred to as light engineering, with more emphasis on infantry training weaponry, shooting and physical fitness.

An annual camp at Weymouth on the south coast took care of watermanship, wet bridging and general bailey bridge. Trips to Norfolk training areas involved street fighting in the deserted villages set aside for that very purpose in which booby trap training was also carried out, areas for live demolition exercises and mine warfare existed and improvised rafting took place on the lakes. On one occasion the whole squadron marched back to Aldershot with just one Land Rover playing ferry per troop, passing through North London in the very early hours, the odd members quenching their thirst on milk that appeared to bounce off the doorsteps. Two tea breaks were given at roadside parks where the cooks had gone ahead in the Rover to prepare. Footsore and weary we arrived back, the longest route march of many that I had made in the army. Other training on Salisbury Plain gave us the discomforts of rudimentary living with a poncho and lightweight blanket on many a frosty night, but we did take time out to visit Stone Henge, hitch hiking to the plain from Aldershot, all part of the exercise.

A brigade exercise in Scotland - many including myself flew to the area in Hastings aircraft, whether the Beverley a/c was used on that occasion I cannot be sure, neither can I recall jumping into the exercise, held in very mountainous country, a lot of troop movement was carried out by air, helicopters, the numbers of these airborne vehicles employed surprised very many of us, a few of which came to grief including a small scout craft carrying the Brigadier having tangled with some aerial cables, he also survived two similar incidents at differing times according to the bush telegraph of the period. The Brig, was a man of extraordinary experience having been captured earlier on as a young officer in Korea whilst serving with the Glorious Glosters, incidentally in the same period as one of my old associates. Lofty Large, but he, Capt. Farrar Hockley as he was then, escaped and later wrote the book. 'Edge of the Sword' which I read with more than some interest. I believe he has written several other books since. We the para engineers were employed in infantry patrolling roles and also deployed on simulated target destruction, not exactly ideal training for our guys in the lower echelons. Towards the end of the exercise No. 2 troop of the squadron was moved back to Aldershot at short notice, whether a battalion went at the same time was unknown to us then. All men of the Parachute Regiment and the supporting units such as the Para Engineers took their turn on strategic standby, whereby they had to be at a state of readiness to move out ready for war or anything within 24 hours.

By the time we returned from the manoeuvres in Scotland. No. 2 Troop was in Kuwait in Arabia, to help prevent trouble arising, another brigade exercise held in Germany. In this instance the Island of Silt was used as a staging post and take off point for strategic planning, for the top 'brass' game of chess. It was said the RE Airborne would never go into active service as a unit and training was organised accordingly, as a supporting force, one troop to battalion or one section to a company, so they jumped from the air craft sometimes in half section groups with the units they supported, hence it was all so important for all sapper NCO's and men to know their jobs well. The staging post Island of Silt, unknown until our arrival was in fact an Island of nudist beaches, only found when

I took the troop for a morning run and swim whilst waiting for movement instructions. I am not sure who was the more surprised, the local skinny dippers or ourselves in blue PT shorts and boots. Two teenage girls actually passed through the ranks, not moving to the side as we ran forward in three ranks, I am sure they had their bums patted. In the circumstances as we came to a halt. I said, "right, when in Rome do as the Romans do," and most did just that! The local paper published a report of the Englander Fallschirmjäger (parachutist soldiers with red berets and white bottoms) enjoy the freedom of the beach. Eventually all troops had emplaned to descend under a khaki canopy into what was said to be realistic sequence of events, that many described as a very demanding time of physical endurance.

The local paper published a report of the Englander Fallschirmjäger (parachutist soldiers with red berets and white bottoms) enjoy the freedom of the beach

# Die „Blauen“ wurden überrascht

## „Orange“ landete an der Eckernförder Bucht / Die großen NATO-Manöver

**Eigener Bericht**  
**Eckernförde/Neumünster, 22. September**  
 Das große NATO-Manöver in Schleswig-Holstein erreichte heute vormittag mit einem amphibischen Landungsunternehmen an der Eckernförder Bucht einen neuen Höhepunkt.

Beim ersten Morgengrauen liefen die Landungsgeschwader der angreifenden Orange-Partei, aus dem Fehmarnsund kommend, in die Eckernförder Bucht ein. Das Landungsunternehmen britischer und deutscher Verbände gelang

bände zu unterstützen. Nachdem die Infanterie einen kleinen Brückenkopf gebildet hatte, setzte die zweite Welle an Land.

Gegen sieben Uhr landete mit Schwimm-Lkw der Bataillonstab. Gleichzeitig trat mit einem Hubdachrauber der Generalinspekteur General Heusinger im „Brückenkopf“ ein. Noch bevor mit der vierten Welle die achtschweren Panzer auf den Süstrand der Eckernförder Bucht rollten, waren fast mehr Zuschauer als „Aktive“ versammelt.

Nach einem Lagebericht von General Hax von der Manöverleitung waren heute morgen an dem Landungsunternehmen beteiligt ein Seebataillon mit Bootskompanie, Strandmeisterheiten und Kampfschwimmer, zwei Landungsgeschwader mit Landungs- und Raketen-Unterstützungsschiffen und englische Landungsschiffe. Marineflieger, Minensucher, Schnellboote und Zerstörer haben die amphibische Landung „dem Plan nach“ vorbereitet und unterstützt. Offiziere kritisierten, daß die gesamte Übung so „temperamentlos“ verlaufen sei.

Gestern nachmittag sprangen 1200 Fallschirmjäger der britischen 16 Fallschirm-Brigade in der Nähe von Gettorf weit hinter den „blauen“ Linien der Verteidiger ab. Das Sprungmanöver, das bei einem Wind von neun Metern in der Sekunde gerade am Rand der für Übungen zugelassenen Windgeschwindigkeit stand, verlief ohne Zwischenfälle.

Auch schwere Lasten auf Plattformen, darunter Kraftfahrzeuge und Geschütze, landeten gleit auf der Erde. Ein Jeep am Fallschirm schwebte in einem Fall nur um ein Meter über das Dach eines Bauernhauses hinweg. Die Polizei, die das Landgebiet abspernte, hielt den Atem an.

Einige Soldaten fällten das Manöver so „kriegsrecht“ auf, daß sie begannen, sich aus dem Lande zu verpflegen. Im Kreis Herzogtum Lauenburg reichten einige Bauern fest, daß Soldaten ihre Verpflegung durch „Hühner frisch aus dem Stall“ angereichert hatten.



auf Antrieb. Die „blauen“ verteidigende Partei wurde völlig überrascht. Schon gegen 9 Uhr war ein gelandetes Bataillon in Stärke von 700 bis 800 Mann mit acht schweren Panzern auf dem Marsch in Richtung Eckernförde. Es soll südlich der Fördestadt mit zwei Bataillonen gelandeter Fallschirmjäger zusammentreffen.

„Betreten des Geländes gebührenpflichtig.“ Eine Tafel mit dieser Aufforderung fanden die zahlreichen militärischen und zivilen Beobachter vor.



die heute morgen lange vor Sonnenaufgang nach einem Marsch über Wald- und Feldwege auf einem verlassenen Campingplatz eintrafen, der „für die Landung zur Verfügung gestellt“ worden ist.

Punkt 6 Uhr drehte die erste Welle kleiner Landungsboote auf die Küste zu. Die Vorderklappen fielen, Soldaten sprangen an Land, „ohne nasse Füße zu bekommen“, wie ein Offizier versicherte. Alles verlief beinahe lautlos.

Ein Zerstörer, der weit draußen lag, ab zum Erstaunen der militärischen Beobachter keinen Schuß ab. Jetzt aber alten Düsenjäger der Marineflieger heran, um die landenden Ver-



Britische Fallschirmjäger beim Absprung im Manövergelände

## 9 INDEPENDENT PARACHUTE SQUADRON, R.E

### Training Visit to the Far East

A Contingent of ninety-eight all ranks, including a small party under command from the Defence Platoon of Brigade Headquarters, left Lyneham in a Britannia aircraft of R A F Transport Command en route for Singapore. The aims were to practice mounting parachute operations from an unfamiliar base, to carry out jungle training, and to refresh Far East Air Force Instructors in current parachuting techniques.

At the last minute instructions were issued that we were to travel in plain clothes. We therefore looked a rather motley crew, and no doubt those who saw us were surprised to see how civilians these days have adopted the "wobbly" boot for foreign travel.

When we carried out our first parachute jump it was to discover the air was as unfamiliar as Nee Soon Transit Camp. Just before leaving England we had pioneered the jumping of simultaneous thirties from a Beverley. The size of the only DZ available on Singapore island limited us to simultaneous threes.

In the event this was just as well because the lighter winds and the varying air currents at different heights resulted in many of our heavier handed lift web specialists landing well over the fence and into the rough. However, they all bounced.

A period in which no aircraft were available for parachuting left the following week clear for jungle training. 2/7 G. R. provided guides and instructors, and full of enthusiasm we made our way into the jungle near Kluang.

Unfortunately much of this enthusiasm took the form of somewhat wild use of parangs, and this resulted in one or two early casualties. Once this had worn off everything went well, and in spite of an ambitious programme of jungle navigation by Troops and subsequently by Sections, nobody will admit to having got lost for more than a few hours. On one or two occasions parties made somewhat long and surprising detours, but always, it appears, by intention. To the disappointment of all, no more dangerous creature than the parang was seen.

After a few days of this we emerged once more into the sunlight and returned to Singapore for more parachuting.

The best available DZ was at Kuantan, about 180 miles north of Singapore on the east coast. This was therefore used on each of the three following occasions on which we jumped. Two Beverleys and three Hastings took us by an indirect route, and we jumped with full equipment in simultaneous eights. Subsequently the aircraft landed and took us back to base the same day.

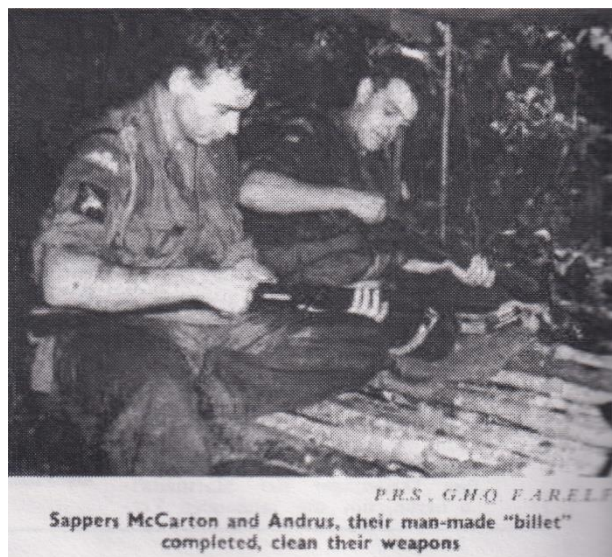
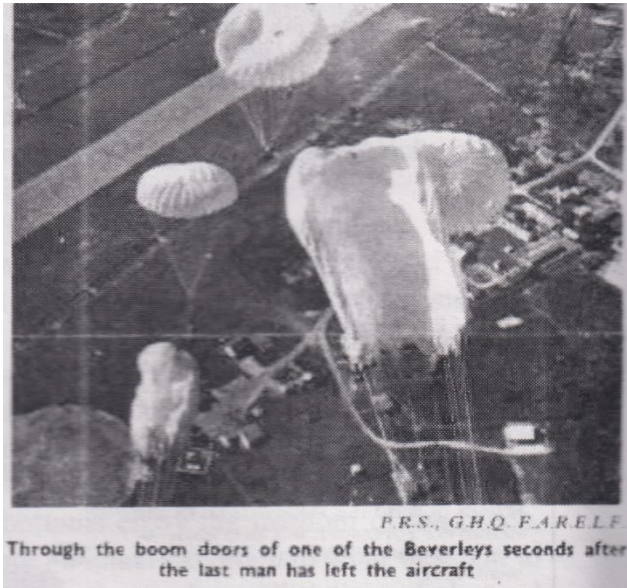
Two days later we jumped again from five aircraft fully equipped for a two-day squadron exercise. This time we bivouacked in the nearby jungle and expended a great deal of explosive demolishing old Japanese bunkers and other obstacles to extend the DZ for further use.

Two days after that, the aircraft returned to lift us out, bringing with them a fresh issue of parachutes for one more jump before returning to base. This was a scene of some delight to the local villagers, who turned out to watch in force. Figuratively speaking we then raised our hats, took a couple of curtain calls, and left.

Another two days later and we started for England heavily loaded with the usual variety of ill-assorted gifts without which no journey of this sort is complete. On the whole HM Customs at Lyneham were really quite good about it.

Sufficient time was available for sight-seeing; visits to the Tiger Brewery being very popular. We are very grateful to 10 Port Op, Sqn, for the Z craft lent us for trips round the harbour, and their hospitality.

A later exercise found us en route for Mala . and a report was given to me sometime later published in "The Sapper" - September 1960



THE SAPPER MAGAZINE 1960



**NO 3 TROOP READY FOR ACTION STATIONS OVER KALNTAN AIRFIELD**

Hanging on to the static line which has been hooked to the strop.

the two 'sticks' in the second Beverley are awaiting the red light and the word GO. Captain Robin Jorden and self as stick commanders

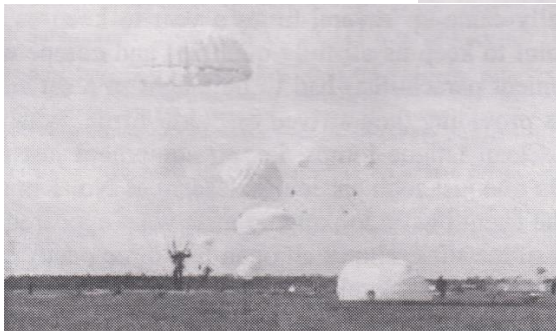
Squadron parachuting exercises held locally came up several times a year to keep us acquainted with the art, or more to the point to keep us all fully qualified and competent, the packing of the CEP (containers equipment parachutist) had to be taught in a set way, but the more practice one had, individuals providing they arrived on 'terra firma' with all the right gear often revised the packing. Clean fatigue jumps, i.e. no equipment just the main and reserve parachutes, were rare. On one just such particular descent as No 1 in the stick, I made my exit intent on enjoying the event but on looking up after what appeared to be a delayed opening, I saw the remainder of the stick, chutes all open like three penny bits above me. A sudden panic alertness and shouting as I yanked on my lift webs to get an immediate 'THWACK' (the only word that I can express to pass on the experience of the rapid opening of the canopy) with instant pressure on my leg straps as I was snatched from the grip of gravity, followed by a thump as I roughly moulded into mother earth. First aid stretcher bearers were at my side before I'd had a chance to think let alone hit the quick release, "are you OK" they asked, as I released myself from the harness and sat up, to their obvious surprise. I watched the other troop members come in. rolled up my chute, and then suffered a dose of severe criticism from the RAF PJI Sgt. acting as the dropping, zone safety officer as I made my way to the RV. To abbreviate his stream of 'aggro,' the message was to stay more alert; he didn't want a fatality on his plate. It was only afterwards with all the comment when I realised the seriousness of it all that the thoughts came home, and privately it 'hit' me.



Above - The Beverley Aircraft so designed that parachutists could be carried and jump from the tail and their vehicles/plant machinery carried and dropped by parachutes from the main body, or alternatively all parachutists.  
 Right — Land Rover and trailer on platform having just dropped by parachute



Right - Some of 3 Troop NCO 'S Cpls. Fox, Shaw, L/Cpls. Edmonds and apologies to unknown



Above – Landing in the dropping zone

Right – Boarding the aircraft (self, extreme left)



Another troop exercise I thought worthy of recording involved the marking of mountain top survey points in Scotland. This was done by placing a two-meter diameter ring of large stones/rocks around the survey point and then painting them white, for aerial survey purposes. The actual reconnaissance took longer than the exercise itself. I spent some ten days with sappers from the troop to cover the ground and having, just prior to the event, bought a new Ford Anglia car (part exchange for my Ford Prefect bought in Germany) I took it on this military duty, getting paid the due mileage allowance and at the same time running it in for the required mileage. We climbed to each of the survey points to be marked, sleeping rough en route. At one point stopping at a remote TA drill hall, asking a reasonably nearby neighbour if there was a resident PSI instructor to be told “no he died three years ago and hasn’t been replaced yet, but you can have the keys, there is tea coffee and tinned milk just

help yourselves." A nice surprise the hospitality very much appreciated; all other nights spent in rather less comfort.

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Mr. D. Newman,      January 26th 1961

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	325	0	0
	321	14	0

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Engine No. 105E / 250669

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On the last night I had come down with a bad dose of flu. It was a Sunday night and the pubs were closed, either that or a public holiday, anyway I asked the guys to go and get me a bottle of whisky and they said everywhere would be shut. I gave the Irish lad Byrne a pound note and mentioned ABI (airborne initiative) how about trying backdoors! Two of them set off leaving myself and the other in a straw laden building. I lay in a hot sweat thinking about the drive south in the morning, the guy with me voicing concern about my wellbeing. The others returned with my medication; eighteen shillings worth. I poured about two thirds of my AB mug full and told the others to finish it off and to give me a shake at daybreak, I felt really rough and within a few minutes the mug was empty.

Next day I drove the eight hundred odd miles back to Aldershot and I have to admit topping myself up as well as the car en route, recalling on the way the wet, windy, very busy and rugged conditions that we had put up with only to find the guys had enjoyed it all and if there were any more trips like that they would be in it. I gave them a day off on return to get themselves sorted out and dried out and took one myself before I sat down with the Troop Comd. to plan our little exercise for the troop. It had to be planned to a time schedule as advised by a civilian survey unit based at Edinburgh, where I had received all my original instructions. The men were to make their own way to the Edinburgh survey centre and pick up half gallon tins of paint with an applicator and instructions. There would be no pay or rations supplied. Postcards and stamps supplied, each syndicate would post a card by 1800 hrs. each day giving location, next 24 hr 'intentions,' and all OK. Maps supplied to be returned. Dress and requirements for the exercise. All were to report back into the guardroom on the given date, by which time reports on the aerial survey should be available.

*Note: it was just too much to think the men would head off with nothing in their pockets in the circumstances, I never voiced such thoughts, however, it was an event where individuals could exercise their initiative and prove their ability. All available men minus the recce. Party were to take part in twos and threes and task allocated according to distance travelled and/or difficulty to reach survey' points.*

The postcard 'sitreps' worked well; one after four days stated, tasks completed proceeding on leave to Ireland. We had not anticipated that, still, all completed tasks well within the time allowed, few arriving back early. Some importance was placed on such initiative trips, stories abounded within the unit, one of such related to a previous SSM who detailed four men to bring a piano down from Glasgow, hitchhiking, they did it in two days by all accounts.



A recce trip to Scotland for troop exercise from Aldershot, running in my new Anglia Ford car on paid mileage allowance

Soon after my posting to the squadron I had managed to secure a flat in Camberly for wife and son, owned by a Col. Freeman RE Rtd. a nice old gent. During my few times at home I voluntarily worked on his garden and lawns, as he appeared to be labouring beyond his ability, he was so pleased and full of appreciation and very sorry to see us go when a married quarter became available some two hundred yards along from the bottom of Gun Hill and the NAFFI club.

At one stage there was an exercise in Cyprus, little is remembered of this except for the long foot slogs some of which were hazardous treks with rationed water supply and our SQMS Ned as the acting SSM over in and around the Troodos mountains.

Social bonding said to be a worthwhile activity in units such as this since, they are often required to work, rest and pass time in, virtually in each other's spaces, were organised to suit available timings. On one such occasion a coach trip to Brighton took place, the planning of which I do not recall getting involved in, possibly arranged by the troop corporals. However the memory remains quite vivid in my mind. A round of various hotels and public houses were on the agenda, all in civilian clothes and no rank qualifications outwardly shown, we could have been any social club. Suitably disguised we all got down to the serious business of 'juggling-up' and within a couple of hours or so most were in very good spirits having cast away their inhibitions, with ample fuel aboard to nourish any activity we all descended to an ice skating rink. No excuses all had to participate, many like myself for the first time on ice, must have looked extremely ungainly by those skimming with the air and gracefulness of a bird in flight. Eventually after persuasion for some we all left, it having been decided somewhere within the group that we should make our way towards the sands, there was some bravado and bets being made about having a swim and since it was a very cold windy day such an idea had not entered my mind. I remember standing watching the white-topped waves rushing in, when I suddenly became aware and looked behind to see a half circle of grinning faces closing in upon me. I immediately got the message, fair and square, there was no escape my time was up. I turned to face them walking backwards and couldn't help but laugh expressing 'you bastards.' There was no point in being man handled men can be very rough in that state, for the last few yards I turned and ran into waves being followed by several of the 'fellas', it was a very brisk, rapid swim. With a soggy wallet and dripping gear we shivered our way back to the coach not exactly welcomed by the driver but all laughing and in good spirits, 'pissed as newts,' as some said afterwards. With more refreshments on board we sang our way back to Aldershot one or two no longer able to stay awake, en route a couple of comfort stops were made before we finally reached our destination and went our separate ways.

Sometime around mid-1961, we, No 3 Troop were sent to Bahrain for a supposed six months, some said it was

"the arse-end of the middle east" and we were to be half way up it, the purpose, to relieve No 2 Troop who had moved down from Kuwait

On arrival I was more than pleased to see that we had living accommodation tint would be away from the para battalion. We were however in the same area as 1he 7th RHA (Para Gunners) In Jufair Naval Base South of Manama town, a fair sized base for the Navy who had married quarters the other side of the sports ground from the now army accommodation, all ranks were in open masonry type buildings. We quickly erected a large tent and a surrounding security fence to house the troop stores and the store man himself as we had been forewarned that our task out there would be construction. The Para Regiment housed in tents north of Muharraq adjacent to. or not far from, the airfield.



Taken Hamala Camp construction Bahrain



Enid and my eldest son Paul left behind at home in married quarters at Aldershot

Having given the troop employment under the NCO's. basically getting settled in and set up, I spent the first week with the Troop Comd.. Lt. Owens, going around organising transport and meeting all the right people. A clerk of works office had already been established, manned by a Capt. and a SSgt. who were to be our immediate employers, we sourced all the various stores and workshops, mainly manned by locals and supervised by servicemen or an English speaking Arab. We looked over the plans for that proposed, living accommodation and all the associated facility buildings and requirements for a thousand men, to include air conditioning, something most soldiers had never experienced before, sewerage disposal in fact wasn't as DTL's (deep trench latrine) were planned as the toilet systems. Plant machinery could be made available if required and accordingly a large D8 bulldozer and a fully equipped grader were requested. Many stores had already been stock piled and a works schedule drawn up by the RE clerk of works. A week after arrival work commenced, timber taken to the site was quickly transformed into form work for concrete bases by the troop carpenters in line with survey pegs already positioned, aggregate and sand was brought to each building site as calculated and two petrol driven mixers positioned. The NCO's were briefed on the overall plan and each given responsibilities, to check and re-check all specifications and measurements before proceeding with work. Carpenters, bricklayers, concreters, plumbers, surveyors, mechanics and drivers were all required initially with construction teams and labour gangs to follow as the work got under way. Close supervision was a constant necessity in the early stages, holding down bolts had to be set with accuracy in wet concrete to cater for the prefabricated Twynham Huts which were new to us all at the time.



The first two weeks were all important, getting familiarised with the new system of work, equipment, stores and practice at construction besides becoming acclimatised in the very humid heat. The carpenters and concrete pourers had to get a head start, plant operators endeavouring to level the sites as the ground rose slightly met problems, grader blades useless in a lot of cases the tines also bent and twisted against the rock surface. The D8 bulldozer had better success but within a week or so it became a monument standing where it had broken down with a sheered driving spline, about four inches diameter of metal axle just twisted off, the camp grew around it as spares were said to be unobtainable.

Sometime later extra labour as requested arrived from the Parachute Regiment and a few very useful tradesmen came forward, troop teams split up thereby doubling their numbers with the para regiment labour who had to learn. All went very well for the first week then a major snag, a complete new set of men arrived from our labour source, we lost the volunteer tradesmen and all the men who were just becoming useful too, a new gang who had to be shown how again. Ranks above Cpl never stayed on site but we learnt from the NCO's that the companies were to take the job turnabout so that the men did not miss out on drill, PT swimming, weapon training and bullshit as they put it. Our Jesse, Lt. Owens, said he would sort it out, but initially no response, as work progressed more labour would be required. The clerk of works captain said he would have a wont and stressed his point requesting a further company each day the following week and also bringing in some additional carpenters from the RAF Regiment to boost the concreting parties. I had to ensure that all were employed and adjusted the works schedule to achieve that Ablution blocks and latrine digging both started, the latter with the aid of compressor took and since excavation in the rock had proved to be a bigger problem than previously thought, we started to use explosives, the excavated material was used as backfill for hut bases, the form work having become up to four feet high in some cases at one end to get a level base Additional sand and cement was also required, but the problem of changing continued which caused some friction.

It had been noted that a couple of Officers and a WOII had been seen on site in their spick and span KD, stopping work as they spoke to their men. I conceded that this should not be discouraged as co-operation was required despite at times the inconsideration's, albeit because of ignorance, the inconvenient timing of their visits - concrete was going off very quickly in the heat and the screeding and setting of anchor bolts had to be done at the right time, hut construction also required the concentration of all its building members at some stages.

Conditions were very hot and humid; men would could and did drink over a gallon of water a day and double that if in the concrete parties. I did not get to know any SNCO's or WO's of the Para Regiment except by sight, we, those at Jufair, never got an invite to their mess in the seven months we spent out there, so were unable to convey anything of substance from an engineering viewpoint.

The sappers works dress at the time was beret or jungle hat if in possession. PT shorts. socks and boots, shirts optional if subject to sunburn, this so I was to be informed did not conform to the Parachute Regimental dress by the Regimental Sergeant Major of the Paras on his only visit to the site. He was exceptionally critical of sapper discipline and dress and his demeanour was inviting comment, "with respect sir. my men are all intelligent tradesmen working to orders as required, this is a work site sir not a parade or a training site and as the person in charge of site works I would very much appreciate that you not intervene with work in progress". Speechless for just a moment, he blurted. "I should have expected this arrogance and disrespect from 9 Squadron", or words to that effect, and left.

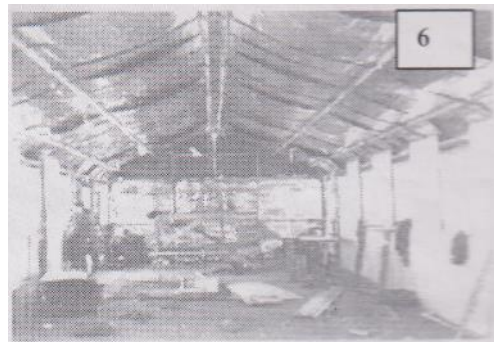
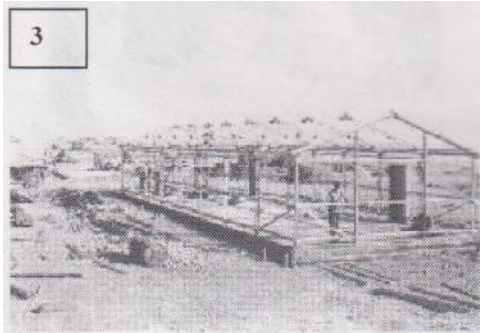
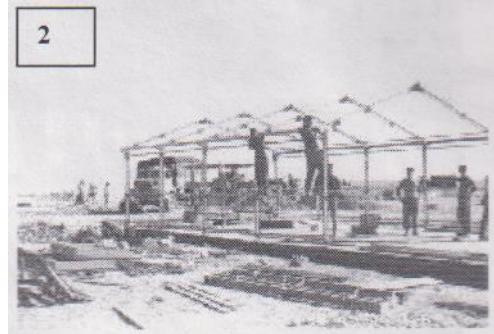
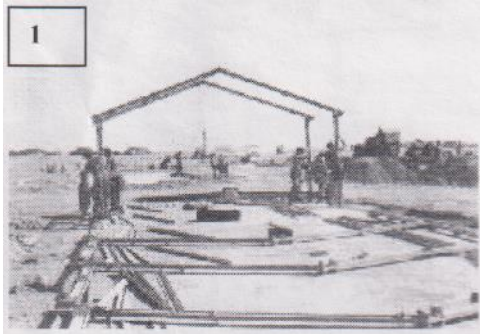
I was visited by the Troop Comd. that same night to be informed that I was required to report to the Parachute Regiment HQ the next morning at 0900 hrs, he suggested best KD, I was on CO's report. I requested his attendance, because of my confrontation with the RSM and that we should bypass him if possible, he agreed. In front of the CO I listened to the reason for my appearance there, and then quoted verbatim my request to the RSM, adding that there had been no disrespect to any superior visiting the work site and that our works dress was as agreed by my troop Comd. Lt. Owens. I also took the opportunity to point out that constant changing of the work parties did interrupt works progress, we had found out the men were very willing and good workers who appeared to be enjoying the work, the NCO's being very helpful. Apparently, it was not what I had said, but the way in which I had said it. Anyway the air had been cleared. On the way back I said to my Troop Comd. "my dour expression giving the wrong impression again," he said, "what do you mean by that Staff?" So I explained that Captain Robin Jordan, a previous Troop Comd. had written on my annual report, that despite his dour expression, he is really a cheerful and pleasant man to work with.

The troop cook, an army catering corps man was not required in the cookhouse but we made good use of him, he initially scrounging certain foods from various military establishments to provide some refreshments for morning tea break at the work site. Certain items had to be bought so a small charge was introduced to cover cost and also make a small profit for the troop funds, as the working parties increased so too did the demand for refreshments and the added benefit to the troop funds.

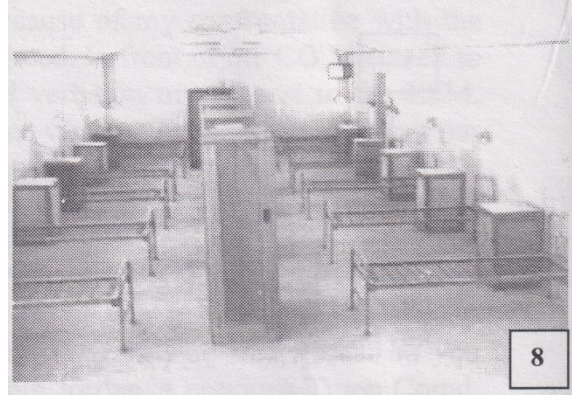
On the Island of Bahrain there existed an oil refinery run by an American company, they had built and ran their own little town, completely fenced in for their own countrymen employees. AWALI was a paradise in the centre of barren waste, green lawns, scrub lined streets, all 'mod cons;' picture house, tennis club, swimming pool and a very large social club, initially an invite was extended to use the club but understandably withdrawn when it was known the full number of troops to be stationed on the Island.

The name of the construction. Hamala Camp, taking the name of a nearby area, which was also around three and a half miles from the Sheik's Palace, the ruling Sheik I had always assumed. During the course of construction it had been decided to use explosives on the deep trench latrine excavation, but a despatch limiting the use of same was received by the Clerk of Works Office from 'his Highness' instructing that explosives were not to be used between 1 p.m. and 4 p.m., siesta time, when his Highness would be resting. We had, prior to that instruction, become acquainted with the island traffic rules whereby all traffic had to give way to the Sheik's entourage, his cars were to be recognised by the flying pennants (note - they never stopped for traffic lights either). On one occasion the sappers provided a guard of honour on the sports ground at the Royal Naval Base Jufair for his Highness, for some reason now forgotten, each member of the guard being presented with a valued presentation.

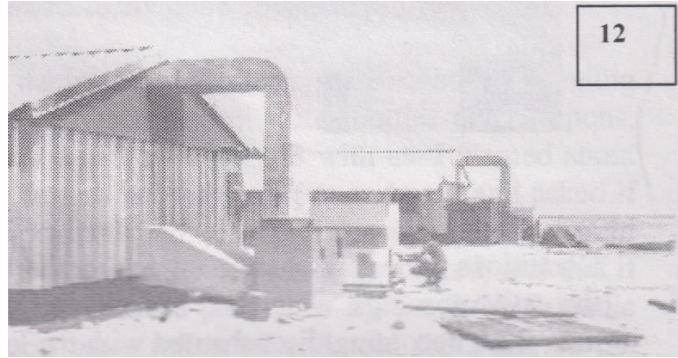
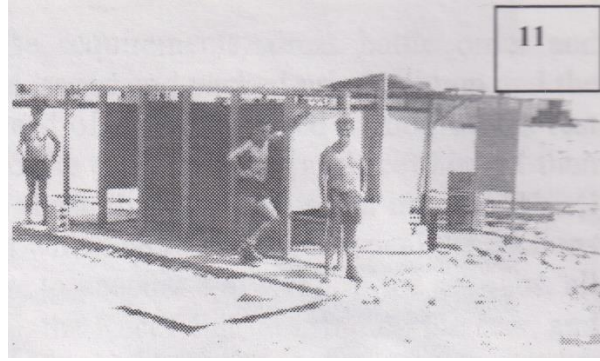
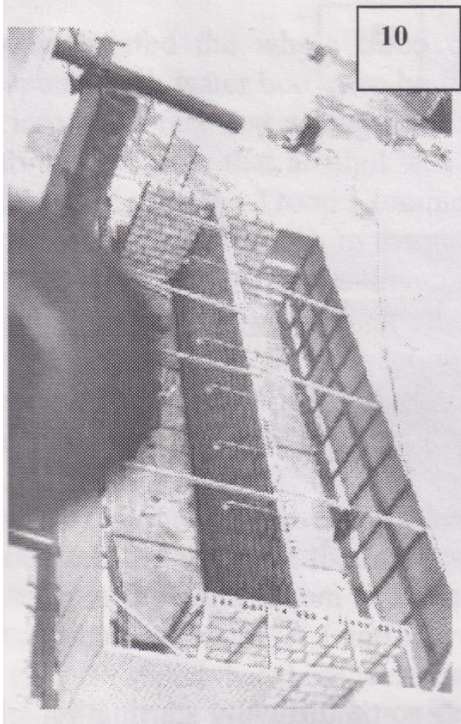
Once a month on Saturday mornings military training occupied our time, all other Saturdays, in the earlier stages all day, were spent by some on the work site. A spot of drill dressed in best KD and boots was considered to be in our interest followed by weapon training and cleaning, it was also a chance to catch up on some maintenance for the tools in the troop store and drivers to have a look at their vehicles seeing that most were in daily use with tasks connected to the Hamala camp site.



1. A precise concrete base for the Twynham Hut -first bay commenced
2. 4 bays standing
3. Skeletal framework up, square up before tighten up
4. Window frames fitted
5. External wall and roof cladding
6. Internal insulation



7. Internal cladding  
8. One half of almost finished and furnished Twynham Hut  
9. Construction crew within the confines of Jufair Naval Base 1961



- 10. Shower block under construction
- 11. Toilet block to be
- 12. Air conditioning units
- 13. The bulldozer that broke down in hard rock
- 14. Views from water tower



15. Huts nearing completion

Conditions generally were very humid and there was some difficulty starting vehicles in the early mornings, which had not been a real problem for the first three months or so, the men were becoming disenchanted with the long hours of work, the old syndrome 'all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy' was in evidence.

One moving vehicle was being used to tow start others round and round our living areas, not one day but every day, I said to Lt. Owens "I can't believe this, maybe (with a question mark) its lack of maintenance!" He had noticed the men were a bit fed up. Several years on, over a few drinks in the local, where on occasion I met men from the Squadron whilst serving as SSM, Ben Guest, one of 3 Troop ex drivers told me about the times he and others put one over on myself and Jess Owens the Troop Comd. regarding the Bahrain early morning starts, it was a protest, the ignition keys were never switched on and there was many a laugh on us.

We had made very good progress on the camp project and he said that we would all get a break within a week. We had already spent money from the troop fund to purchase the various sports equipment and the odd game with the gunners had taken place. Saturday nights had become a regular party night with the troop fund providing a chicken and chips meal and some drinks, all with the aid of the troop cook and the NCO's hopefully keeping order. They did not want me around and I do not think the Recce Sgt. got involved. I thought perhaps he was a non-drinker as he was rarely seen in the Gunner's mess, which was a very comfortable Sgts. mess. I got on very well with their CQMS and WOII and a WOII Battery Comd. but the BSM remained a little distant. I guess he felt responsible for all the discipline in Jufair regarding the army personnel. He did speak to me a couple of times about the RE weekend parties, and I had to intervene more than once. There was a small detachment of Para Medics in Jufair, a young officer and Vernon, a coloured Sgt. with whom I shared accommodation, he had four NCO's and about the same number of privates.

A break from the camp construction found us on an exercise that commenced with a parachute descent with the whole parachute group, but in a rare event for such an exercise the troop flew and jumped from two aircraft from Muharraq to Al-Sharjah in Saudi Arabia, what now may well be the UAR (United Arab Republic). On the drop the Troop Comd. and six men were injured and could not continue, I had on the previous day with the troopie briefed the whole troop on the exercise requirements, dress battle order and weapons, both water bottles to be full, haversacks issued and packed prior to jump and the all-important fact that a long hard march lay ahead of us and advised a good night's rest with the reminder that alcohol will dehydrate and the early call was at three thirty. I then had to take over the Troop Commanders roll, all those that could reported into the RV, (I had smelt the usual smells in the aircraft, some of which were hangover types) the sections were reorganised to average them up, NCO's were to keep an eye on all in the sections, all men to be alert and watch each other and 'Gibbo,' the Recce Sgt, to bring up the rear, and we set off in single file in section groups, myself with the leading section. The target, Nanama, some fifty miles inland along a soft sandy track to the base of the TOS (Trucial Omen Scouts). Some of the Para Regiment had already gone on ahead of us.

After two hours in the stifling heat with denim long trousers, puttees, boots, jumping smock, all the webbing that makes up battle order, two full water bottles and weapons, walking in the wind blown soft sand, I called a

halt all were still with us. I warned about conservation of water. A Land Rover came up behind with a major on board and asked if all OK, He stated that there were two water points ahead, jerry can dumps where we could get a refill, at the eighteen mile peg and the thirty six mile peg (no pegs existed) and that if anyone fell out they were to remain on the track to be picked up by the RAMC medic Rover and trailer. All members of the troop were informed and told the pride of the Squadron rested on us and to keep a reserve of water, next stop to be the first water dump. I had hoped at the four-hour point but it stretched to four-and-a-half or a bit over. All had a good drink with little urination after a twenty-minute break we set off again. After an hour or so I let the whole troop pass by to check on condition and have a chat with each man, all appeared to be going well. I regained my position with the leading section, another hour and another break, some had admitted to sipping water en route but they knew the score on the water supply, it was over ten hours by the time we reached the second water dump and two men had had enough, one with very bad feet and the other feeling sick, a good point to drop out I guess, they weren't daft.

At the twelfth hour break we were short of another man with very bad feet left on the track, three or four others were showing signs of fatigue but not willing to give up and I noted the hardened drinkers, those that had had the hangovers were still going strong. As we set off for last leg, I had said I wanted it to be the last one, a couple were limping who said they were alright before the break so I gave them the OK to carry on saying the stiffness should ease in a while. I wandered up and down the column giving encouragement, one or two had offered to carry their mates weapons to keep them going and as the time wore on I took a turn at carrying one of the two Bren guns in addition to my own Stirling machine gun. A L/Cpl, along with my second in command, dropped out despite my verbal efforts to the latter to stick it out for an estimated further forty odd minutes Those who had dropped out were picked up and passed us before the troop made it in. which was fourteen- and-a-half hours after setting out as I remember, when they flopped out under large palm trees whilst I went ahead to find out feeding, ablution arrangements, areas and or buildings for sleeping and weapon security. It was one of those times when a bed of stones would have been OK, the soft sand, the breeze when it blew was hot and it gathered the dust to thicken the air, shallow areas protected from the winds were hot pockets of sunshine made worse as it was reflected by the coarse sand. Our clothing although hot and sweaty for us Europeans in our endeavours to cover distance on foot at least protected us from the sun. Ask anyone if they have ever seen an Arab in the desert wearing bathers or a bikini!

There was a very large brew of curried goat on the boil with slices of bread and ample tea. I briefed the section NCO's as the men came up for the evening meal and then reported in to the field HQ with strength and injury stats and received instructions for the morrow. A further week passed when we managed to get some shooting in on the ranges, a bit of rock climbing took place in the rocky terrain that existed just beyond Nanama - we learned a little about the TOS scouts they may have been, but soldiers they just did not resemble, however we learnt that they would have been a formidable enemy. One young Arab boy in the locality had shown an interest in their signals wing, said to be twelve years old at the time, had become somewhat of an expert in Morse Code and would write down all the symbols of the alphabet as he heard them and had no idea what he was writing down, Morse Code we were told was the settlements only communication with the outside world.

The TOS had the 4 x 4 Bedford 3-ton trucks and by all accounts new ones were lucky to last much over four years, owing to the high humidity and salt laden sand. Maintenance appeared non-existent except what the rough, tough looking scruffy drivers could fix. One vehicle I rode in had no engine cover in the cab and the driver started it with his dinner knife, not quite sure how he did it without looking, a large block of wood was wired in over the back axle to take the place of the broken leaf springs, it looked a rust bucket and everything shook and clanged over the rocky terrain. I was amazed at the condition of the tyres, well worn, ripped and shredded, obviously the reason for two spares but they were all 'goers.'

Back on the Island of Bahrain supposedly rested, work commenced and we took up where we'd left off making a five-and-a-half day working week to be the norm rather than the exception, and this to include military training as we saw fit, thus allowing more daylight time for recreational pursuits or whatever. I certainly appreciated the extra time for as many will know, much planning is carried out in so called off duty time.

Other happenings and/or incidents worthy of mention are included - the troop at one time had been approached and asked to donate blood to the local hospital, and to their delight found that they got paid for it by the locals. I had never seen such willing participation in what had always previously been a gratuitous occasion, from the 'outside' their generosity overwhelming. There was a given time limit between donations 'so called' but as to whether this was adhered to I would never argue.

Myself, I took time out to go to the camel races with Vernon my roommate, the equivalent to horse racing in European countries, it was different.

A locust plague occurred during our stay on the Island, and we were very surprised to see the locals just knocking them out of the air with whatever they had and then eating them alive, the green juices running out of their mouths and down over their chins. Yuk!

Bartering is the Arab way of life, and most soon got used to the system when out shopping, many things were comparatively cheap and only sold there. Having been approached several times by Arab business men who wanted to take over our 'meals on wheels' tea break run which was now looking after some two hundred men, and the RAF Regiment were increasing their numbers, I was offered cash, free tailor made shoes and suits, as they put it, to put the right words in the right ears, but our troop funds were doing very well and providing for the very much subsidised weekend parties. In due course however, under pressure from the Parachute Regimental HQ I'd assumed, the Troop Comd. eventually gave way and handed over the tea break responsibility to them, but I learnt later that some of our cooks contacts were not, I did not question the fact. We had had a very good run and their numbers by far outweighed ours so with general troop agreement and bringing in the troop NCO's, we decided to equip the troop with a good supply of sports equipment that was eventually taken back to the squadron.

The work continued and flowed along nicely to the satisfaction of the Clerk of Works Office. I got along well with the S/SGT Clerk of Works and learnt a lot from him. An RE water boring team appeared on the scene to locate a source of water and achieved it very quickly. A large air compressor trailer was brought in and pipes connected to air develop the hole. This was done continuously I thought for two days to assess the quantity and quality of water (unknown to me then, that at a much later stage in my life in Australia this sort of work was to be part of my work in earning a living). The water thus delivered to the surface drained into the barren surrounding area and within a number of days the wetted area became green with a variety of plant life to the surprise of most of us.

There was still work to be done when it came for our time to leave, air conditioning installation had just commenced by RAF specialists and the electric supply had to go in. Many years later I spoke to men who had been posted there and lived in Hamala Camp.



SOME MEMBERS OF HEADQUARTERS TROOP 1968



## CHAPTER 9

Permanent Staff Instructor 299 Para Squadron RE TA

And

Instructor Combat Engineering 36 Engineer Regiment RE

In the early part of 1962 I received a posting order as a Permanent Staff Instructor to the Territorial Army to what was then, 299 Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers TA the HQ of which was located in Hull Yorkshire, with the HQ troop and No 1 troop being its resident members. With the exception of a couple of vehicles and a small dozer, the units transport was also housed there as was the SQMS clothing and equipment stores. The responsibility for No 2 troop also came under my domain to assist in their training and some admin when required at Doncaster some fifty miles away for two evenings per week. The No 3 troop located at Liverpool had their own Sgt. PSI regular soldier attached. The TA Officer Commanding and his Sergeant Major both lived in the area, the whole squadron only coming together at the units annual camp. I did manage to visit the Liverpool Drill hall a couple of times during my stay as PSI. where the 'dozer, a small D4 was kept for some reason, I was later to find out the reason and there was some 'kafuffle' about it all. being used on civil construction, however I kept in touch by phone with the PSI.

I was given a married quarter adjacent to the drill hall in Calvert Lane very handy, too handy in fact, and before I had chance to settle in found myself en route for an Assistant, some called it an Army Parachute Jumping Instructors Course (APJI) for which special wings were awarded. We were taught how to teach the basic rudiments of parachuting which included despatching men from captive balloons from eight hundred feet and the various aircraft used at the time from eight to twelve hundred feet One of the more enjoyable courses that I attended in the army and as with all courses if one enjoys them, one usually does well.

Some of the older men in the TA had seen service during World War II, quite a substantial civilian full time paid staff were on strength, most of whom held Sgts, rank or above as TA soldiers. I was amazed at what they found to do to fill in time and justify their positions, a Captain, two S/Sgts. and a Sgt. were shuffling paper sending weekly returns to the Regimental Headquarters based in London. 299 Sqn. RE were a part of 131 Parachute Regiment RE TA, 300 Sqn. RE were located in Scotland and 301 Sqn. RE further south in the country. The regiment as a whole unit only came together on annual camp, usually at Weymouth in Dorset for bridging and watermanship training.

Subjects		Possible Marks	Result Marks Obtained	Per cent. Obtained	Remarks	Flying Times	
						Day	Night
<u>A.P.J.I.</u>					<u>Despatching Sorties</u>		
Written - Practical		100	76	76	Balloon	7	
					Aircraft	3	
					<u>Descents</u>		
					17		
Place in order of merit: 6		Marks obtained as % of total possible marks: 76		Final Result and Grade: A.2 PASS			
No. on Course: 21							
INSTRUCTOR ABILITY (See Instruction No. 3 on cover)							
Remarks by Commanding Officer: A very good instructor quick to learn and enthusiastic. His result is a credit to him.							
Recorded on F1406/F280	F. 543	F. 4001/2	F. 125	Initialled by Candidate	Date: 11. Dec. 62		
				Signature: <i>B.F. Stannard</i> Sg. Cdr. B.F. Stannard.			

As the PSI for Hull and Doncaster and after some three months or so I was asked to explain the drop in attendance numbers, the civilian office staff that included a PSO ex regular officer all said, we can only go on your attendance registers, less than thirty per cent were attending on a regular basis, perhaps a few more at Doncaster. After discreet inquiries to other men not on the permanent staff, several I might add at both locations, to confirm any doubts, I found attendance figures if anything had increased all round, although register entries prior to my arrival showed, that there was a very good attendance on all parade evenings. All ranks of course received a payment per attendance and my figures on paper certainly recorded a reduction. Nominal rolls on evening parades agreed with total numbers present. I made a written explanation of my findings and was not questioned further and nothing more was heard of the matter. I did take the opportunity to speak to my immediate superior, a regular soldier, on his occasional visit from RHQ a man I had previously served with in Germany who suggested I continue to do things properly as you see it. I guess we were in a slightly different army, well we were. and it was different.

I found it difficult to as I then thought pass the time usefully. The daily routine started at 9 am. half hour tea break at 10.30. lunch break at 12.30-2pm. 3pm another tea break and then lock up and finish at 4.30 pm, these guys were on a good wicket. However in addition to the above I had Monday and Wednesday evenings at Hull 7-9.15 pm and Tuesdays and Thursdays at Doncaster from 7-9.15 pm, plus an hour at least each way driving there and back, then there was the weekend training as and when organised but as I had taken the recruit training under my wing, most Sunday mornings were spent endeavouring to reach some sort of a fitness standard to prepare them for the final test on entry and the parachute course.

A travelling RAF balloon crew did the rounds twice a year, three times if a unit was lucky, a couple of times I also went with them to other locations, it was a good time to get some extra practice as a Jumping Instructor besides the extra jumps myself.

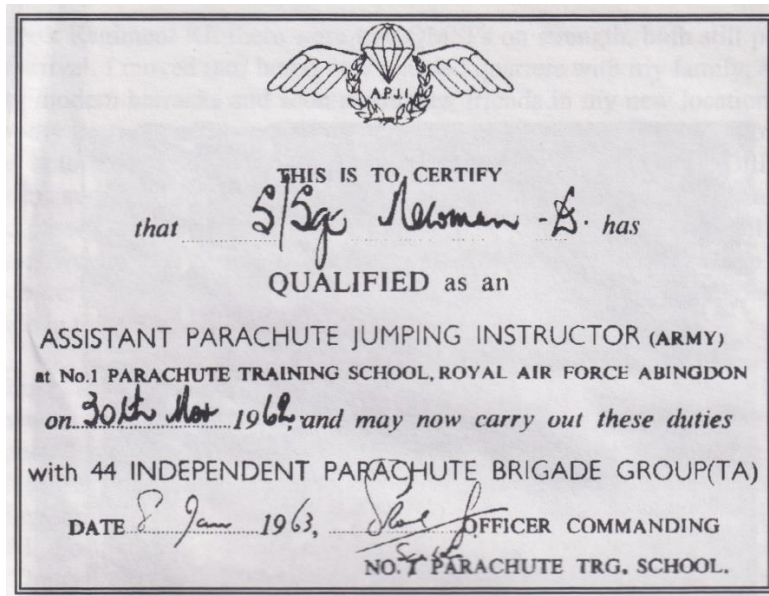
It was the custom to go to the Channel Islands each year, started so I was informed as an advertising campaign to get new recruits, anyway with available selected personnel the idea was to get in a couple of water jumps, something I'd only done before with the SAS. A two day exercise enjoyed by all the regular PSI's attached to the Regiment along with the selected TA soldiers. The regular Lt. Colonel of the Regiment I knew as a Major who served in the same unit as myself in Germany, a good officer who also enjoyed his liquid amber. Water jumps are another parachuting skill that should be taught before attempts are made at it and a safety boat crew in attendance for the first few jumps, being able to assess ones height above the water can prove to be difficult, big waves can look like little waves and vice versa even light winds can be a problem to the unenlightened.

The recognised drill at one stage was to hit the quick release box undo the leg straps and remain in the seat strap and then release one's self from the harness just prior to splash down. Split second timing was required to get it right however my previous remarks on height assessment often resulted in men releasing far too high with unpleasant results or, entering the water still in the harness and, since the lift webs are attached to the rear of one's shoulders, even the lightest of breezes tend to flip one face down in the water - unless - one knows the score and has had practice to turn on ones back and slip out.

I had been to the Islands previously when serving with the regular Engineer Parachute Squadron, I'd had a section out there working and flew out to pay them in a small high wing aircraft from the Army Air Corps, from the same airfield where selected Para trained men were taught heavy drop procedures, dropping Land Rovers and trailers, light tanks, armoured cars and plant machinery by parachute.

My second son Nigel was born at Hull, so I had for a few days anyway, the job of looking after my first son, Paul. He'd be three years plus by then and was quite a handful. A short while later I was to go down with chicken pox with my young son which kept me out of circulation for a while.

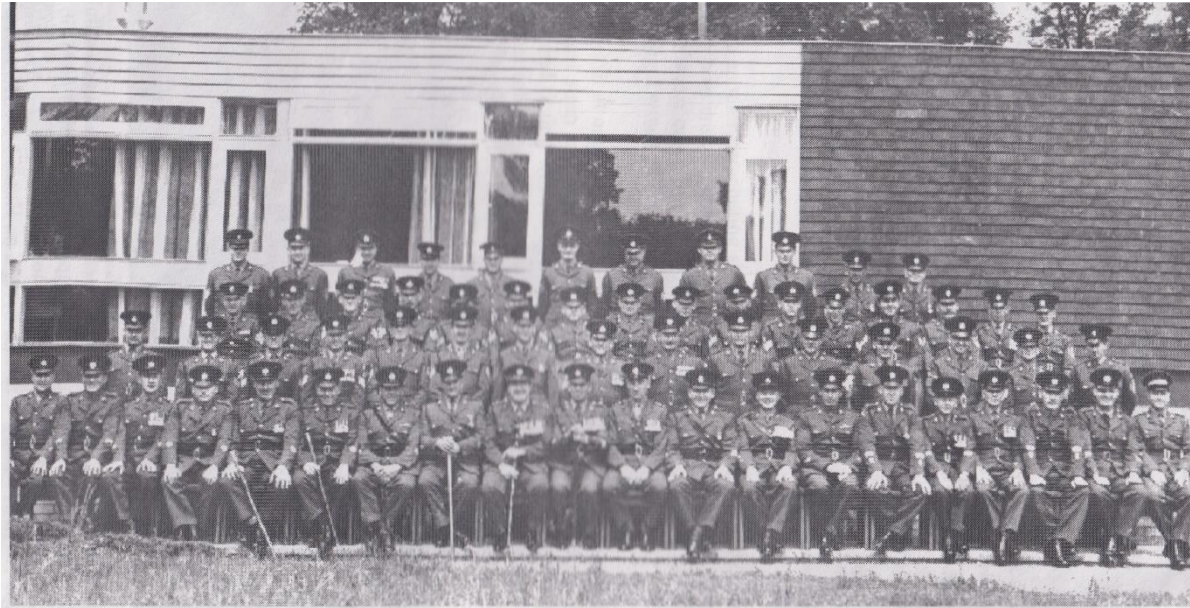
Whilst at Hull a couple of social dances for the squadron were organised, where one sees people in a different light, but I had long since decided that this type of soldiering wasn't for me. Notification came in advance of my next posting, I was to report in wearing the rank of a Warrant Officer Class II on a given date as a Quarter Master Sergeant Instructor (QMSI) to 36 Engineer Regiment RE stationed at Maidstone in Kent, a unit that kept one of its Squadrons on Strategic Reserve at all times. My time with the TA. Eventually came to an end I moved on in early 1964.



**APJI (Assistant Parachute Jumping Instructor)**  
 Course members in front of a Hastings Twin Aircraft, much in use at the time

<i>From the Left</i>		<i>From the Right</i>	
<p>5<sup>th</sup> SSGT Fowler (2TP Doncaster 299 RETA)          9<sup>th</sup> Mick Torovic (RAF)          10<sup>th</sup> Dinger Bell (RAF)          11<sup>th</sup> SGT Davies (2TP Doncaster 299 RETA)          14<sup>th</sup> Jack Flint (RAF)          15<sup>th</sup> SSGT Robinson (1TP Hull 299 RETA)          22<sup>nd</sup> Stuart Smith (300 RETA)</p>	<p>1<sup>st</sup> SSGT Don Newman (PSI Reg Army RE)          2<sup>nd</sup> SSGT Wally Linham (PSI Reg Army RE)          7<sup>th</sup> Adams?          12<sup>th</sup> SGT Lofty Large (PSI Reg Army SAS)</p>		

*Other names now lost in the mist of time.*



36 REGIMENT RE  
WARRANT Officers & Sgts Mess  
Maidstone, Kent 1966

At 36 Engineer Regiment RE there were two QMSI's on strength, both still present at the time of my arrival, I moved into brand new married quarters with my family, at the rear of new looking modern barracks and soon made new friends in my new location. No sooner than I'd got my bearings and become regular army acquainted again the fellow that I had been posted in to relieve left. My new found partner generally known as 'Billy the Kidd,' Kidd being his surname, an old soldier who had chalked up many years in India. He said he had been passed over for further promotion, he was well versed in Rudyard Kipling and his recitations would keep many amused for hours in the Sgts. Mess, he also appeared to know his job very well. I considered myself very fortunate in having someone in whom I could confide in this new higher rank.

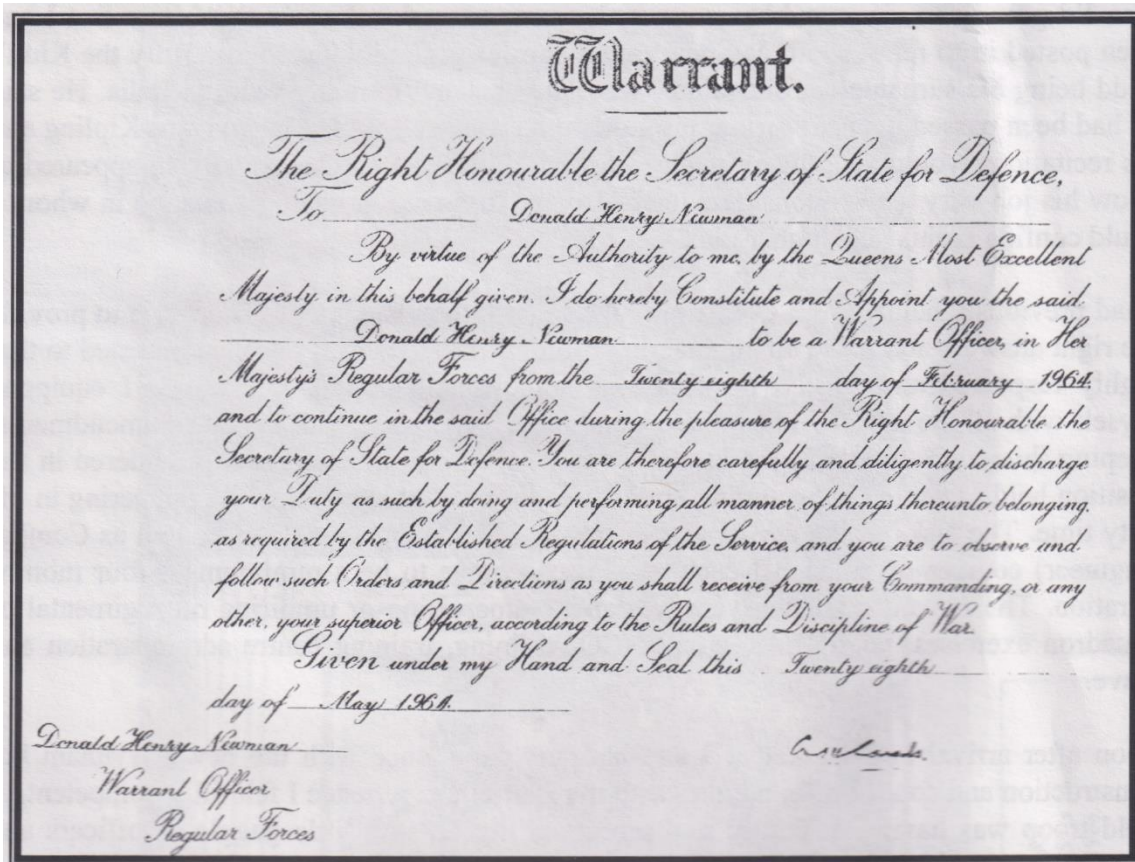
I had previously held all unit QMSI's in high regard, they had always been able to provide the right answers and solve all engineering problems. To find myself then elevated to that highly respected and trusted position was somewhat daunting. On advice I equipped myself with all the up-to-date pamphlets and precis, complete with the latest amendments, keeping things up-to date in the army was quite a chore but essential I considered in the position held. I settled in becoming an avid reader of all things military engineering in off duty time. The tasks of the QMS I was to run two Field Engineer (later known as Combat Engineer) courses of grade BII each year, each course to be a minimum of four months duration. The remainder of the year was spent supervising or umpiring on regimental or squadron exercises, young officer and NCO training, training centre administration and leave.

Soon after arrival I was asked if I had had any experience with the new Twynham hut construction and could I offer advice, with my Bahrain experience I felt fully competent. A field troop was having difficulty so I presented myself to a little gaggle of officers and SNCO's and without instructional pamphlets was able to answer all questions and gave a few a tips that I had learnt the hard way to facilitate the construction with ease.

The Commanding Officer, a rather unconventional Officer I thought at the time, a Lt. Col. Frosell ( ? ) would walk around the barrack area, no cap, no sam brown, jacket undone, hands in pockets, chatting to all, he would acknowledge salutes with a half-hearted wave his hand reaching about shoulder height as he did so. A plumpish pear-shape man who had what one would never describe as a military bearing, known as 'Popski' around the barracks, and of course the unit was known by some as Popski's private army, he was often accompanied by the RSM, a Les Neave, later commissioned to Captain.

The CO. despite his outwardly shown demeanour, was very demanding on professionalism, all aims to be achieved with speed, efficiency and safety, placing some emphasis on the latter, his often repeated "preparation

and practice before execution" was likened to life, saying to Officers and SNCO's alike, "you always wine and dine before you seduce!" as QMSI's we were referred to as his experts. I'd never liked that expression ever since I'd heard someone say that "experts were drips under pressure" however he confided in us stating his known ability of Troop Comds. and SNCO's and asked our opinions of anything outside of the average.



Royal Warrant from Royal Engineers Records Office  
(As sent to 36 Corps Engineer Regiment Royal Engineers)

After one very success::, exercise of wet bailey bridging, reports were received in from the Royal Military Police concerning RASC drivers who had the responsibility of driving our bridging equipment convoys in three ton trucks, the pontoon vehicles, 3 tonners each with two pontoons secured to a flat tray top, were said to be exceeding all speed limits under cover of darkness on the main route travelling south etc. Called to his office, I was asked by the CO "would you like to a comment on that QMSI?" I pondered after reading before relating that we had received full co-operation from all personnel, of the RASC, there were no accidents and all equipment had arrived intact, and they had been instructed to get to their destination as quickly as possible as the construction crews were waiting, and then jokingly added "bloody good drivers sir". "I agree" he said "the MP are doing their job too."

After the third Combat Engineer course BII, I was asked to explain why 40% of the course had failed, this being the first course of which I was completely responsible for. It was towards the end of the course that my partner had left the unit and his replacement had been employed as the Warrant Officer in charge of the unit motor transport for some reason. It was only then that Billy's words rang a bell with me, "you will only be judged on the percentage of passes on these courses", I'd never really thought about it until he had left and then there were some possible implications which had no place in my book. My only explanation was that the students had not achieved the required percentage on all subjects on my own assessment, as to whether the soldiers were too inexperienced or just plain 'Dils,' the Troop Comds. should decide, Popski. said "that was a fair enough comment".

I was informed that I would be working on my own in the foreseeable future with the proviso that I would get suitable Sgt. instructors to assist in the running of the Combat Engineering courses, as one would imagine my workload increased significantly, especially since my assistant instructors were unknown to me and all course administration came my way. I continued to mark fairly as I assessed examination papers and practical work, failures still occurred up to 10%, perhaps 4 men per course, certainly a dramatic improvement in course results. There was an incentive to do well as in most cases it meant increase in pay.

Social life in the Sgts, mess was good and families had use of the swimming pool (which also served as the indoor .22 rifle range) my young lad Paul, before the age of five was winning medals against children two years older. Initially we had rather a small community of married families from a REME WO1 down to Cpl about sixteen quarters in all. all appeared to mix in very well, although I did intervene in a domestic argument once only to calm down an incident that was getting out of hand

On 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1965, having looked around with the idea of getting my own home. I put a thousand pounds deposit (\$1941 at time of 'writing 11/7/96) on a two bedroom house/bungalow on a quarter acre block situated along Town Road, Cliff Woods in Kent. The total purchase price 4050 pounds Stirling, and moved in soon afterwards to make new civilian friends.

A duty as Regimental Orderly Officer came my way every so often. On one such duty I attended a very unusual task, a police report had come into the guard room that a mad bull had escaped from the local slaughter house, could we provide a marksman to shoot it? I selected a rifle from the armoury on advice from the armourer, took five rounds from the guard room safe, and with two members of the guard proceeded to the location in the duty Rover. On arrival I found the mad bull to be a young Heffer that had been cornered. It was very dark and not knowing the area and going on what was told to me, I stated it was not safe to fire the rifle at ground level in the built up area and said I would return at day break, which I did to find the RSPCA and a local butcher present with a couple of reporters and the police who had contained the animal all night. I spoke to the RSPCA representative and asked if he knew the ideal aiming point and with that knowledge dropped the beast with a single shot from 25 yards having ensured safety in the line of fire. The local paper reported Warrant Officer shoots mad cow.

On another occasion I had reason to call out the Medical Officer to attend an injured soldier. The MO. with a strong Scottish accent who liked his scotch as well, arrived rather under the weather, assessed the injury, "yes. clean up and stitch up" he slurred. After cleaning up and giving the man a local he was unable to close the wound with his unsteady hands. so having assured the patient and the doctor I took over and with the stainless steel croc nosed pliers (as I referred to them). half-moon needle and gut I did the job myself inserting eight stitches, rough but it did the job.

My instructor occupation often found me at Upnor Hard on the River Medway for watermanship training, pontoon bailey bridging and rafting. to Wouldham Quarries for normal dry bridging and practical demolition training on the live ranges. I also used to take courses out to prepare civil engineered bridges with dummy explosive and all the usual circuitry required. On the Isle of Thanet or very close to it I discovered a very embarrassing problem for the military and civil authorities. Whilst preparing a bridge for a dummy demolition exercise, a L/Cpl called me over to have a look at what he had uncovered with a shovel. He had recognised what was then an obsolescent explosive, they were in fact Gun Cotten Slabs, the real things, 6 x 3 x 1.5" with primers inserted at intervals we found. I concluded that those I had seen were most likely inert by their age and condition. I stopped all training immediately, dismantled work done and placed stores back on the three ton stores vehicle and phoned the police and the Adjutant of the Regiment and stressed urgency for their immediate attendance on site. While waiting and with a couple of NCO's I continued the search, just a visual one to ascertain what I had thought, layers of slabs had been placed across and under the road surface which had since their placing had a couple of layers of tarmac laid over them. Three policemen with a sergeant in charge arrived in panic mode and wanted to close the road straight away, but kept it open on my explanation that it had obviously been there for many years and it might be better to close the bridge under the guise of bridge maintenance to clear the old explosive and avoid unnecessary publication and its consequences but my superiors may decide otherwise. An Officer, a Captain that I did not know too well, arrived saying, "what's this story" in a sarcastic manner. I briefly told him my advice to the police on what I had found and left it in his hands, travelled back to barracks with the course, told them to go and do private study and reported my findings to the CO adding that I did not appreciate the attitude of the attending Captain who approached with a supercilious manner. It was

real, the bridges in the area had all been prepared for demolition in light of the expected invasion during the early part of World War II some twenty four years earlier, whether other bridges were checked out for similar attachments and when and how the one found was cleared I never knew.

Attached to 36 Field Engineer Regiment was a RE water boring drilling unit and I never really got to know its members for some reason. The Regiment had a very efficient signals wing that a neighbour of mine had quite a lot to do with. Members of his Squadron had been sent to Aden and he had managed to establish contact with them, in fact he did get permission to allow wives to speak to their husbands on Friday evenings, an exceptional achievement for radio communication at that time I believe.

Combat Engineering courses continued, the unit keeping in touch with the Royal Schools of Military Engineering and the trade training units in the Medway towns, I kept my ear to the ground for anything new as the developments and trials often took place under the guiding arm of the RSME at their various establishments. I often learned from students who I had served with, or were attending the courses I ran, who had come from such establishments. It had always been my nature in any case to listen to Sappers, drivers and junior NCO's with whom I worked or had to supervise as many things and sometimes bright ideas came to light. As an example I learnt to cut corrugated sheet iron with fencing wire, on much the same principle as cutting cheese with wire. This was never seen in print to my knowledge and yet such a simple, useful and expedient way to cut sheet metal to requirements.

Whilst at Cliff Woods my eldest boy Paul had broken his arm on two occasions, the second time whilst still in plaster having slipped in the ice and snow. My wife and I took him to the hospital, the two younger boys coming along as well, where he was taken in for an examination during which he began to scream and kick up a fuss, he had been told that he would feel no pain when the doctors mended his arm for him as he would be put to sleep. The medical people having explained the procedure to ourselves understood the calamity when told the family had recently been to his Nan's house in London where we learnt that Nan's cat had been put to sleep! A little event in life still remembered well, one of life's lessons perhaps.

Personal fitness - leading a very busy life often in the so called after duty hours, writing questions and precis and exam papers and then marking same, refreshing memory on my lesson plans, I had little time for personal pursuits. One was expected to attend the mess socials and dances and with a young family that involved babysitting, the odd family outing to see parents and in-laws and relatives made use of time I really didn't have to spare, so personal fitness became to be a rather low priority. Swimming sessions in the summer were enjoyable but not as frequent as I would have liked, and long walks rare. Having moved out of quarters, I was travelling by car to and from work, from Cliff Woods to Maidstone so there was then private property' to attend to.

Overall, my three years as a QMSI, although exceedingly busy, was very satisfying and a personally rewarding full time employment that I had in the army.

Two months warning was received for my next posting as the Squadron Sergeant major the 9th Independent Parachute Squadron RE - the unit I had served in some five years earlier. A prestige appointment if there ever was one considering there were six other potential contenders vying for the position or so I was told.



Rear view of bungalow bought at Cliffe Woods

## CHAPTER 10

### Second Tour 9<sup>th</sup> Independent Airborne Squadron RE

Squadron Sergeant Majors, as I had seen them, was where the buck stopped, and had their back to the proverbial wall and thus expected to have all the answers and know how especially in the independent squadrons. I guess I must have had some doubts knowing that there would be no brother SSM's or a Regimental Sergeant Major from whom to seek advice as in the previous units with whom I had served.

I therefore applied for and was accepted on a Guards run drill course, prior to my taking up the position of SSM, a move I was to regret. The Guards units (jokingly) had always been referred to as 'Wooden Tops' and 'Gravel Crunchers' in many past conversations, and the Drill course did little to improve the given impression from my own point of view. The course was one of constant repetition both verbal and physical, learning was parrot fashion, with strict obedience teamwork and attention to detail, both on turnout and bearing and the strong belief that wars are won on the square. As the only Warrant Officer on the course and wearing a red beret, (all others had to wear the No 1 dress Peaked Cap 1 I guess I stood out like a sore thumb. I felt that I was often ridiculed and sought out to illustrate bad examples and incorrect movements by the two Sergeant instructors - Automaton I called them. I found it difficult to take the course in a serious way. being taught how to keep men warm on the square clapping hands and stamping feet simultaneously "I ask you?," at one stage one course member started singing 'here we go gathering mils in May' I was then instructed to move to the front of the squad and lead all in the singing of the song. Although I spoke to the Warrant Officer in charge of the course, criticism obviously was not appreciated and nothing changed. Extra parades were ridiculous, one man ordered to get his metal wardrobe on parade for not polishing the brass handles and hinges. On the subject of military funerals, one man volunteered to get in the coffin to give it a realistic weight and then on going through the main gates sat up in a ghostly manner and asked for a light for his cigarette, we had a few laughs. My own benefits from the course very few, I generally thought the course a waste of time, maybe in order for a junior drill instructor in the Guards/Infantry roll but worlds apart from Engineering activity. I did not enjoy the course or thought it worthy of the time, and was assessed accordingly.

On arrival at the Parachute Squadron I had less than half a day as hand-over from the outgoing SSM, an old friend of mine from our previous Parachute Jumping Instructors course together, Wally Linham a long time member of the Squadron who was moving on to a Commissioned Officers posting. All Officer positions had changed from my previous time in the unit, I knew not one. With the exception of two SNCO's, all others had moved on, and the positions now held by men I had known as junior NCO's. The two SNCO's were both now Staff Sergeants, 'Rick' Mogg who eventually spent almost his whole career I believe in the unit a nonsmoker, non-drinker, excellent at rugby and swimming, a likeable rogue who appeared to know his job well, and big John Smith a long time Squadron soldier then the SQMS.

Life with the parachuting engineers still proved to be a very busy one, I endeavoured to carry on in the traditional SSM manner that I had learnt was the score, dealing with all minor disciplinary matters and some not so minor myself, with the unwritten approval of the Officer Commanding and his Second in command, who did not get to hear all that I dealt with (to my knowledge), extra duties and work were always required outside normal working hours, and any defaulters were the ideal persons to fit the roll, thus relieving others on the normal duty roster.

This system also applied to the Officers and SCO's alike, the Officers dealt with by the 2 IC and the latter myself. I settled in very well I'd thought and felt (surprisingly to me) very comfortable in my then new post. Fitness was essential, I had accumulated more than a few pounds of unnecessary body weight in previous instructing role, a fact realised prior to taking up the appointment and efforts to reduce already commenced. I continued with determination in off duty time to improve general fitness, stamina had never been a problem in my book, and leading by example a desired trait. At the age of thirty seven and a half many were beginning to tail off, however I attended all Squadron and HQ troop road runs and encouraged Officers including the OC and the 2 IC to do likewise, not always successful, there were always excuses why some could not take part and although alternative times were arranged it was a constant battle to get the higher echelon on a regular fitness routine. I did not let up on this one. someone had to keep pushing and I was in the ideal position.

Parachute training came around every so often, usually preceded with ground training, landing, flight and aircraft drills, 95% of jumps were with equipment, in effect practising our real role for active service, i.e. weapons



and light engineering equipment, water and rations and other necessities to be self-contained for several days. Field troops carried out engineer and infantry training according to preset training programmes and often went off on troop exercises for many days at a time.

On the family side we had settled in to our first private home well getting it set up with all the furniture required, we had bought it from a couple who were emigrating to Australia, and quite a lot of household goods were part of the deal. I had managed to keep the well- kept garden up to scratch, Paul my eldest boy had started school and I was now running a ford Cortina car. Enid remained at Cliffwoods with the two boys whilst I went off to Kenya.

On my posting to Aldershot, I had arranged for my bungalow to be leased under the rental arrangements in order that I may have my family with me as I'd thought A LCpl and his family moved in late April 1967, a move I was long to remember, as no-one looks after a place like one would themselves. On return some two years later, curtains, soft fabrics, the furniture and carpets were thrown out and a complete clean-up of the whole house and grounds had to take place.

Married quarters in Aldershot, Hampshire were very modem and less than a mile away from the quarters that I had occupied on my first posting to the squadron around five years previously, I was then living (or my family was) just opposite the families Navy Army and Airforce Institute shopping centre - known as the NAAFI

Wayne our youngest son had been born just prior to our move as a family Aldershot in April 1967. Nigel our second son was still too young for school and so the two of them kept Mum occupied daily whilst Paul the eldest boy attended the local junior school. The gardens were very small and we shared the dividing wall of quarters on both sides, in the event this was quite comforting from a security point of view for wives left on their own. as was often the case with men serving in Airborne Forces.



Captain Hewish – Second IC  
9 Indep Para Sqdn RE

With a film Director on  
location in Kenya

Squadron parade by troops within  
a game park in Kenya



My first trip to Kenya, Africa took place soon after my posting back to the unit. The Squadron flew out from London to Nairobi in civilian aircraft the big airliners at the time, supposedly in civilian clothes all wearing 'cobbly wobbly' boots, our rubber soled army boots, with short back and side haircuts and mostly pullovers worn over jeans and the like, a motley collection of individuals for the casual observer. (Note civilian 'civvys' dress as advised in the event of an unscheduled landing in territories where British troops would not be welcome.) Our Quartermaster advance party met us at Nairobi with three ton trucks to transport us to our destination, a campsite within the bounds of a game reserve many hours further on. Accommodation as expected under canvas, but in the very unusual location, actually within the game reserve but all were informed that we would be safe from marauding animals which in the end proved to be quite true, despite the many stories that emerged during our stay (around four months from memory) of large beasts on their nocturnal perambulations.

The encampment was quite compact, all the junior ranks Cpls. and below slept in bivouacs, two or one man tents, SNCO'S and myself occupying a large marquee and a similar arrangement for the Officers, the Officer Commanding having his own canvas 'Igloo.' The cooks were located in a central position having a large canvas shelter, basic and primitive but serving the purpose. Communal ablutions for washing/showering and a real 'beaut' twelve seat DTL (deep trench latrine) with no dividing partitions, just a cover from passersby, so one always had to pass others carrying out natures daily duty with just the early ones getting a cold seat! This was the convenience for all, the OC, all Officers and all ranks. I recall on two or three occasions sitting next to the OC conferring on Squadron matters whilst having a crap, unusual to say the least!

The camp was situated not so very far from the famous 'Tree Tops Hotel' the venue of Princess Elizabeth prior to becoming Queen, it was there that she received the news of the death of her father, King George VI in 1952.

I managed a trip to Tree Tops, and was surprised to learn of the tourist trade tricks via whispers, along the well-worn tree lined track to the observation building overlooking the large drinking pool, various animals were kept and as the tourists approached in groups, a zebra would cross here, a giraffe there, and then a small group of deer, a big Jumbo would stand in the shadows, all having been given an unseen kick in the backside to get them moving to the delight of the sightseers to wet their appetites for more as promised. From the observation building viewing platforms many animals would be seen at dawn and dusk as they came to the drinking pool, this would have been as close as anyone could get to wild animals except for the few that take no notice of safari vehicles in die game parks.

Little is remembered of the heavy rain, flies, sweaty atmosphere and the consequent muddy conditions that could not be avoided in the small area allocated as a camping - one hundred and fifty men. Tasks were allotted to the troops and administration sorted out to ensure all flowed smoothly, some extra vehicles were drawn as arranged the Quartermaster, as were the continual supply of rations and working materials.

The purpose of our visit, was of course a continuation of military training in an overseas theatre, in fact it served a dual purpose with two beneficiaries, the Squadron in so much that it gained some valuable experience in the various tasks that became available, and the Kenyan Tourist Board/Association or whatever handle it went by. Our immediate contact was a Mr. 'Bill' Woodley, the head game warden (in Kenya to my knowledge) a white Kenyan having been born in the country. The task generally was to open up the game parks, to make the transportation of tourists more comfortable, and giving all year round access to many areas via improved tracks and roadways albeit dirt ones, the construction of culverts for the all-important water drainage, and timber bridges to cross the larger water courses. Improvised bridging being very much a subject of combat engineering, and here was the opportunity to select and cut our own timber straight from the forest, personally never experienced at any other time in my twenty two years in khaki, not that I was actually involved in the work on that occasion.

As the work moved further afield the troops set up their own camps nearer to their work sites. Another task became available for which there was no apparent working, and after some Headquarter discussion at which I became involved. I volunteered my services being anxious to get stuck into something constructive as such was my background. I soon rounded up a works party of ten, grudgingly agreed to by some of our leaders, and then commenced planning. The report of the job, a copy of which I still have, is reproduced here abbreviated in part to maintain reader interest.

**REPORT ON CONCRETE DRIFT TASK AT  
KENMERE LODGE, MERU GAME RESERVE KENYA  
BY WOII D H NEWMAN RE**

List of Contents

- a) By Whom Ordered
- b) Summary
- c) Recce Report and Proposed Plan
- d) Works Progress Report by Sgt. Gosling

**Note 1** - A Works Programme as such is not submitted owing to the fact that no similar task had been undertaken by myself and problems as I envisaged them would have to be overcome as and when they arose.

**Note 2** - Living/working conditions are included where the opinions expressed are open to discussion

- a) By Whom Ordered - on 30th Jan '67 I was briefed by Major M Matthews RE for the purpose of recce of a proposed engineering task at Meru Game Reserve. I was to discuss the task with a Mr. Charles Moore, the Assistant Game Warden to whom I had been introduced previously and produce a report within three days. This was completed with some delay owing to the Game Warden administration flight between parks, ten days being the maximum construction time allowed.
- b) Summary - The task, a 50 A concrete drift, was quite a formidable one. It was undertaken with the promise that all stores as requested would be available on site by the time they were required. In a few instances this promise did not materialise. The eventual plan to dam the river in sections of the water span went extremely well damming one third at a time. The successful drying up of the river rock bed did not necessitate the use of dry mix cement in bags as previously thought, with the possibility of pools of water remaining. A compressor PCU mounted on the rear of a Fordson Major Tractor was used to drill tie bar holes into the rock bed at 18" intervals each to a depth of 9" - with some difficulty a box type form work was placed in position to construct the downstream concrete wall to a width of 2 ft and varying depths from 18" to 42" approximately 8 ft from an existing concrete wall. Vertical tie bars 1" diameter, 2 ft and 3 ft in length, were grouted in position in the centre of the proposed wall before laying of concrete.

A 1: 2: 3 mix was used and in conjunction with concrete placing, 1/2" horizontal reinforcing was interlaced along the line of vertical tie bars.

With the same damming and diverting of the water the remaining task, that of producing a road, or concrete drift between the walls began, filling with large rocks 1 1/2 " aggregate and sand in that order leaving approximately 12" to be concreted in with large 5 ton vehicle chassis to act as reinforcement. The apparent force of seasonal floods warranted the heavy construction. Previous work on the site had been washed away.

c) **Recce Report and Proposed Plan (Carried out on 3rd February '67)**

The water gap was found to be 147 ft. depth flowing over an existing concrete wall 5". Rate of flow calculated as 8000 gallons per second. The crossing already in use by Land Rovers only. A previous attempt to construct a concrete drift had failed, it being washed away in the seasonal floods, part remains found showed that 4-5" concrete was used reinforced by chain link fencing.

It was suggested by the assistant game warden that a bridge be built just above the existing water level, out of same old 5 ton vehicle chassis seated and tied to concrete pillars. Having seen the results of previous floods and foreseeing the problem of placing decking on the chassis in a satisfactory manner, coupled with the possibility of large trees flowing downstream, I strongly advised against this method of crossing.

My plan to construct a concrete drift below the existing water was a secondary consideration by the Game Warden providing the problem of construction in water could be overcome. I accepted this problem, having in mind to dam the river in sections.

The advantages of this far outweighed the first suggested method and was certainly not impossible. The plan to construct a concrete drift 11 ft. wide and - deep approximately, below the dry seasons water level.

An existing reinforced concrete wall was found to be as previous., positioned, it is not known whether this is tied to the rock bed in any way

An additional wall constructed and tied to the rock bed as the downstream drift edge is required, the gap between walls then filled and concreted in.

The task provides a challenge and as the job could be completed in stages without interference to the present crossing and with the go ahead from the warden.

I suggest the Squadron accept the task with the proviso that it may not be completed. I estimate our contribution as being to complete downstream wall and at least one third of the drift surface, the remainder of the work it was agreed would be carried out by the National Parks Staff.

**Stores and materials already available:**

**300 cwts. of normal Portland Cement**  
Approx. 12 cubic yards 1 1/2 aggregate  
Approx. 8 cubic yards sand  
6 large vehicle chassis

All remaining stores required were promised before time of use. Good living accommodation is available.

d) **Work Progress Report**

**Day 1 - 3rd Feb:** Self and three arrived at location by air p.m. to take over accommodation and plan arrival work arrangements for road party.

**Day 2 - 4th Feb:** Arranged local labour — 12 Africans, placed rocks on new RC wall alignment, drew an old Ford V8 1940 vintage as run around vehicle from Game Warden along with a selection of working tools that should have been on the scrap heap long ago. Road party of 8 men arrived, at 9p.m..

**Day 3 - 5th Feb:**

Work started 7.30 a.m., 12 BOR's and 12 Africans on site. Africans employed filling bags of sand and sewing them up and carting to site, each bag weighing approximately 250 lbs. Own men employed in placing dam. Insufficient bags on site break-water idea dispensed with as an experiment, dam only on SC wall successful.

10 a.m. - Compressor arrived - party broken down as follows - 3 BOR to commence drilling rock bed, 3 to start form work construction, 2 to cut and prepare tie bars, remainder with Africans continue damming including downstream to divert water from working area.

1330 hrs - damming complete (one third span acceptable) preparations for concreting, tie bars grouted in, drilling now in wet gap.

1430 hrs - form work in position and batch box made and 4 : 3 tilt mixer on site.

1445 hours - concreting commenced, two hand mixing parties and machine party, Africans hopeless at transporting concrete in barrows over 6" x 1" planks, 3 barrow loads lost, hand mixing twice as fast as machine, time lost in putting over what was required. BOR Swahili almost non-existent.

1630 hours - with the exception of rock drilling party, all others left site after a wash down, swim, little concreting having been achieved. I asked for large washing bowl type containers for Africans to carry concrete.

1830 hours - rock drilling party completed task of drilling 100 holes each 9" deep across river rock bed, two thirds of drilling carried out under water.

**Day 4 - 6th Feb:**

0730 hours - concreting commenced, bowls very successful

1230 hours - 1st section one third span concrete wall completed, more bags arrived during morning.

1245 hours - commenced damming far bank section. Prepared and placed form work, prepared and grouted in tie bars, 8 Africans collected more aggregate.

1630 hours - finished work. All preparations for concreting completed. Rock bed (as in the first section) dried up completely after much effort and two times the amount of bags used.

**Day 5 - 7<sup>th</sup> Feb** - The whole day spent concreting in the 2nd section, much more concrete required — the rock bed being deeper. Midday did not find us optimistic about completing 2nd section. I therefore employed piecework and the task was duly completed at 1550 hrs. with very tired but pleased Africans. Later, on questioning our party I found three men affected like myself, I had not urinated for two days and then advised all the consequences of such — more liquid intake was a must.

**Day 6 - 8<sup>th</sup> Feb** - the task handed over to Sgt. Gosling who is to report further.

### **c) Works Progress Report**

**Day 6 - 8<sup>th</sup> Feb:** I was instructed by WOII Newman to carry on with the task in which I had been employed as his 2IC. Work commenced following the original construction stages as planned by WOII Newman.

#### **Day 12 - 13<sup>th</sup> Feb:**

0730 hours - work commenced on the laying of concrete on roadway - 3 bays were completed giving a total of 4 bays - just over 80 ft. of roadway, the Africans on this day were given jobs and BOR men supervised them so as by midday I had the Africans doing all the work with minimum supervision.

1330 hours - Africans only employed. BOR men clearing up in accommodation area - myself and 1 Cpl looked in on the job at intervals - work going well. By the end of the day the Africans were competent to carry on without supervision.

#### **Day 12 -14<sup>th</sup> Feb:**

0700 hours - handed over accommodation to Mr. Moore and explained tasks of completing roadway to his mason foreman who was to supervise completion of roadway. Left for Base Camp at 08:30hrs



Above  
Aerial View - Ford crossing/concrete drift, one of the larger short term jobs surveyed, planned and designed.



Right  
Sgt. Gosling - who took over to complete the job.



Above Left - Assistant Game Warden Charles Moore, carrying out a pre-flight check prior to my flight with him for some reason now 'lost'

Above Right - With the Head Game Warden, Bill Woodely, prior to a flight over the reserve

Right - An Eland, the largest type of deer being examined by long-time Squadron member Sid Davies. A rumour at the time said it was shot for a Squadron BBQ



It was whilst on this particular project that I met up with Bill Travers - the film star, he was on location in the area at the time and was in fact staying at a shooting lodge nearby. I guess he was having a break from whatever he was doing at the time as he wandered down to our work site to see what was going on, I had an interesting chat with him.

As a consequence of my meeting, I along with five of the lads from the work party spent a pleasant evening at the Shooting Lodge at the invite from Bill who provided us with ample liquid amber and a meal, the likes of which I had never had before, or ever had since. Asparagus shoots, cold straight out of the tin, cheese that had rather a lot of green mould growing from it and also bread with green mould, dates and savoury biscuits, he appeared to be living alone there but as he said it was a short break.

I was recalled to base camp with some disappointment on my part where I continued in my usual roll of general admin ensuring that all went as expected as far as possible in the circumstances with the camp routine, the all-important hygiene so necessary in such conditions, the camp security via guards and other duties and record keeping.

The Officer Commanding had thought that I should not stay too long on the concrete drift job, as my presence was better served back with the Squadron. I had an orderly L/Cpl who was briefed or otherwise had the initiative to keep things on the go, he had quite 'a long rope' and often exercised his authority in my absence. I could never sit on my rear end for very long with a poised pen in hand, I much preferred to be out and about and was quite prepared to do manual work if I could not find other labour. There was an occasion when one of the men

Benny Benson also known as Darcy, ex SAS and had served with them for many years, on camp duty at the time approached me to let me know that five men dressed as Kenyan Policemen were at the barrier, I do remember saying "what do you mean dressed as" he said "SAS I'm sure they've recognised me. I went back with him and made eye contact with one individual who I was quite sure that I knew, he didn't have to say anything, I asked whom I had thought was the senior one if there was a problem. They had been sent to check on the unit, who, how many, purpose, how long, our authority and contact. My answers were just as brief, unit, base camp no's only and military training, the last three questions not known to myself stating they would have to call later when the officer in charge would be present, I made the eye contact again and watched them depart They were not seen or heard of again to my knowledge. I instructed Benson to keep the incident as we knew it under his hat and reported to Mike Matthews the OC on his return that evening, and that is how it has remained until now as far as I was concerned

Our contact Mr. Bill Woodley (incidentally the author of the book 'The Elephant People' about the Mau Mau) and his assistant Mr. Charles Moore, I had come to know very well and had been flying with both in their small aircraft, the mode of transport being very necessary for the large area of their responsibility.

Many trips were made to the troops out in the bush with the re-supply trucks and odd trips into Nakuru, I saw the lakes famous for the Pink Flamingos and many other sights that a tourist would pay dearly for. Football matches were arranged against the locals most of whom played in bare feet and once winning at that against the small rear headquarters team. A BBQ was given for the Squadron by the Head Game Warden Bill Woodley in the grounds of his residence, I don't think he had a shortage of meat what with all of the deer herds running around but I will add that that is pure conjecture on my part, what I saw as a meal on the hoof may not have been seen in the same light by himself. I think he employed half of the local African village, garden boys, cooks, mechanics, firewood choppers, housemaids, some handymen/tradesmen, but by far the biggest number were Game Park wardens, could have been twenty, those going on duty were paraded and inspected duly by Bill they were very smart as a high standard was expected including foot drill, we were surprised and quite impressed with the polished boots and brasses, KD uniforms all carrying .303 rifles and live ammo some with large parangs at their sides. With selected members of the Squadron, mainly Officers, we ate with Bill his charming wife and young daughters.

I took advantage of an invite for a sightseeing flight around Mt Kenya wife its snowcapped peak with Bill who also invited myself and the second in command a Captain Garth Hewish to a visit at the Mt. Kenya Hotel, which he had pointed out to me on the sightseeing flight. The names of Churchill. Stalin and Roosevelt famous names in history are connected in some way with the establishment. I was told at the time but it escapes me now. The place just oozes with the trappings of luxury, servants — no not waiters — servants in their Persil white gowns with red cummerbunds and pill box hats were quick to attend to the visitors every need with their (I'd thought) gold plated serving trays, as they opened the gold plated gates that served as dividing barriers to each bar or lounge. Outside the lush emerald green lawns provided the perfect strutting ground for the many peacocks and other feathered kind normally seen in cages. A one eyed emu greeted one in the car park, or what I had assumed to be an emu at the time.

At some other time, not everything is written in the order in which it happened, I managed to get myself on two vehicular come foot safaris that involved rising at three a.m., meeting with Bill at a pre-designated point prior to travel to some selected area where we dismounted to proceed on foot at 'sparrow fart' (daybreak to the unfamiliar reader). Information on the habits, abilities, reactions and failings on the animals we were likely to see were given, and also how to conduct ourselves in movement and communication, and what to do if! It was funny to see two of our largest Officers walking on tippy toes to avoid snapping a twig, all of us, seven or eight with cameras at the ready approaching where possible from downwind, most animals having a very keen sense of smell and hearing. We were surprised to find out how close we could get to the rhinos before our presence was detected, and then on a hand signal we all became motionless to observe nature at its best in absolute silence. Rhinos are known to have very poor eye sight and although appearing to look directly at you (in the direction of the last alerting sound) the cocked ears and sniffing nostrils straining for further signals, one is relatively safe as a silent statue, within minutes they are always said to move on. Our advice was first class ensuring our safety, even so at times there was tense excitement, like the buffalo herd that we crept up to through the bush, suddenly turned into a snorting thumping stampede, that passed us by at a very uncomfortable distance. Stand still, like a tree trunk and they will go around you, one generally finds such statements difficult to believe, but could well be so. Whilst travelling around a very steep hill in a sturdy Toyota

land cruiser (the preferred warden vehicle) with a precipitous drop on one side and a very steep slope on the other, we came head on to a large bull buffalo, with instructions to sit tight and remain quiet we played the waiting game at a ten metre distance. The animal with thrusting head and pawing hooves after quite some few minutes came cautiously forward, there was no room to pass, the engine silenced as we had come to a halt, we all waited with baited breath, the horns were engaged and the vehicle rocked, a few minutes of inattention and then the same again. Eventually we were left alone as the buff struggled and slipped in its efforts to make way up the steep slope. We started up and continued on.

At another time our route was blocked by a gathering of elephants and because of the way they had grouped there was no chance of us getting by, Bill stating that "I'm afraid we have to wait this one out" and switched off. He thought that perhaps one was giving birth, and the matriarch, the senior cow was in attendance, in due course we were given the right of way but without seeing the evidence of a birth, all this and prior to the working day.

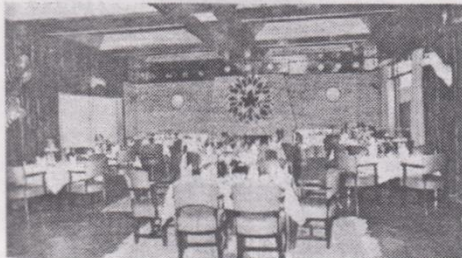
Sometime later, days later, as my camera indicated I was at the end of the roll of film (note my Olympus Pen E camera purchased through the good offices of Bill Travers was an up to date model that he referred to as simplicity itself, everything was automatic, a 35mm and one could take half frames seventy two shots in my case). However on opening the camera as the rewind appeared to be not working, no film, I was more than disappointed and not quite so polite about it at the time, someone somewhere had relieved me of the exposed film, the once in a lifetime on foot safari record gone. I had had some fantastic opportunities and hoped to have had some excellent pictures, never did I think such a thing would happen and at the time I could not think who or when, no proof no evidence, an experience that I tried to forget. Other pictures were taken in efforts to fill the gap.



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**T**HE sign pinned to a thorn tree at the end of the dusty, bumpy airstrip leaves no doubts. "Stay by your plane", it says. "Lions on the road".

Once again, George Adamson has lions at Kora, the desolate bush camp on the Tana River that has been home to him and his cats for 17 years.

By the time Adamson's autobiography, "My Pride and Joy", was published in 1986, the last of his lions, Koretta and her cubs, had crossed the Tana and disappeared. "I thought all the lions had gone forever," he says.

But here, as dusk falls over Kampi ya Simba (lion camp), a cough drifts from the bush and a dark shape pads up to the fence. It is Growe, 11-year-old daughter of a lioness from Nairobi orphanage. With her are three cubs, aged about two, named Maggie, Denis and Boris by Adamson during British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's visit to Kenya in January.

Adamson calls for camel meat, pushes the gate open and walks out towards the lions. "Where's Growe?" he calls. "Come on, girl." He throws a chunk and the lioness comes close and picks up the meat, growling and showing her teeth.

Ghostly in our torchlight, the rest of the pride come forward: in addition to the three half-grown cubs there is One-eye, probably also Growe's daughter, and her four young cubs. One-eye joined up with Growe a few months ago and the pride is now nine in all.

These lions are in spirit, if not in blood, the heirs of Elsa, the lioness released by George and Joy Adamson, and the heroine of "Born Free". Elsa was returned to the wild three decades ago and Joy herself was murdered at her home on Lake Naivasha in 1980.

But over the years, George has raised and freed more than 30 lions.

Now aged 82, he has trouble breathing, but with his shoulder-length yellow hair and beard he still cuts a dashing figure. He retired from the game department 25 years ago and has lived out his retirement in the most isolated parts of Kenya.

At Kampi ya Simba, he is six hours' drive from the nearest shops and his only contact with the outside world is on the radio security network.

After 17 years, the camp is still primitive: a few huts enclosed by the high wire fence to keep the lions out. A dozen African servants tend the camp: Tony Fitzjohn, George's partner for many years, lives here now and again: and at any one time

there are usually two or three old friends and temporary helpers.

The camp is a menagerie: vervet monkeys run in and out of the huts; squirrels eat nuts on the table; acacia rats rustle in the roof; vulturine guinea fowl and ugly marabou storks fight for corn; lizards scamper in the dust.

Sitting in the shade of his dining hut, while birds and squirrels dart for corn on the sandy floors, George Adamson explains: "When I was a game warden I shot more than 70 lions for duty, so when I retired I thought I would try to help them instead."

His helping has been controversial. Some people have criticised him for breeding man-eaters – and the lions have indeed killed or wounded several people.

But Adamson believes much has been learnt from his work and he has proved that lions born into captivity can be freed in the wild.

He continues to feed the lions because he worries that they will kill Somali cattle, illegally grazed in the park, and will then be poisoned by the Somali herdsmen who are all over the reserve.

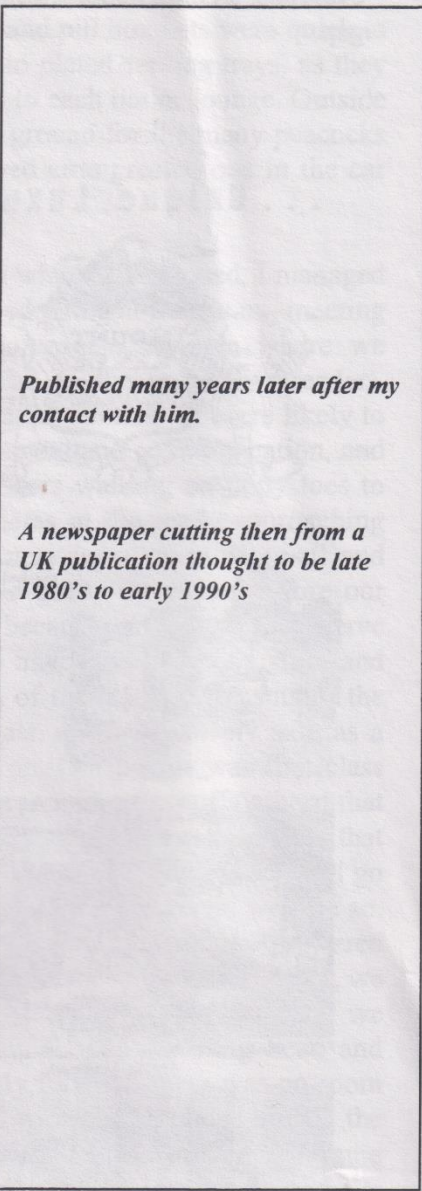
**O**N rare occasions, Growe has even taken meat from his hand. As he walks out into the dark towards the nine wild lions, he laughs when asked whether he is ever nervous. "Sometimes," he says. "But if they are intending some mischief, I can usually tell."

Usually, yes, but twice he has been badly mauled. He believes that almost any wild creatures can be released from captivity. There are a couple of tigers in the Nairobi orphanage, confiscated while being smuggled from India, that he has his eyes on for Kora – only half jokingly.

The best news for George Adamson is that Perez Olindo, the much respected new director of wildlife in Kenya, has given him permission to release more lions at Kora – a decade after he was banned from introducing new lions to the reserve.

A mother and half-grown cub which had been attacking cattle in the Nairobi park have been captured and they are soon expected up at Kora. "One gets so fond of the animals," George Adamson says, puffing his pipe beneath a large and beautiful photo of Koretta.

"Then one day they go off and one may never see them again." But now, with Growe and Maggie and Denis and One-eye and the rest, George Adamson will probably have lions at Kora until, as he puts it, "I kick the bucket".



*Published many years later after my contact with him.*

*A newspaper cutting then from a UK publication thought to be late 1980's to early 1990's*



George Adamson, 82, continues to make friends with the big cats.

In between and sometimes connected with my work, other travels found me paying a visit to George Adamson at his lonely outpost, I went to his compound location twice, once by air when the pilot Charles Moore assistant to Bill Woodley did a low over fly to disperse some giraffe on the very badly maintained airstrip before making his landing. The second time by road, a long dusty bumpy ride. George and Joy Adamson were the real life husband and wife team of the film 'Born To Be free,' acting the film parts were Bill Travers and Virginia Mckenna known stars of the period. George was rehabilitating circus and or zoo lions back to the wild a pastime/hobby at which he was very successful, I say pastime or hobby as he was not employed by or paid by anyone, being self-funded. His Book 'My Pride And Joy' is well worthy of a read, a very fitting title. His wife incidentally lived and worked many miles away from him nurturing other big cats of the non-lion variety. George although I only met him briefly on one occasion, lived a solitary and primitive life. Obviously an educated man he had a small thatched hut perhaps nine feet by seven feet with only open spaces for windows and a doorway located inside a large wire compound. On the inside of the hut all-round the top of the walls were little plastic white horses, I guess he liked his white horse whisky. Joy on the other hand had a couple of African males to assist and look after her. Both George and Joy met their untimely deaths at the hands of Africans many years on from my time out there



Above  
Approach by air during a visit to the remote bush home of George Adamson - the man who spent his life with the lions.

Right  
Sitting outside the compound on an elephant skull





Small timber bridges built to open up tourist tracks for all season's use

Local leave in the way of long weekends was given and the use of transport provided to get the men to various locations, but other than that rear parties continued to work to keep all occupied, although the odd day off for one to attend to one's domestic affairs was always appreciated. A few men under S/Sgt. Paddy Smyth MM ex Korean veteran managed to get in a couple of parachute jumps. Paddy was later promoted to Warrant Officer Class Two and remained with his troop for quite some time before posting.

We had visits from the Parachute Brigade 'higher ups' since I cannot remember who they were, to see how their engineer support group was training and passing time, I would imagine with some envy. There were also visits from VIP's of the Kenyan government of the day. The available photos that I have should help to complete my memories of the Squadron trip to darkest Africa in 1967 as I then thought.

On return to UK all had a chance to catch up on leave entitlements followed by a period of dusting off the basic Sapper and Soldierly skills weapon training, demolitions and mine warfare and other Combat Engineering subjects and also including the unit 'hate' a bit of square bashing drill in No 2 dress. Fitness and sporting pursuits were given a fairly high priority and there was a chance to catch up on the unit administration.

A brigade parachute exercise in Germany of several days duration took place late in 1967. Like this insertion - it was brief in comparison to our many other exercises.

On the 7th of February 1968 my Father died, I attended the funeral on the 13th, a cremation, and stayed a couple of days with Mother who was living at Sheperdswell near Dover in Kent.

Soon, all too soon from the wives point of view and in keeping with the Airborne Engineers way of life and service we were notified of a forthcoming exercise, a Parachute Battalion exercise to be held in North Africa Tripoli.

Eventually the time came and we moved off, majority of the unit taking part, we left fully equipped for service be what it may, to find ourselves as a complete parachute group based in a very remote location many miles inland in the desert from the North Coastal road of the Tripoli area. Way off the beaten track, that is until we had been there a few days when there were many beaten tracks as the rations and fuel trucks endeavoured to locate the fairly large canvas fenced in encampment, wheel tracks often covered overnight with the wind.

The camp had been erected and put in place by an advance party there were some creature comforts, mess tents, basic ablution troughs and showers, central camp cooking and lighting provided by generators, but as expected cautious use of water was a directive. I ended up with a four man tent to myself, fortunate as some might say, but personally only used to sleep in when there, emphasis on when.



Above - desert camp for part of the Parachute Brigade in Libya - a base used for many exercises  
Below - On recce with Captain Garth Hewish



Training consisted of long desert patrols on foot involving at the same time acclimatisation to desert conditions, navigation and general soldiering. Vehicle search and rescue techniques practised, the latter as a genuine requirement for one of our patrols, but they would not have been the only one by any means, fortunately as a face saver myself being the OIC search party at the time since there was much inter unit rivalry.

The Squadron prepared a large aircraft landing strip and its use was proved by several landings of the Hercules the big C130 transports. Our final test for use was ascertained by driving a Land Rover up and down its length with six men aboard at 45 mph. (72 kph.) and if no one was thrown out it was assessed as being suitable.

We also became involved in parachuting and then preparing defensive positions and living in them. In the course of my own travels I saw several World War II airstrips most recorded on our issue maps and still marked by what we would describe as square biscuit tins but were in fact the wartime petrol containers, Gerry cans of course used by the German army during the war hence their name, and then adopted by the Brits post war. Many of the wartime fuel containers became a favourite building block when filled with sand by the desert dwelling Arabs. As a passenger in but in charge of a 3 ton 4x4 truck and leading a small convoy, I once found myself in a wartime minefield, live and unmarked except for one or two mines that were marked with a ring of stones that

drew my attention to the fact. On halting the vehicle and those following, investigation revealed anti-tank mines Mk II the ones with what is known as the spider cover and were taught as being obsolete in 1950 soon after I had joined the army, this was the sure confirmation that live minefields still existed as pre-warned. Having taken photos all drivers were instructed to reverse out in their own tracks, those in the rear just for practice. Since desert sands are always moving i.e. windblown, such mines are covered and uncovered many times each year.

Small wartime relics could still be found in some areas, large objects, tank hulks, gun remnants and vehicle frames having been removed by scrap merchants as informed later. Very few identifiable objects, natural or otherwise existed and navigation by compass presented its problems, but there were methods to achieve reasonable accuracy. One of the few that I was surprised to see was a very prominent well-built white painted Mosque in the middle of nowhere and no apparent approach roads, and yet inhabited dwellings as found gave the impression of abject poverty' and even they were very far away from the Mosque.

Dust storms are an experience that most would have preferred not to have had, however it became our lot to sample twice, not unlike the sand storms (Kamseens) that lasted up to four days in the Suez Canal Zone Egypt, in the early fifties.

Having time up my sleeve whilst on a trip to Tripoli I took the opportunity to visit the British War Cemetery run by the British War Graves Commission, neat and tidy I found it rather awe inspiring. Many World War II battles were fought in the Libyan desert, the very large area now, or as it was then allocated to the British army for exercise purposes.

Sunburn as such never appeared to be much of a problem, works and training dress around the encampment consisted of PT (physical training) blue shorts, head dress the red beret, boots and socks, but those wishing to wear shirts could do so, usually advisable for the red/ginger heads, light skinned individuals, hair cutting became a bit of a problem, the men actually asking for the service. Barbers appeared non-existent and it was thought not worthy to send men all the way to Tripoli, so out came the hair cutting kit from the Quartermaster store and yours truly volunteered more out of emergency treatment than anything else. The OC reluctantly agreed, both of us since no one else came forward with the said skills, fears were allayed when it was made known that I'd had some previous experience, Officers being among the first to avail themselves. Thinning scissors were much in demand and some half an inch all over styles then known as a crew cut, and this was some five to six weeks after leaving UK and perhaps another two-three weeks before return.



BROTHER SID, LEFT, ON NATIONAL SERVICE 1949

Back in the base camp around Aldershot, Hampshire, the Squadron enjoyed the more civilised duty hours with most nights, evenings and weekends free, except of course the Guards and various pickets all which were associated with security, this was always the case where most military units served. Continuation training was always the name of the game between the varied exercises and it was also the time when some of the men would be given the opportunity to upgrade their trade ratings and if successful their pay as others maybe attended signals courses, drivers courses and first aid all of which advantageous for those attending Junior Non Commissioned Officers courses, the first rung on promotions ladder.

The annual bridging camp at Weymouth found us sharing the camp and training facilities with men of the Territorial Army Airborne Engineer Regiment meeting their obligations of a two week annual camp, no doubt a good experience for them to serve alongside regular soldiers one would hope that we were a good example. Large Garrison Parades were ordered at least once per year, Airborne Forces day being the regular one plus any others so organised for Royalty and other visiting VIP's, on one occasion the World War II General, General Montgomery said to be in his eighties at the time. The Parachute Brigade would assemble complete with the brigade band and mascot, three battalions and the brigade staff with supporting units if all were available which was rarely possible. The Gunners lined up in batteries, some with field guns plus the headquarters of the unit known as the 7th RHA, the 9th Independent Parachute Squadron of the Royal Engineers, and as the Squadron Sergeant Major I was responsible for the drill and general turnout and of course judged by most accordingly. The 63 Parachute Company of the Royal Army Service Corps, Parachute Company of the Royal Army Medical Corps, a para trained detachment of the Royal Electrical Mechanical Engineers and various other men from a number of assorted units.

## NEW REGIMENT MAKES ITS DEBUT AT PARADE

A NEW regiment—1 Parachute Logistic—made its debut at the Parachute Regt. and Airborne Forces Day parade reviewed by Lt-General Sir Mervyn Butler, Col. Commandant of the Parachute Regt., at Montgomery Square, Aldershot on Saturday.

To highlight the role of the new regiment, which combines all the logistic services, is the only one of its kind in the army and is commanded by Major H. J. Pike, R.A.O.C., the men of 16 Parachute Brigade formed up without it and, on the arrival of General Butler, parade commander Brig. A. H. Farrar-Hockley asked permission for the regiment to march on. They were then reviewed following which a crash of small arms and machine gun fire echoed round barrack blocks as a fusillade was fired.

The shots rippled down the lines of men from the front to the back of the parade for several minutes, then the Browning guns of the scout cars of the Parachute Squadron, R.A.C. each fired a salvo.

The colours of 1 and 3 Battalions, more than 600 officers and men of Parachute Brigade and four gun detachments of 7 Para Royal Horse Artillery, were paraded.

### HIS BATMAN

Pte. A. N. Lowe, of H.Q. Coy., H.Q. 16 Para Brigade, General Butler's batman at the time of Suez, was one of eight who received Long Service and Good Conduct medals, the others being: S.S.M. D. H. Newman (9 Inden. Para Squadron, R.E.), C.S.M. J. Ord (15 Para (V)), C.S.M. R. Rogers (Depot, Para and Airborne Forces), C.S.M. Lancaster (16 Para Bde).

Brigade Provost Unit, C.Sgt. H. Gibson (Depot, Para and Airborne Forces), Sgt. D. R. Harris (7 Para R.H.A.), and Cpl. K. Clarke (Depot Para and Airborne Forces), R.Q.M.S. D. R. Cummins of 7 Para R.H.A. received the M.S.M.

There was a moving moment when the Old Comrades rose Regiment on the sports field. The evening was given over to reunion socials in the Maida from the stands to assemble for a march past—headed by one of the most famous commanders of 2 Bn. The Parachute Regt., Major General John Frost, who led the capture of Arnhem Bridge.

### CLIMAX

The parade was climaxed by a helicopter flypast by 21 Para Squadron, Army Air Corps and a massed band march past.

In the afternoon the Red Devils gave a display on the Sports Field off Farnborough Road, while their colleagues manned sideshows and a "toy town railway" for the hundreds of children present.

Fresh from some spectacular successes at the army parachuting championships at Netheravon the Red Devils lived up to their reputation, for precision landing.

The afternoon's events closed with Beating the Retreat by the massed bands and drums of the Parachute and Normandy Gymnastics with entertainment by the steel band of the 3rd Battalion the Parachute Regt.

On Sunday memorials to airborne formations and units were dedicated at the Royal Garrison Church of All Saints, Aldershot. Plaques were dedicated to numerous British units—and one to the Polish Independent Parachute Brigade.

A plaque in memory of the late Lt. General Sir Frederic Browning, wartime leader of airborne forces, was also dedicated by the Rev. John Burridge, an ex-airborne gunnery officer.

*Below—General Butler pins the Long Service and Good Conduct Medal on his former batman, Pte AN Lowe*



General Butler pins the Long Service and Good Conduct Medal on his former batman, Pte. A. N. Lowe

AN ARTICLE FROM THE ALDERSHOT NEWS



The Colonel Commandant, Lieut.-General Sir Mervyn Butler, inspects the newly formed P<sup>1</sup> parachute Logistic Regiment during the Airborne Forces Day parade at Aldershot.

On one such parade on 5th July 1968 I was one of eight to receive the LS & GC medal (Long Service and Good Conduct) eighteen years of undetected crime as some would say. though looking back quite an achievement and an element of luck for some. I might almost include myself in the latter, since to survive basic training, some four months in the Engineers, men were placed on a charge for such minor offences as needing a haircut, boots not cleaned to the required standard or not having the required thirteen studs in each sole, a button undone on the tunic or a said dirty rifle. All such said offences were placed on the individuals conduct sheet and one had to have a clean conduct after having served for eighteen years and this requirement was strictly adhered to. I had noted prior to and since retirement from the army that the wearing of the ribbon and/or the medal itself attracts some attention and envy.

I understood on leaving the service that certain public service jobs could not be obtained without the award not that such employment would have interested the likes of myself. It is also interesting to note that the princely sum of five pounds Sterling was given as a gratuity to the award holders on retirement from the services personally I had to write and ask for it.

In the late half of 1968 we found ourselves en route for Kenya once again, doing the final preparations for the move in the week before 16th November, a weekend of many tearful goodbyes perhaps.

The Squadron was split into three parties for the flight out, the first arriving at Embakasi at 3.20 a.m. on the 19th Nov. in light rain, going straight to Eastleigh where they charges into uniform and had breakfast before moving on to Mau Narok, getting there just before 6 a.m. The second party arrived Eastleigh at 7 p.m. On the 20th freight arrived from Nairobi. The third party having been delayed in Malta the previous night did not arrive until 7 p.m. 21st Nov., having had to rough it out for the night in Nairobi turned up at the base camp at 4 p.m. apparently all stony broke.

The new camp/home for the next few months did not look very inviting, large timber framed huts covered in corrugated iron, dirt floors and big gaps in the structures at either end, but each had a fireplace built and placed centrally. The whole set up was on a grassed area at the end of a fairly long steep climb up the dirt approach roads well over thousand feet above sea level. By the time the third party arrived the dirt road was becoming rather a problem since it rained heavily all that day.

For a further three days all the men were employed on camp structures making themselves timber beds, tables and seats to get themselves up off the dirt floors and also to get the camp set up for use whilst the Officers went off on a reconnaissance of the tasks ahead, continuing on so we learnt from another Engineer Sqn. (No 8 Sqn) who had done some basic road building. In the same period the Troop Commanders with their section NCO's allocated the individual jobs drew up plans and stores requirements. Plans to make our own concrete culvert pipes was confirmed having secured the steel moulds about two feet six inches (760 mm) in diameter and over three feet (900mm+) in length, far preferable in the long term to the corrugated metal pipes in standard use for the purpose.





Left  
dirt road entrance to Squadron  
base in the Mal Narok Forest 'wet'

Below  
SSM Parade Ground - mud mire of  
a square. A real test even for a  
guards unit



Above  
View of the accommodation huts (old  
forestry huts converted before the rains  
came.

Right  
Plant troop extracting in the mud



The first supposed day of work there was heavy rainfall all day long, efforts were made to get more plant equipment from Nairobi and Nakuru, the troops loaded up, one troop managing to get away the trucks in convoy and taking a D4 caterpillar tractor with them they made it to their camp site, the other was prevented from moving owing to the weather and the proposed route. The remaining troop was felling suitable timber. The motor transport floundered about all day in the mud but most were back in by last light. Plant troop had commenced work on two so called bog areas and then just to add to the overall comfort the generator failed in the evening. Just over half way up the climb to the camp, could have been more, there existed a sawmill and this was made available for Squadron use. The heavy rain continued preventing the other two troops from getting to their work sites with vehicles and requirements.

The work entailed construction of small timber bridges and culverts including head and wing walls and some concrete aprons, sections of corduroy roads (timber log roads) were laid but a couple of these were sabotaged by Africans overnight. The overall object was to open up the Mau Narok Forest area which included quite a lot of open shrub areas and the said idea was to encourage the Africans to become farmers, quite against their nature particularly the Masai Tribe who inhabited the country around about however they did use the roads to drive their cattle along.

The camp water point, we were taking our water from a forest stream, had its problems mainly due to its inexperienced operators, so whilst the process was being rectified we made use of the better water available collected in large drums from various roof run offs. The amount of heavenly water falling was very demoralising for the culvert construction teams. Often seeing their work undermined washed away or turned into bogs The Headquarters camp was awash with thick heavy mud from day one almost eventually turning it into a watery sloshy quagmire, the three ton trucks had, with the help of the larger caterpillars managed initially, to get all the construction requirements rations and fuel to where it was required taking about four times longer than it should on average

Every evening large fires burning logs of over a metre in length were lit to dry out boots, clothing and equipment. The huts would have been perhaps five metres wide and thirty metres long with little end compartments/rooms one of which I occupied.

Working at this altitude proved to be a bit of a problem in the early stages the air being much thinner, but all had been warned about feeling breathless and tired with little effort, time would allow acclimatisation to a point where it would not be noticeable, most adjusted within two weeks albeit with the help of a few organised runs to the sawmill and back. Around the 5/6th December it stopped raining, well almost, all vehicles had experienced bogging and towing in mud and the local police had also taken an interest and were very concerned about the damage being done to the sawmill road despite the OC having closed the road for repairs drainage and drying out for the odd day or two. The Quartermaster bought 70 pairs of rubber boots 'Wellies' about three days before it stopped raining and some of the Squadron Gurus' had said "that'll stop the rain." Myself a day or so earlier on return to base camp up the saw mill road in a Land Rover driven by a Spr McGill became bogged, I had dismounted to have a look and at the suggestion that perhaps we could get on to the lower side grass slope. I said "OK its worth a try". He got out of the mud alright and I told him to keep it going whilst I followed on behind, but he slipped and slid and all so quickly rolled over the edge of an embankment coming to rest some fifteen metres down against trees perched over a steep incline, luckily, apart from bruising and loss of pride and a little skin he was able to walk/climb away from the vehicle. (Note there were no such thing as seat belts.) A couple of others had had their wheels over the edge. The depth of the mud in some instances got the better of 'dozer caterpillars both the D4's and the D6's becoming bogged themselves.

In the first two weeks there I had never ever previously seen such a mess made by an Engineer Squadron, but then 9 Sqn. never did anything in half measures. In hindsight, the work should never have been attempted as there was an extreme amount of stores used and lost for the efforts and results produced in the time. Lessons of the experience not particularly worthwhile, however it may have been seen as a challenge since many of our Engineer masters had been indoctrinated with the belief that if work or a given task can be achieved in the worst conditions, results at other times would be very good. My thoughts turn to my previous experience in Germany in mid-1950's, midnight mid-winter, degrees below zero, mud steel and water, bridging.

On December 7th having been pre-warned and therefore prepared I set off on a recce, of the Masai Mara Game Reserve with three others Cockburn, Lafrenais and Charlton the driver. We arrived at Narok soon after 5 p.m.

having spent three hours travelling the 46 miles from Mau Narok along roads either dusty or very slippery and decided to look at Narok Club, 108 miles further on and the roads just the same we pulled into Keekorok Lodge. Having an introductory/reference letter I met the right people and we were all given a tourist meal and accommodation for the first night plus the use of the bar and showering facilities. The lodge appeared to cater for the very wealthy, all drinks being about 25% up, however we were made to feel very much at home perhaps with some renditions of old army songs appealing to the unfamiliar in the early hours of the 8th.



Keekorok Lodge  
Civilised accommodation during recce of the Masai Mara Game Reserve

A morning  
washdown whilst  
camping along the  
River Mara with an  
armed range warden



An armed range warden was obtained and despite camping being strictly prohibited and in the circumstances we were made the exception, two nights were spent twenty two miles from the lodge just off from the River Mara, dark brown flowing water frequented by hippopotami that we saw a lot of and crocodiles not seen but were said to be around. Under canvas we listened to the after dark animal noises and two large fires were lit, required all night.

The reserve was exceedingly large and very swampy in places, we saw a large variety of animals including elephant, buffalo, hartebeest, wildebeest, rhinos, hyena, lion, mongoose, jackal, warthogs, deer (Elan & Toby) and Thompson Gazelle, birds of all sorts ostrich, vultures and hawks and the odd snake. The reconnaissance was for military purposes not shown here, this is an abbreviation of a report of, rather than a report on, some unusual army adventures.

Back at base the work continued, some roads had been closed, hillside streams having been diverted by deep wheel ruts and supplemented by the odd rain storms became little rivers with large deep spots, with much effort such problems were overcome and the weather started to improve. December 14th the first day of a weekend off for most, soccer against the locals and a wander around Nakuru afterwards, a few drinks and a visit to the local dance hall for some. In the following days' work progressed well and a noticeable improvement in morale, on the 19th a thick white frost greeted all in the early morning which dispersed rather quickly as the sun rose bringing the temperature at midday to 95 degrees 'F', a day on which General Penfold and a Col. Dalton paid a visit to the camp and toured the work sites. There were a few more frosty mornings before Christmas and a report came in that the 9 Sqn. Rd had achieved 64000 feet by the survey team.

Xmas leave for those wishing to take it was three and a half days inclusive travel, and transport took individuals to Mombasa Silver Sands Leave Centre, others went to Nairobi. Kisumu, Nakuru, Eldoret, Katale and Lake Baringo. With the exception of Xmas day all rear parties worked.



Above -Christmas dinner  
bagpipe call with Biddy  
McMillan at 2 troop  
location.

Left - Plant troops remote  
Christmas rear party getting  
stuck into a bit of turkey and  
a beer delivered on the day.  
Sammy Clyde a rather  
overweight member of the  
squadron

Christmas day in the Mau Narok Forest Camp - The guard started early calls for gunfire servers at 0400 hrs. at 0500 myself, a couple of members of the guard and 'Biddy' McMillan with his bag pipes proceeded up country to serve gunfire to the three troops left out in the field. Officers and Sergeants did likewise to those in HQ base camp at 0730 hrs. Xmas dinner was served by the Officers and Senior NCO's at midday drilled by a Sapper Lafferty. Myself once again making an early start to take turkey, fruit, tinned ham and puddings up to the men of the troop rear parties left out in the field, much of Xmas day for myself and driver was spent bumping around over the dirt roads. The unit certainly lived up to the military tradition of the Officers, Sergeants, Staff Sergeants and myself as the Squadron Sergeant Major serving 'gunfire' (rum in large mugs of tea at reveille) and the midday Christmas dinner involving a lot of time effort and organisation for some in a unit that was dispersed such as ours, the cooks having done a magnificent job were all members of the Army Catering Corps and attached to the Squadron often had to rough it and make do.

On boxing day it was back to work, sore heads or not and the culvert making parry continued to turn out more cement culverts in base camp, others tidied up some mess from the previous day - happenings is perhaps the best way to describe it and later in the afternoon the volley ball net was again in use.

The following day work continued and those who had opted for Xmas leave returned. On the 28th a number of men were selected to attend a Masai celebration ceremony at Narok to thank the British army for the work they were doing for the Masai, there were VIPs both black and white long speeches, the O.C. presented with a spear and Officers with three hunting knives, the unit reps were then invited back to the Narok club for what was said to be lunch which some of us tried anyway, fortunately there were a few beers to wash it down, even so there were a few stomach troubles as a result of.

Sunday 29th a local barber arrived and sheared most as they took turns to break off from work and lose their locks, it was a working day for all, on the 30th December the Xmas rear parties or those of them that wanted to, left for the Silver Sands Leave Centre for five days. I cannot recall getting the chance to take leave myself, on the other hand I did get the opportunity to 'swan' around quite a lot (travel around a lot).

1st January 1969 a working and a hangover day, the squadron plant troop dozers were reported to have pushed one and a half miles through the bamboo forest. I actually checked this out by walking the distance whilst on a round of troop visits the Land Rover having gone elsewhere. I had heard talk of a large black cat having been seen in the bamboo so I took a rifle and a few rounds of ammunition with me which I must admit I held at the ready with one up the spout, baboons also travelled about in the area, they had even raided the base camp cook-house on two occasions, on arrival at the No. 2 Troop base they could not believe that I had walked through the bamboo on my own, and it was heard that they said I must be nuts.

2nd January OC described progress on all work sites as excellent

3rd January OC 2 I/C Capt. Walker, the football team and the free fall parachutists all went off to Nairobi, next day leave parties etc all returned to the unit. Colonel Mike Matthews our previous OC arrived a day or so later with his father to visit his old unit whilst on holiday in Kenya.

9th January work, still at it even after a freak hailstorm left up to two inches of large almost half inch hail stones the previous day. Information received that the Wheat Development Authority are now requesting that five large huts are required to be built around the area for accommodation. A Squadron BBQ was held on this day, quite a big affair with all the local farmers being invited and the cooks doing us extremely well on this occasion, the liquid amber flowed in more than ample quantities and sadly some of the men's behaviour towards the end of the evening left more than a little to be desired requiring my intervention.

The 10th and onwards, the work continued on the roads and culverts. Parties from all troops had by then visited the Mari Game Reserve and Keekorok Lodge.

There were no newspapers as such available on the trip so we endeavoured to provide our own to keep all informed with invitations to submit articles etc., humour was by no means lacking and the news sheets always ended with quips, knocks, wits and jokes some examples of which follow:

## Humour

- ❖ After two weeks of work we were four weeks behind schedule (work that one out). Does seven days' work make one weak.
- ❖ On being asked if he had anything humorous for the news sheet a certain cook in the field replied "there's (four letter word) all funny about this place. DTL does not stand for dirty trench lavatory.
- ❖ Micky Finns are traditional drinks for the OC and Sergeant Major.
- ❖ 3 Troop had a leopard in their camp, however it accounts for a missing round.
- ❖ L/Cpl Curtis, the coloured lad running the MI room was called the white doctor by natives.
- ❖ Sapper Cockburn's name should be pronounced correctly
- ❖ The OC. took umbrage at 3 troops beards.
- ❖ Midnight snacks are costly.
- ❖ A certain driver is now known as Roly Poly McGill.
- ❖ OVERHEARD: I'm the Project Officer, well project yourself over the hill out of the flipping way. Well you know where I sleep, No sir I've not had the pleasure. There are far too many flies in the cookhouse Sergeant Major - Oh really sir, how many should there be. Has Lt. Norris volunteered for permanent Orderly Officer.
- ❖ The local farmers are clubbing together to build a road to get us out of here.
- ❖ Caterpillar tractors do not float on mud 3Tp Comd. note.
- ❖ Bamboo cracking in the sun maybe mistaken for rifle shots.
- ❖ With continued predictions of good weather the Prophet Commanding had to be right in the end.

### The Masai Ceremony - "What Was It All About?" by SSM

Members of each troop to the total of 22 were the Squadrons representation invited to attend. A big 'thank you' session for ourselves and to inform the "Mau Narok Council" Africans what we, the British Army, are doing out here ("officially!?!") Mention was made of the 'hardships' we had undergone in the first weeks here, of the families left in the UK. on their own over Christmas, of the highly educated soldiers we are. who laboured and worked with our hands.'

This in particular was meant as a lesson to the Masai, who believe it is below their dignity to work with their hands.

Note: Majority of Africans until recently thought that all Europeans had slaves and never worked themselves.

Tribal performances were very picturesque, but it was thought that the Masai 'stole the show'. We ourselves marched to the area with Biddy and the bagpipes.

Speeches lasted a good two and a half hours, at which all the dignitaries were introduced to the gaily coloured crowd, all down to the 2 IC individually, the rest of us as a group. Presentations were then made, military pers. receiving Maj. Gen. Penfold and OC a spear each, the 2 IC three Masai knives for Captains in the Squadron.

The 'feast' then followed at the Mau Narok Club, consisting of half-cooked high smelling meat and vegetables, served in great big dustbin type containers. This was then washed down with a couple of Tuskers (the African brew.)

Prior to leaving black and white mixed freely. Beard amazed the natives with his strong man act of pulling out his (false) teeth, and then with his finger type tricks, efforts to imitate were more than funny. Much of the day was recorded on continuously clicking cameras, the result of which will be seen around in future.

The event was summed up by one member of the unit who stated "I wouldn't have missed that for anything."

## Facts

From the African standard - Major P.J. Dickson Officer Commanding the 150 officers and men of the Royal Engineers was also made a "Moran" (or should that A be an O?).

A unit barbeque will be held on Thursday 9th January, approximately 50 guests will be attending (best bibs and tuckers are required).

The tune "Land of Hope and Glory" was played for 9 Indep. Para. Sqn. RE or the Kenyan Radio, New Years Eve, paid for by Battken Social Mess. Cost 1051 EAS (this was the highest donation ever received for a record).

On his way to Nairobi hospital the Pay Sgt. was asked what would happen to the squadron's pay problems in his absence. His reply - "my stomach bleeds for them!".

## Smokers Only?

Any takers for the NONSMOKING CLUB?

### Rules

- One pound for a membership card
- Any member caught smoking before returning to UK forfeits membership - - one pound.
- Remaining members share proceeds on return to UK.

Names to sqn. office.

## Who's hard Done By?

- Extracts from the "Sunday Times" magazine on the Russian soldier
- All able-bodied males are conscripted on their 18th birthday for a minimum of 2 years' service.
- A Pte gets three Rubles pocket money per month i.e. 6 bottles of beer.  
NCO's who sign on for extra time get 50-60 Rubles per month  
Master Sgts, are paid 90 Rubles.
- There is no leave for pers. on National Service at all.  
Regular soldiers get one month per year.
- Passes out of Barracks are given to trained soldiers at the discretion of his Sgt. - perhaps 3 a month expiring at midnight. Civilian clothes are not permitted.
- All NS men have their heads shaven.
- Drinking is a very serious offence. Any sign of inebriation means ten days in the guard room.
- The term simple arrest involves the prisoner occupying a cell for several months.
- The need is stressed to love one's commander and defend him in battle! Most bases are in very remote areas (ay, ay!). Soldiers and Officers live entirely apart.

## Silver Sands Leave Centre - Mombasa by Pete (Kershaw Perhaps?)

The camp is situated on the Nyali Beach about two and half miles from Mombasa. It costs 22 shillings per day to stay there with facilities inclusive:

### Meals and Facilities

0700 - 0730 Cup of tea in bed. Laundry collected

0730 - 0830 Breakfast

1230 - 1330 Lunch

1600-1700 Tea

1900 - 2030 Dinner

Clean laundry is returned in the afternoon.

There are 3 bars on the camp which may be used by all ranks and are open normal NAAFI times. There is also a bar on the beach which is open all day until 1830 hrs. The NAAFI shop is open during the day but bottles of spirits cannot be obtained unless special permission is given by the Naval Admin Staff who run

the leave centre. Certain brands of cigarettes are also not available.

### Mombasa

Recommended places to go at night - Star Night Club, Regal Bar, Nelson Day and Night Club, Sunshine Bar and Night Club, Casablanca, Central Night Club, California, New Florida Night Club, Rainbow Bar.

Taxi prices from Silver Sands to Mombasa 10-12 shillings.

For an evening with Class White Trash a visit to the Nyali Beach Hotel is the place to go.

Beer prices vary between 3-4 shillings in bars and night clubs respectively. A few "warmers in the bank" are recommended in one of the bars in the Leave Centre before proceeding down town at night.

A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL OUR READERS.  
Next Edition Saturday 28th December 1968  
Ideas etc. to 2 IC by 1600 hrs. Friday 27th December 1968

As the task taken on were completed towards the end of January the field troops were given further employment building large accommodation huts/sheds as previously

requested by the Wheat Authority. I always appeared to have more than enough to occupy my attention, even though at time taking my turn on the end of a shovel in efforts to keep the main route into our camp open alongside clerks, storemen, off duty cooks and drivers, the only source of labour left in the base camp.

Ever since our arrival at Mau Narok the Officers and Sergeants Messes combined to share the one building available for such a purpose, that is relaxation and dining facilities. The Officer commanding had his own caravan, but otherwise all remaining members of the squadron had the same standard of sleeping/living accommodation and ablutions, the food may have differed a little since both messes chipped in a few extra shillings each week, which was a fairly normal practice. I went back on one occasion to the location of our previous visit to the country, an official visit for some reason or other no longer remembered and took up the opportunity with a reasonable detour to call on Bill Woodley, the Head Game warden.

Towards the end of our time there we held a unit BBQ to which some fifty7 local guests were invited; local farmers, rangers and other VIP's all within a hundred miles or so of the area, maybe more, for good-byes, thank-yous, been nice to know you and all that.

Biddy McMillan  
Keeping the locals attention whilst playing the bagpipes





It could have been the end of February or early March 1969 when we left Kenya en route for Aldershot, loaded, as one would expect with all the usual trophies, carvings being one of, some of which still adorn my home here in Western Australia. I still use a Masia walking stick that I had to cut down to size removing some six inches (150 mm), not that I need a stick, its just been a lifelong habit ever since my teenage years when out walking for relaxation, or just purely enjoyment.

A few weeks leave was taken by all concerned on return to the U.K.

My time with the Squadron was drawing to a close, having been notified in July 1968 that I was to be promoted to Warrant Officer Class One on posting to The Royal School of Military Engineering RE in early April 1969.

Little did I know at the time that I had completed my last overseas trips and field exercises in the army, I guess I never really thought about the future and just lived worked and soldiered on for the present.

The Sergeants Mess members of the Squadron presented me with a silver headed/silver tipped drill cane suitably inscribed to remind me of my time in the 9th Independent Parachute Squadron RE, the only unit of its kind in the British army as far as I was aware, that continued to live up to its longtime earned reputation of being able to compete in most sporting events and military skills as a minor unit against major units very successfully.

The Squadron always had to my knowledge carried out its own pre-parachute training selection course for any new members applying to join the unit, and of course in so doing ensured where possible that there would be no failures (exception injuries) on the Brigade Parachute selection course, that all potential (supposedly) military parachutist (Special Air Service Regiment excepted) had to attend and pass. Supposedly brackets on brackets off since I personally saw quite a few others RAF and other arms for what reason I wouldn't know taking part in some of the vigorous ground training.

Those having gained their wings and wore their red berets as members of the Parachute Brigade were certainly above average soldiers in all respects but this is not to say that there were no like individuals in other arms (excluding Marine Commandos of course) far from it, I have known many unit athletes and sporting types with exceptional high standards and physiques to boot that would be more than a match for most army para's, a few of the latter learnt such a lesson in the pub-type quarrels around and away from Aldershot.

Sometime prior to leaving the Para Squadron I was asked to report to the Officer Commanding in his office, and met the second in command on my way in. After the normal complimentary salutations I was invited to take a seat and during the course of an informal chat, the question was popped "had I ever considered a commission" rather out of the blue and quite unexpected, and I guess my answer was given without or perhaps little thought, "not seriously, no I had thought the experience as a Regimental Sergeant Major would probably suit me better to consider such a future". An answer that with prior knowledge of, thought, discussion or consideration might not have been given, however thinking back, it quite likely finalised my career path there and then.

I had many months previously, prior to the Kenyan exercise moved my wife and three sons back to Cliffwoods in Kent where I had bought the bungalow, so that there would be an easy transition to my new unit as the RSM.



Our three sons  
Paul, Nigel and Wayne  
at home Cliffwoods, Kent

Leave over I soon found myself on the No. 3 RSM's. course at Brompton Barracks, prior to the No. 1 like course it appeared that there had been no formal instruction or prepare: - for the position of RSM, I guess somewhere along the line it had been found that incumbents of that rank had been found to be lacking in what they were expected to have knowledge of. Personally I found the course informative and certainly of benefit. Probing deeper into military law, organisation of the corps and its future as seen at the : customs and traditions and the changing order of promotions. Very early on sexier: tempered with the said right characteristics, then later same again tempered with skids. up to the then present time of, skills tempered with seniority and a very good educate: level. The recruitment of suitable potentials for commission from the ranks, to fall in line with the new technical forces requirements.

The highlights of the course as I saw it:

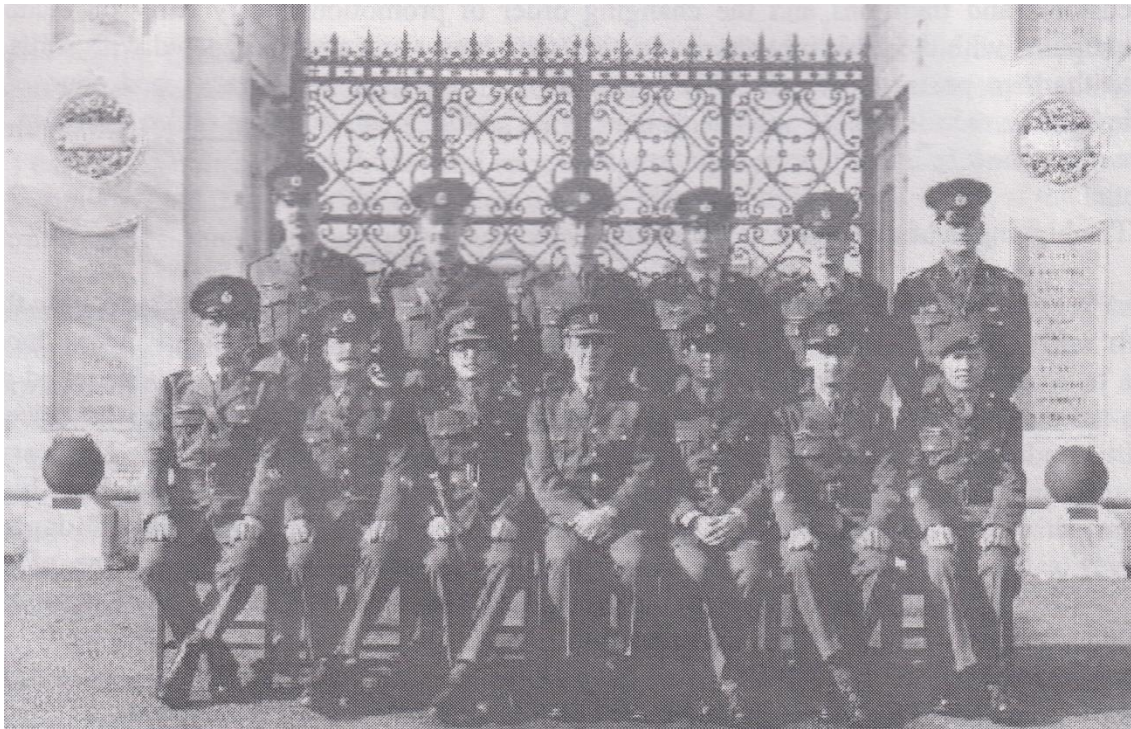
- a) A visit to the underground chambers/galleries in highly secured vaults to view the Corps treasures and trophies, the Corps Headquarters Officers Mess having responsibility for same. Solid gold in all forms of shapes and sizes decorated with diamonds, emeralds and opals beyond one's imagination described as priceless beyond calculation, and very many pieces a hundred plus years old. The story of one such piece has it that the artist a Russian, who designed and created one highly valued intricate work piece had a hand chopped off so that he could not dedicate his masterpiece. One may now pose the question, what is to become of such treasures with the army being decimated almost on an annual basis, now some thirty years on at the time of writing.
- b) A visit to the Royal Engineer records office. What goes on from recruits to retired pensioners and before and after these times of the individuals. Each member of the course after some informative lectures was handed his own file for perusal and interest. I was quite surprised with some of the detail, in a nutshell I found I was a potential non-commissioned officer before I had actually signed on as a volunteer for army service in the Royal Engineers. As soon as I had expressed interest in serving, checks were made on my background, family schooling, post school interest and work experience. There were school reports in brief, notes on house vice-captain, school prefect and sporting attributes, these were all plus marks as was the fact that I had joined the sea cadets, passed courses and gained promotion. I had felt that my work experience had been anything but exceptional except the glowing reference from my last employer prior to joining up. It was all there including progress and achievements during service, most would never know of such records particularly then.

I returned to the Squadron to complete my time there living in the Sgts. Mess during the week and returning to my family at the weekends. There was little happening at the time apart from military, domestics, getting all the ledgers and equipment up to scratch. The men were occupied on revision training or small unit courses, fitness

and sports. I continued on with camp security duties and general discipline, tidied up my office affairs ready for hand-over, got myself some decent uniforms, re-badged, a new peak cap and generally prepared myself for the move. I asked for and received a little more leave prior to moving on, there was no hand-over of duties and who was to be my relief I did not know.

NUMBER 3 RSM'S COURSE - LATE 1968

BROMPTON BARRACKS, KENT



## CHAPTER 11

### Royal School Of Military Engineering RE

I reported in to the Adjutant of the Regimental Headquarters of No. 12 Royal School of Military Engineering Regiment Royal Engineers, then based at Chattenden Barracks, Chattenden, near Rochester in Kent on 9th April 1969 to take up the duties of the Regimental Sergeant Major. I had a brief introduction with the Commanding Officer and the Second in Command of the Regiment and was then shown to my office to be introduced to Ilene, my own young female clerk come typist. As one would expect she appeared very knowledgeable about all that went on in the Regiment and soon produced a list of responsibilities undertaken by the office, all appeared organised and I was immediately relieved of any concerns I'd had about the new role in life. My predecessor had left so again no hand over as such. I made my way around the RHQ offices, introducing myself to the mainly civilian staff who, with one exception, were all female asking of their duties and what connections if any were with my office.

Daily dress at the Royal School of Military Engineering.

(Wayne wanted his picture taken with Dad)



Working with women in the army was a new experience for me, not by any means difficult, strange perhaps, unsoldierly maybe but certainly different. One no longer demanded one requested, one no longer ordered one asked, please and thank you were the norm and 'or else' was out. A new job, a new era, the men only world of real soldiering had come to an end in that little domain anyway, but it was different and had to be different outside the office. Discipline was still one of the main responsibilities although rather more indirect than it had previously been.

I had never been in the habit of using bad/foul language although my ears had been singed by some many times by superiors as I had made my way up the promotional ladder. I had never found that such a way of speaking was necessary in the execution of my military duties, it was however a way of communicating by some from certain parts of the country and made the more genteel ears cringe with embarrassment. However times were a changing, men were complaining about getting short haircuts, working at weekends, and what was termed as excessive 'bull' in their living accommodation (nothing compared to earlier times). It had also become an offence under military law to use foul language in dealing with subordinates in carrying out ones duty, but since as many

would know, the four letter expletive and its associated derivatives were part of the common communication skills of many, and accordingly those like myself in supervisory or management rolls would have to make premature judgements as to whether the use of same was in fact an offence, not the actual words used but the manner in which they were expressed.

Incidentally, some years after army life, I learned that the infamous four letter word was in fact an abbreviation that had originated very early on in the law courts of the country and as used by the law clerks of the time. Sexual offences were and have been since the more predominant reasons of breaking the law and one particular phrase was in constant use - for unlawful carnal knowledge, hence the first letter of each word formed the word used in written reports etc. as an abbreviation. So in reality no one was swearing, but it did not sound nice to the old Victorian ladies and has been accepted in higher society as being offensive ever since. True -1 would not know but it sounds feasible

Within a few days of my start date, having assessed an appropriate day and time, I requested the presence of all the Warrant Officers Class I on the strength of the unit and those using the mess. There were twelve in number who appeared seated before me representing the various schools and departments. Wings. Squadrons, whatever. I thanked them for their attendance and introduced myself being well aware that I was quite likely the junior WO Class I of them all. although also aware holding the senior position as the RSM of the Unit and President of the very large Warrant Officers and Sergeants Mess of some one hundred and fifty members including forty Warrant Officers Class II. I'd hoped to get to know them all and asked for their support, expressing a wish to work with as applicable, and if there were any conflicts of interests I'd like to discuss them and to always consider my door open. I held the floor for the best part of an hour, during which tea/coffee and biscuits were served as arranged and took note of the few comments raised. I already knew two of those present having served with them previously, one of whom stated later that the meeting was very much appreciated and he'd heard the comment that I had started on the right foot.

The unit strength varied anywhere from 800-900 plus depending on the courses run and the student numbers attending, excluding the Bomb Disposal Unit, an Independent Squadron in all respects. Civilian staff were quite numerous holding down employment as cleaners, gardeners, kitchen hands and cooks, storemen, sports groundsman, mess staff, waiters and barmen, clerks and typists, guard dog handlers wearing the uniforms of the constabulary, and executive administration officers, all of which were open to and occupied by some retired ex-servicemen.

Parades as such were rare for the likes of myself, personal dress was according to seasonal orders and had to be exemplary as expected of the rank and position held, with spare dress e.g. shoes, Wellington boots, raincoat, no. 2 dress and mess dress kept in my own room in the mess accommodation block where I could retreat to solitude if and when required. The WO'S and Sgt's mess was large with a very modern outlook, I was the second RSM. to 'reign' as it were since the barracks opened and completion was still underway in many respects. Much time was spent carrying out inspections of buildings and their areas to be kept clean by the occupants or the cleaning staff so allocated

#### Unit Guard Dog Kennels

Section Cpl K. Borthwick  
and L/Cpl Godber with  
Champion UK Guard Dog  
'Prince'



The unit received many VIP visitors, some from overseas military forces. We ran young officer training courses, we, since I took my place as an instructor on same. Students worldwide attended the various courses available there. I had a keen interest in the guard dog section of twelve dogs, Alsatians/German shepherds, and assisted in some of the training, the section being one of my direct responsibilities. For two of my years with them we had the UK guard dog champion 'Prince' ably handled by L/Cpl Godber, such champions were chosen at varying locations in the country at military dog trials held every year.

Generally I was left to carry out my duties and responsibilities as I saw fit and since I had a full time clerk/typist the office was always open and attended. The relief from office work very much to my liking, although some confidential reports etc. had to be in my own hand as and when required. One particular daily chore was the reading of all duty reports. Orderly Officers, Sgts, Guard Comds.. Dog Handlers. Training Guard Picquets, Provost, odd reports from the Garrison Military Police and Civil Police and then follow up where required. Orderly Sgts, were briefed daily by myself to carry out whatever checks I thought were necessary at any time around the clock.

My time was fully occupied from 8 a.m. onwards daily and with the extracurricular activities, sometimes starting at 6.30 a.m. and very often going on late into the night. As Officer OI/C in charge of soccer and running the regimental soccer team, hence the early starts road runs or whatever, interested temporary students were invited to attend training and often made up the numbers. My only aim was to provide fitness, skills were selected from the ever changing personalities as students came and left. There was a regular cadre of five or six from the permanent staff being the backbone of the unit team. For the whole regiment I organised sports grounds, referees paying them when required, purchased shorts, shirts, balls, boots, liaised with groundsmen on the maintenance of posts, nets and ground preparations, transport for away matches, refreshments and showers for visiting teams, bought unit trophies and maintained the unit display cabinet, all funds coming from the unit PRI.

Lunchtimes I was often found to be in the unit gymnasium, playing badminton or working out on the trampoline with some of the unit instructors. More evenings than not were spent at the barracks where my presence was required at various meetings, WO's and Sgts, general, committee, and living in members and likewise the Cpls. Mess, all of which attendance was compulsory unless excused for why, games evenings versus all messes including the officers and other unit messes.

There were general social evenings, dances and quarterly mess dinner nights, course break up parties and invites to other corps messes. The position found me nominated in an official capacity on other committees, one, the Royal Engineers Association met at the Union Jack Club in London twice a year and I remember voting to continue paying an allowance to an elderly widow whose husband, an ex-corps member was killed in World War I some 55 years earlier, this was but one of many unusual cases. Applications for assistance came from far and wide, genuine and outrageous, even with further information sought more than half were rejected.

Personal fitness was maintained knowing and feeling the value of doing so. Each year the annual efficiency test,

the physical one, came around and as a base waller in a military school of learning, there were officially no exceptions for eligible members of the permanent staff, in RHQ all were routed out of their little warm seats for the event. At age 35 most would opt out there being something to that effect in regulations. However I felt that all combat leaders should do everything that they expect their men to do and if anything do it better, this in my book applied to all NCO's Junior, Senior, Warrant and Commissioned Officers too, but there, there were just as many laggards as elsewhere, despite my verbal attempts with some commissioned Officers. At age 40, 41, 42 the annual test was completed fully equipped with men of one of the Squadrons, 10 miles in two hours etc. Many were egged on with my attendance, some determined to finish ahead but that was fine, setting the starting pace I came in usually behind perhaps thirty with the remainder following that I backtracked to with encouragement to keep the pace going and then coached them in their shooting and further efforts, all part of the test. Enjoying that type of activity I joined in with the other two squadrons when they set out to complete the annual requirements, still wearing the SAS wings one had to uphold the standards, especially for an old guy at the tender age of 40 plus as one is considered to be in the army.

After the first year there was a change of Adjutant and Commanding Officer and also about that time the WRAC (Woman's Royal Army Corps) moved into barracks under the command of a Captain "Ma'am" and two Sgts, mainly drivers and support staff as far as was aware. At RHQ trouble was expected although not officially, personally I initially thought it not to be a very good idea to have young females living within the barracks with no barriers or restraints apart from printed words published in Regimental Orders, but we were pleasantly surprised, incidents were few or else kept very quiet (what the eye does not see etc.) however not all things could be concealed and a few girls were discharged for obvious reasons. I did on occasion visit the WRAC living quarters with the Commanding Officer for official inspections, an eye opener to say the least, to find beds made down teddy bears and mascots, pictures and posters, no military apparel on show with the exception of shoes under the beds. It could have been a high school girls dormitory, however that was their standard, neat would have been the highest rating although the CO commented that it was satisfactory he was obviously not impressed. I later spoke with the two Sgts, on the subject who stated that all graffiti had been removed and the toilet blocks scrubbed and a lot of effort had been put in on the accommodation block giving rise to thoughts as to what they may have been like prior to the inspection. Having been requested to pursue the matter quietly via suggestions and requests I disagreed as is the prerogative of an RSM in some matters and asked why we should have two standards, one for the men and one for the women, a question never answered and never resolved. Reports of couples did emerge in duty reports, and one that I remember well of a Warrant Officer who caught a couple on the floor of the unit bus in throes of passion, as he recorded, when asked what he said to them he replied by saying "I told them to be careful and not get any grit in it Sir."



12 RSME REGIMENTAL SOCCER TEAM

THE MID KENT AND CHATHAM WEDNESDAY FOOTBALL LEAGUE

The final table for season 1970-71 is below:

	P	W	D	L	GOALS		POINTS
					FOR	AGAINST	
12 RSME Regt	18	18	0	0	71	12	36
Sheerness Co-op	19	17	1	1	81	30	35
Gravesend Postals	20	11	3	6	80	34	25
Gravesend Customs	20	11	2	7	65	43	24
London Tugs	21	9	4	8	58	62	22
Royal Arsenal CS	22	7	5	10	55	80	19
Meidstone District	16	7	4	5	29	25	18
Bowaters A	16	8	1	7	41	33	17
Thamesview	18	7	3	8	35	37	17
Imperial Paper M	19	4	4	11	40	66	12
Bourne Hillers	22	3	5	14	38	81	11
Medway Postals	20	2	4	14	27	68	8
Bowaters B	19	1	4	14	37	86	6

On the private side of life I was served with a compulsory purchase notice by the local council who required almost two yards/meters of my side garden for its entire length adjacent to the dirt roadway that led up to the woodlands where a lot of squatter weekend shacks were located. The price was said to be negotiable and as part of the conditions I asked that a low brick wall two feet higher than the proposed finished pavement surface be built with spaced pillars to support a timber screen fence. Having been told that I drove a hard bargain, some of my prized shrubbery and garden was churned over, the ground compacted and the work duly completed only to have two brick pillars collapse some months later. After much strife and time the pillars were rebuilt the new road and pavement completed and I had backyard privacy that previously did not exist.



Improvements to the barracks were still taking place, at one stage being asked to comment on a plan to construct concrete pathways in the barrack area, disagreeing with the planned alignment I offered an alternative i.e. to place the pathways where the men already walk, the shortest and most direct route between the accommodation, dining halls and canteen. Unknown to me at the time the Regimental Quarter Master had submitted a like idea, which was eventually accepted upsetting the Adjt. who had apparently drawn up the original. Actually I found him a difficult Officer at times to work with, way behind the times, guess that would be an obvious comment from the likes of myself since I had been considered to be way ahead of times in some quarters.

Memories recall my being called to his Office (the Adjt.) overlooking the square, to be asked "what's that man doing on the Square RSM?." Looking out of the window, I said "walking across it Sir," to laughter from other occupants of the office. I was instructed to get his name and take action. I replied "no Sir, it has already been published that the square is out of bounds when in use for instructional purposes and as you are aware one end is now used for car parking and the square is not now in use to my knowledge." After an embarrassing quiet of some few seconds I walked out.

The office girls later related a little incident which I now feel worthy of a few words since it confirms an earlier remark. The Adjt. had watched an individual, obviously a new course student walking across the square with all his bedding, having just drawn it from the bedding store, in pouring rain and then bawled at him from his office window to "go back and walk around the square". The only way some officers could exercise authority but losing much respect from civilian staff and soldiers alike, many old soldiers would remember such wooden top attitudes and so called discipline.

Continuing on with my Para, squadron experience, many minor disciplinary matters were dealt with in my office and went no further concerning senior NCO's and the odd WO that needed a reminder, junior ranks all dealt with at Squadron level unless the offence's committed were of a serious nature requiring the CO's attention. Commanding Officers orders, as they were known were quite infrequent. On occasions reasons saw it fit for partners of soldiers to be disciplined, not quite the right word perhaps, but certainly dealt with in my own formal manner, mainly squabbles or annoyance within married quarters or rather more rarely, unsavoury behaviour unbecoming that of a lady, the latter in one instance resulting in my having to ban a senior mess members wife from attending the mess.

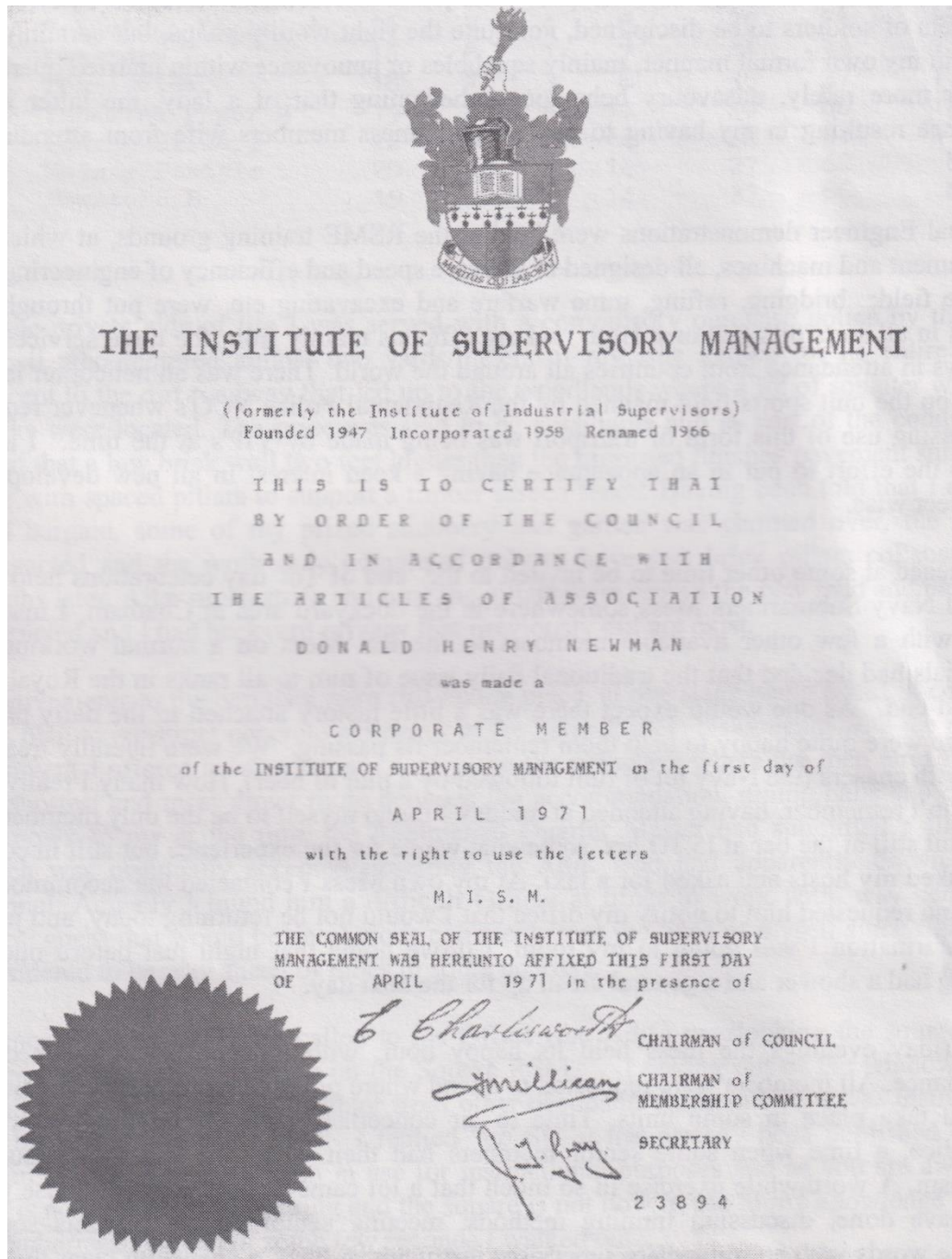
Annual Engineer demonstrations were held at the RSME training grounds, at which new equipment and machines, all designed to increase speed and efficiency of engineering in the field; bridging, rafting, mine warfare and excavating etc. were put through their paces in all sorts of situations. High ranking officials mainly from the three services were always in attendance from countries all around the world. There was a helicopter landing zone on the unit sports field manned by the Regimental Police NCO's whenever required. Increasing use of this form of transport was being made by VIP's at the time. I always made the effort to put in an appearance having a keen interest in all new developments engineer wise.

Privileged at some other time to be invited to the 'end of Tot' day celebrations held at the Royal Navy Submariners Mess somewhere in the dockyard area at Chatham. I made my way with a few other available members to the RN Mess on a normal working day. Officials had decided that the traditional daily issue of rum to all ranks in the Royal Navy should end. As one would expect there was a little history attached to the daily practice and we were quite happy to help them remember its passing. We were liberally treated to tots with chasers (the Navy tot of rum followed by a pint of beer). How many I really had I wouldn't remember, having attended at midday I found myself to be the only member from my unit still at the bar at 15.30 hrs. somewhat worse for the experience but still in control. I thanked my hosts and asked for a taxi. At my own Mess I contacted the accommodation Sgt. and requested him to notify my office that I would not be returning today, and just for his information I was going to my room. I drove home that night just before midnight having had a shower and a general clean-up for the next day.

On Friday evenings the mess held its happy hour, with reduced prices to encourage attendance. All members were requested to attend where possible rather than being ordered as did take place in some units. Time to air concerns, opinions and grudges without prejudice, a time when some senior members had their ears bent and maybe suffered criticism. A worthwhile exercise in so much that a lot came to light that otherwise would not have done, discussing training methods, meeting senior course students socially, private words with an

immediate supervisor instructor or boss, a chance to clear the air or some misunderstanding even anonymous reports. Many stayed on for a few hours after, but since the military five-day working week had long been established many had to get away for the weekends where possible and this was accepted, prior notification was appreciated and the Squadron Sergeant Majors kept me informed.

Study had been undertaken as and when time permitted in furtherance to enhance military experience on the subject of Supervisory Management, all in preparation of, hopefully, suitable after service life employment. Eventually making the grade and being awarded Corporate Membership of the Institute of Supervisory Management.



Security was a problem almost from the time of my arrival at the unit, students taking their place in turn on such duties in their normal off duty time, there was also a serious threat from the IRA, unit guards for the barracks area, random mobile picquets for the outlying schools and training areas, the all-important ammunition and explosives compound area guarded by dog patrols, the latter in addition to the regular untimed visits by the unit Orderly Officer. I often made night time visits myself, though unlike the OO visits to the main entrance I made

my entry by scaling the high exterior brick walls rarely getting very far without a challenge “halt or I will release my dog”. Just the threat of the IRA kept all concerned on their toes. Communication with the Civil and military Police often practised.

Married quarter areas were inspected infrequently, there being block or area leaders to advise and or control and some quarters, with previous notice given, inspected. The actual term 'inspection' never really applied, it was more of a welfare visit to ask if all was satisfactory and were there any complaints. Conversation often led to an invitation to look the home over, not always accepted as time was always at a premium, some gardens were neglected whilst others were pride and joy to the occupants, advice given when required to help keep all residents happy either by myself or the Commanding Officer diplomatically.



Above - The family prior to going out (note the shoe shine)

Right - Paul and Nigel all ready for school



Above – On holiday in Spain

Left – Enid all prepared for an evening in the Warrant officers and Sergeants Mess

The family had become very well established in the area around the small bungalow that I had bought. I had made some improvements to the dwelling having had a central heating system via radiators installed, double glazing, enclosed the front porch and built another on the back door and constructed a sunroom adjacent to the lounge in the back garden. There seemed to be little private spare time there however I managed to keep the garden tidy and grass neat.

The two eldest boys. Paul and Nigel, were doing well at school or so we had been led to believe there being three and a half years between them. Young Wayne was beginning to make his presence felt in the many ways that young boys do. We kept a family pet 'Teddy' a Keeshond or that's how it's pronounced, owned previously by one of the regimental guard dog handlers, many of whom came our way whilst exercising the guard dogs, our private residence being a watering point en route. I had on many occasions walked through the woodlands up past the Cliffwoods squatters huts, many of them weekenders, through the blackberry fields where many pounds of fruit were gathered for family use on my way to the Barracks at Chattenden, sometimes for a pint in the mess on a Sunday.

Many civilian staff for whom I was indirectly responsible were employed in the WO's and Sgts, mess mainly in the many mundane but none the less important jobs, although one or two held very responsible positions looking after the mess needs, cash flow etc. Peggy Lambome had worked for many years in the bar assuming the top job when I had to dismiss the top man after it was proven that he had his 'fingers in the till', but surprisingly he remained in government employment being transferred to another unit department, but none the more for that his reputation went with him.

The head cook had plenty of rope in the way he operated, he was questioned on his purchasing and up front ordering of supplies, as catering for such a large number of living in members that would fluctuate weekly, perhaps daily, could have been a concern if return figures from RHQ differed greatly from those as given to the Accommodation Sgt., they rarely agreed for various reasons. He explained that on occasion, often at weekends, there were consumables available that were perishables. The situation was understood and I suggested that with some careful forethought and planning such wastage could be kept to a minimum not wishing to get involved in the latter process. I heard via private letter writing after I'd left the army that he had had too much rope for his own good which landed him a lengthy holiday in Her Majesties civil departments. The PMC President of the Mess Committees was also obligated to oversee the general running of the mess as part of his duties, it was he in fact who caught the gent with his 'fingers in the till', the PMC of larger messes usually fell to those holding Warrant Officer Class II status and was for a period of months as set out in the mess rules.

The Commanding Officer on occasion would call me in to discuss discipline and standards of dress within the unit, it was a difficult one as the various schools would have their own. I didn't see it as a problem I had good co-operation from the SMI's. Warrant Officers Class I I/C, they and their instructors and students dressed according to the work in hand in like uniform and even head dress discarded if it was appropriate with discipline and respect being maintained where due. He, the CO, did at one time ask me to have a word with a certain sergeant he had seen in town wearing a greatcoat undone and using a pace stick as a walking stick, everyone knew him, Sgt. Rolstone a man in his thirty fifth year of service, in fact he was still acting Sgt. paid Corporal the same as he was when I first met him: him seventeen years earlier when he issued me with my Sgts, mess bedding on my Grade 1 Field Engineering Course and still being employed in the same capacity, he served for a very long time on the Regimental Police at Brompton Barracks where he apparently made a name for himself. One wonders about recommendations of careers to fifty five, there's a dramatic increase in pensions for those able to do so.

Nominated as RSM for Garrison Parades - There were three Regiments within the - School of Military Engineering, No. 10 RSME Regt. RE, No. 11 RSME Regt. RE and 12 RSME Regt. RE. Between them most military engineer skills were taught, most since there are other trades/skills best taught elsewhere, stevedores, railway squadron operators and diving to mention just three, all encompassing a field of knowledge that was constantly expanding to keep up with the times.

Garrison parades were held annually at a time to include the REA (Royal Engineers Association) at their weekend get together, my presence required as Parade RSM on two occasions in the three years that I spent with No. 12 Regt. There would have been around 1200 men on parade including the RE band and the veterans, quite a large parade but the acoustics were good on the ample space of the main Brompton square aided by the tall buildings on three sides.

Administration and planning of the event was more involved than the parade itself with a lot of behind the scenes personnel all doing their own little bits. Marching to the beat and music of a military band certainly takes the boredom away from such ceremonies and all who have taken part in such parades will generally admit to feeling a bit of pride when passing the saluting base, more so I'm sure for all the old timers. With the exception of the veterans, on dismissal the men were marched away under their respective SSM's. For the vets the official excuse for the weekend over they could then get down to other reasons for attending, the social side to meet old comrades in the various messes and canteens opened for the purpose.

Life continued on each year much the same as the previous one, carrying out all the duties as outlined in the following "Responsibilities RSM 12 RSME Regiment" now reproduced here for interest since many, I would imagine wondered what an RSM does all day, my own experience of course as duties would obviously vary from unit to unit.

RESPONSIBILITIES RSM 12 RSME REGIMENT

Serial	Duties	Involving
1	Regimental Police	Escorts for: Pay, Chimney Sweeps, Absentees, Upkeep of various Register Books, Employment of RCPs, Manning of Guardroom, Reception of Students, Maintain Guardroom, all Parade Equipment and Flags, Man Helicopter LZ as required.
2	Offr IC of War Dog Sections	Security duties: Explosive Compound, Bomb Disposal, Administration, Training, Courses, Displays, Liaison with RAVC Schools, Strength <i>Reviews</i> .
3	Unit Fire Officer	Fire Orders, Piquets, Practices covering Lodge Hill Trg Area, Barracks and Explosive Compound, Maintenance of all Fire Appliances (100) approx, Liaison with Local Fire Brigade.
4	Unit Gymnasium	Control of Instructors, Allocations and Cleanliness of.
5	Private Vehicles Register	Maintenance of: Unit Parks, Parking Offences, Removal of Wracks, Tracing Owners, Liaison with Police.
6	Unit Recreational Grounds 4 Soccer Pitches, 1 Rugby Pitch, 2 Cricket Pitches. 6 Tennis Courts, 1 Hockey Pitch, Athlete Trg Areas	Liaison with Groundsman, Allocation of, Control of use/misuse, Liaison Unit Sports Reps, Cleanliness of Pavilion.
7	Married Quarters	Block Leaders Roster, Complaints from/about occupants, Cleanliness of Areas, CO's Inspections.
8	Unit Cleaning Areas	Allocation and Inspection of, Instructions to SSMs, Barrack Sign Posting/Notices.
9	President of Sgts Mess	Control of Committee via Advice, Instructions, Control of Civilian Staff, Accommodation Inspections, Chair all Meetings, Check on Expenditure and Maintenance of Order.

Serial	Duties	Involving
10	President of Junior Banks Club	Chair Meetings, Give Advice, Discipline and Control of Entertainment, Duty Members Roster, Check Daily Reports, Check Expenditure.
11	Health/Hygiene Visits	Arrange Escorts, Liaison with Departments, Action on Reports.
12	Military Training	Drill Programmes, Young Officers and WOs/SNCOs in conjunction with CO's Trog Directives, Military Law, Garrison Parades, HQ Physical Trog.
13	Unit Refuse Dump	Control of use, Cleanliness of Areas, Control of Scrap Merchants, Liaison with PWA on Clearance.
14	Bolant Control	Barrack Areas, Quarters, Stores, Kitchens, Messes, Instructions to Bolant Operators.
15	Orderly Officers, Orderly Sergeants Roster	Maintain, Amend, Publish, Brief Orderly Sergeants Daily.
16	Commanding Officers Orders and Interviews	Arrange, Publish and Organise, Correspondence Ref Offenders, Personal Documents.
17	Officer IC Soccer	Run Minor Units League 8 Teams, Regimental Team in 2 Leagues, Organise Grounds Referees, Transport, Refreshments, All Correspondence, Maintenance, Allocation and Purchase of Kit, Attend Meetings, and all Regimental Matches, General Trainer, Assist Minor Unit Weekend League, Paying of Officials Fees, Purchase and Engraving of Trophies, Spending on a Limited Budget.
18	Garrison Rep of Corps Sports and Games Committee	Attendance at Bi-annual Meetings, To allocate Corps Funds to various Sports and also Correspondence.
19	Garrison Rep Union Jack Club London	Advertise the Club, attend Annual Meetings at Club.

Serial	Duties	Involving
20	Assistance to Local Charities National Collections	Advertise via Posters, Distribution/Collection of Collection Boxes, Man Power Assistance, Misc Letters.
21	Arrange - Organise Visits	Car Parking for, Assistance, Guides, Escorts, Clerks, Blood Donors, X-Rays, Official Military etc.
22	Liaison with Schools, EOD and Squadrons	Regimental Instructions, Demonstrations, Displays, End of Course Discussions.
23	Security	Assist Second-in-Command, Liaison SSI's, Guards, Piquets, Barrack Lighting, Civilian Watchmen, Additional Duties as required.
24	Commanding Officers Inspections - Visits	Arrange, Accompany, Quarters, Barracks, Minor Units/Areas.
25	Liaison with The Depot Regt and HQ RSMC	Attend Conferences, Garrison Parades, HQ WOs and Sgts Mess.
26	Duty Reports	Read Daily - Orderly Officers and Sergeants, Guard Commanders, Duty Dog Handlers and 12 Club Members, Security Check Book, Telephone Message Book, Daily Incidents Books.
27	Returns/Office Routine	Orders, Briefs, Garrison and Command, DGI's, Misc Mail, Nominal Rolls, Students and Permanent Staff, Strength Returns, Accommodation and Messing SNOs.
28	Visits to Training Areas	For interest to Students when possible.
29	Other Banks Barrack Discipline	Whole Area roughly 6 square miles, Liaison with RHP, SIB, regarding Thefts, Uniformity of Dress and Standards.
30	Unit Dog Register	Recording of Applications for CO's approval, Register of Owners and complaints about.
31	Regimental Functions	All normal ones over Year, Dinners, Dances, Parties, Mess Formal Dinners during Year.
32	Social Functions	Invited to many Course Parties, Attend where possible all Social Functions, plus invitations from other Units.

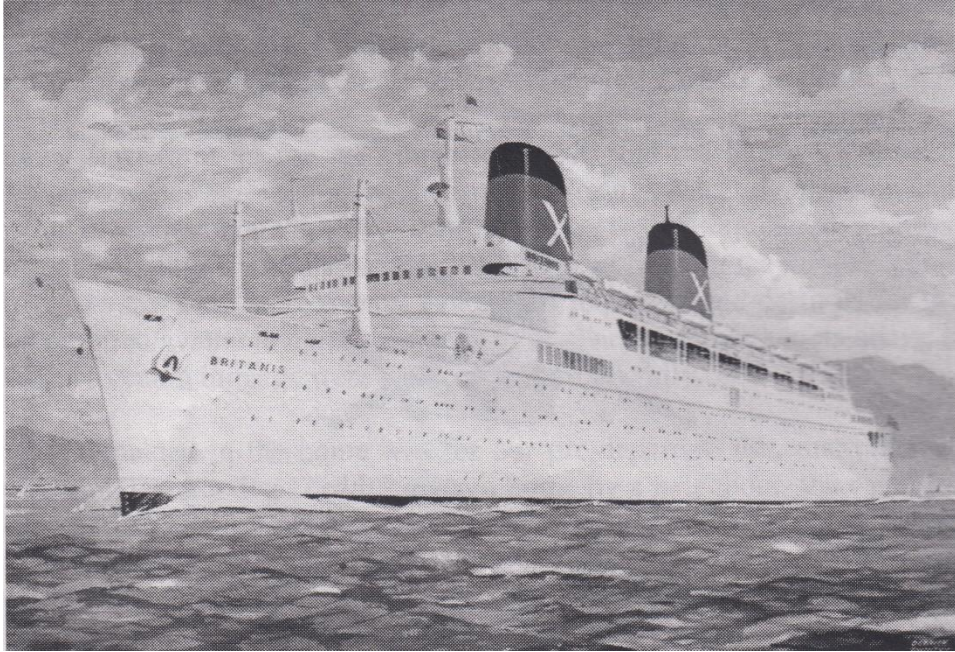
Towards retirement I was given the option of attending a resettlement course held in London under the auspices of the Department of Labour. Working on the principle of nothing ventured nothing gained, another experience, I accepted and attended course No. 69 of four weeks duration held at 160 Great Portland St. London W. 1. from 18th October 1971. Thirty four attended all WO's and SNCO's from the Army, Navy, Marines and Airforce. The syllabus covered the following subjects: Supervision in Industry, Cost Control, Work Study, Industrial Organisation, Communications and Accident Prevention, all designed apparently to prepare ourselves for the transition to civilian life and work. A booklet listing all attendees and a profile on each with the preferred area of employment was sent to all potential employers who were able to interview students at any time during the course, with the exception of a few enquiries none to my knowledge made contact. I did get a postal offer of a job in a factory producing number plates without even facing up for an interview. I had previously studied for, and passed an examination, to become a member of the institute for supervisory management and thus entitled to use the letters MISM on personal letter heads etc.

Regardless - ideas to emigrate to New Zealand had already been discussed at home, however on return to my unit I resumed normal duties for a short while and then took up on an offer from a brother Warrant Officer at the plant roads and airfields school. On asking the CO if I may take advantage of some practical plant experience at the PR and A school each afternoon, he agreed as long as my duties otherwise were covered, that was no problem I could organised that at short notice, and did so informing the Adjt. of my intentions. I received instruction on D8 'dozers, graders and various other plant equipment and then left to practice on my own in the churned up training area receiving check visits and tips from whoever was available on staff in the area. Many months earlier I had obtained a 'B' class licence with some practical refresher experience on driving ten ton trucks and up to date tuition on facts and figures, rules and regulations from the MT Sqn.

Christmas 1971 soon loomed up and quite a few evenings prior to were spent chasing up the organisation of events over the festive season, including an evening out with the unit dog handlers, Cpl Borthwick and his crew, the wrist watch they had all contributed to is still in my possession. The usual Christmas lunch in the traditional way was organised for the unit rear party it was also rather larger than usual owing to the threat of the IRA at the time.

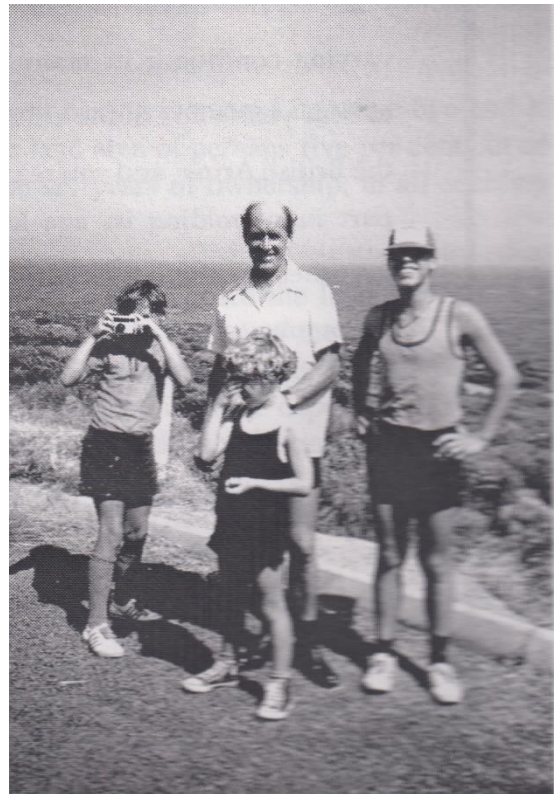
During the first week of 1972 I began to tidy up my military affairs, the office being no problem with Ilene in control. A Regimental mess dinner, a farewell one in my honour was held, the exact date I had thought I had recorded somewhere. My relief arrived soon after, a room associate of my younger Sergeant days in Germany, Paddy Haslett probably I would think, well known in most units he had served in. A couple of days were spent in his company doing the rounds, meanwhile some of the RSM duties already handed out to other sources, O I/C soccer to a commissioned Officer, SSM's to run their own dog and car registers to mention a couple. I cleared up my 1157 (an army form allocating clothing footwear equipment and various other items to soldiers) with the RQMS a Warrant Officer in charge of the quarter master stores and then granted leave from the 15th January-12th February 1972, the last day being my official release from the army having served 22 years pensionable service.

Careers to 55 years of age had been discussed some twelve months earlier, but as my immediate superior was not exactly my soul mate and incidentally the individual who wrote my annual report, future recommendations were unlikely. Fitness appeared to have no bearing on selection from my own observations, many overweight elbow exercising golf playing individuals with obviously a suitable brain achieved higher status, not that I was keen to pursue a further military career and my wife had had enough: twelve addresses in fifteen years, the long hours that I'd spent in barracks whilst all mess wives that she knew, their husbands worked eight to five and often less just four and a half days a week since Wednesday recreational training was considered to be for the younger men. That and my previous adventurous army life of many exercises of many months 'away with the boys' as it was put, I decided to call it a day and start life anew.



Above – Britannia

Right – Dad and the three boys soon after arrival

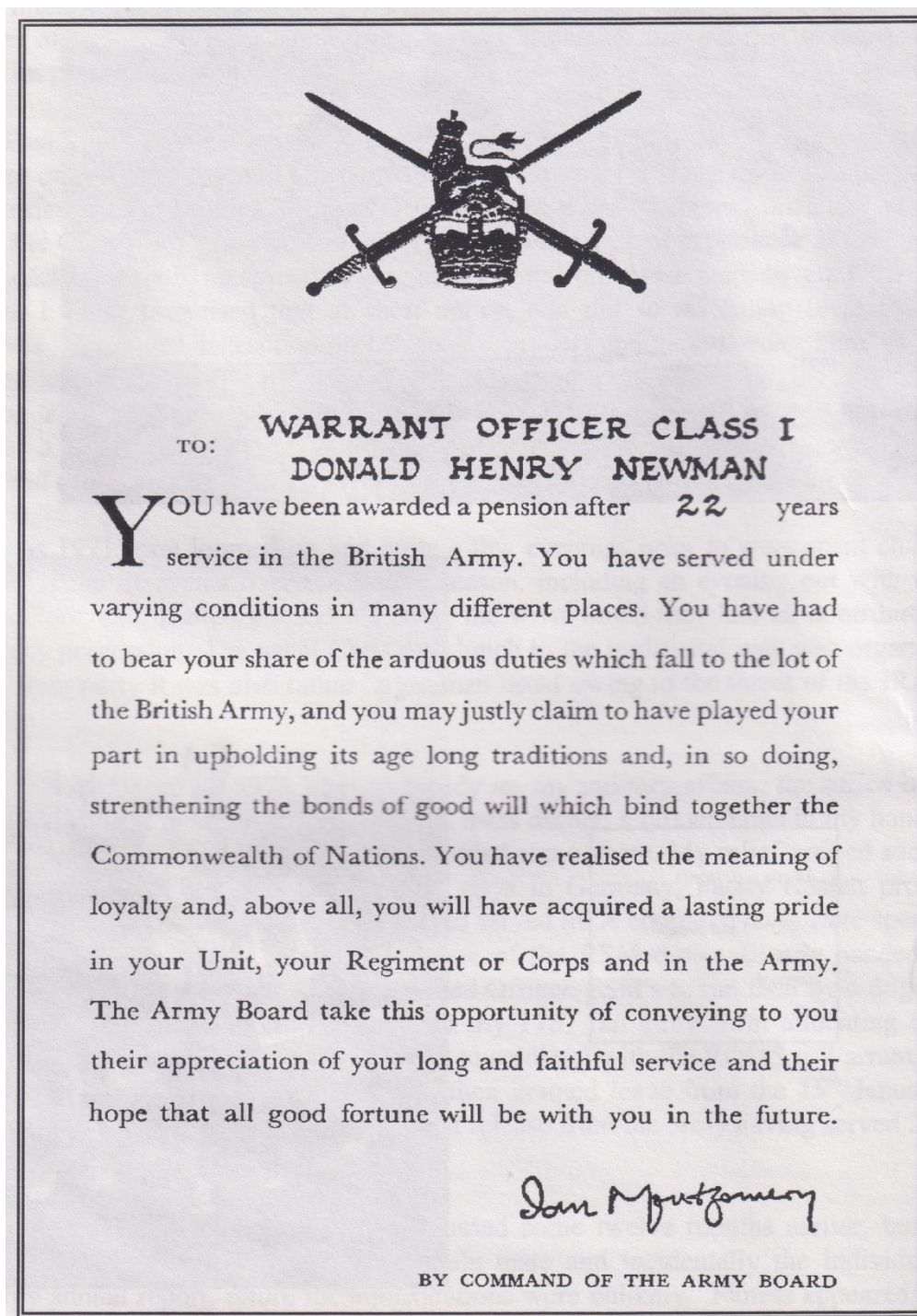




## CHAPTER 12

### Life In Australia Work, Retirement And Travel

Once a big fish in a relatively small pond, I was later to find myself as a small fish in a very big ocean.



Having travelled to many countries it was felt that there were better climates and places to bring up my three boys, New Zealand on further research had been replaced by Australia and applications and visits to Australia House in London were the decisive moves that cemented the final decision to emigrate, but it didn't stop there, Western Australia or Eastern Australia? Not sure how we came to settle for W.A. possibly the better weather. Perth said to be the most isolated city in the world and with an average of eight hours sunshine per day throughout the year.

By the time all the formalities for the above were completed it would have been towards the end of March, we had been accepted and the move was on. We had been sponsored by a W.A. building company, Landalls Construction Pty Ltd, who supposedly would build our home and find myself initial employment, although there was no binding agreement.

Our house was put up for sale, large tea chests and the like were acquired for packing family belongings and the process began with sorting, selecting, packing and recording the contents of each container which then had to be sealed, numbered, addressed, ownership name and shipping stickers attached. There was no limit on the number of containers as far as I was aware, there were twenty three all as requested and destined for the 'hold' as not being required/available during the sea voyage, suitcases marked as above and in addition stickered as cabin luggage were to accompany the family.

All that remained in the home was for our pre-departure use, many items sold gr-en or thrown out. The pet dog 'Teddy' given a home by a neighbour; the car sold subject to nr. having the use of it up until the day prior to leaving and a few offers were made for the bungalow (the house) each being higher than the previous one, for this was the period I learnt rather quickly, when 'gasumping' came to be the normal way of business in real estate at the time. Gasumping, however it was spelt - when one could put in a higher bid than the previous offer despite verbal agreements and it was quite acceptable if there was no paper work to confirm otherwise, a solicitor engaged to deal with the final sale and any other matters that came to light after departure.

Our house proved to be a very good investment having increased its value two and a half times despite the slight decrease in size of the land area of perhaps five per cent but on the plus side all the improvements made over the six years of ownership, in all enabling the family a fairly good start to life in Australia.

We set sail on the 6th May 1972 from Southampton on board the liner Britanis, a large vessel of the Greek shipping line 'Chandris Lines' to form part of the load of some of the last ten pound 'Poms'. Children travelled free. Soon after, the ten pounds per head for adults scheme was discontinued by the Australian emigration department, and a more realistic fare introduced. A few hours into the journey the ship returned to port to rectify mechanical troubles, an overheating main shaft bearing according to a ships news sheet displayed on the 7th May. We set sail again on the 8<sup>th</sup>. The trip turned out to be somewhat of a luxury cruise from our own point of view, excellent food and numerous waiters and staff to cater for ones every need, an hour by hour time table commencing at 7a.m. and the last event or show starting at 10p.m. perhaps catering for almost any or every activity that the entertainment staff could provide on board ship, and this was seven days a week. There were schools for children, keep fit classes, swimming, deck sports, cinemas, parties, dancing, libraries etc. Many doing their daily constitutional walk around the upper deck at daybreak or before, maybe two hundred metres at a guess per circuit. Doctors and Nurses and a sick bay were available, post office, telegrams and letter service and also several bars with specific hours. Dancing on a moving dance floor became a new experience, daily contacts meeting many new people from all walks of life, we shared a dining table in one of the two, or was it three, dining room areas with a couple of friends and their fifteen year old daughter and three Nuns who were to pursue their following in the new country. Children under fourteen years were fed in a dining room separated from parents, the reason for such planning made sense. Film shows and lectures about the future ahead created interest and the poisonous snakes and spiders that live there made one wonder. The ship stopped at Portugal and Cape Town, the latter on a Saturday afternoon when everything was closed.

The voyage all too soon was over docking in the Port of Fremantle Western Australia on the 30th May 1972, but it was the early hours of the 31st May, very early hours in the dark when we disembarked. We had received a 'welcome to Australia' telegram from the daughter and her husband of an old gentleman we had met in Cliffwoods who was emigrating, but flying out, Audrey and Bryan Cole who had four boys and who had come out to the promising land some four years earlier. They called to meet us a few days after landing and have been good friends ever since. A young sales rep from Landalls Building Co. had met us on disembarkation, introducing himself and saying he would quickly get us away and take us to our new temporary home, the migrant flats in Anstey street, South Perth, our packing cases would be sent to a large warehouse.

The internal walls of the unit were bare brick, more like prisons according to my wife Enid, the unit very basic and furnishing old and just the barest of requirements to say the least, "what on earth have we let ourselves in for" she tearfully stated. In efforts to console, the boys were given some biscuits and a drink and put to bed, it was a sleepless few hours of what was left of the night. The following day spent finding our whereabouts,

introducing our- selves to neighbours, looking in the local shops trying to compare prices with the new money, schooling for the boys, reading a local paper, time passed very quickly. The next day the rep called 'striking whilst hot' as the saying goes, with brochures and plans of dwellings, choice of areas where land was available, a bit too much to take in, too much too soon. I had drawn up a plan on board ship of my ideas of a desirable home and he seemed quite pleased with it, I guess it was a starting point for him. There were questions on both sides such as how much were we prepared to spend, what have you got on offer, we'd like to see some show homes, where would you like to live? We hadn't a clue, we knew not a sole in the new country it was a case of hey hang on a bit we are not going to rush in to this, we wanted a look around, get our bearings, put out some feelers, speak to others in a like position etc.

My own experience with job search found that military experience and achievements in the army counted for very little, in particular the amount of time spent serving was detrimental, references and a personal resume were said not to be worth the paper they were written on, people have to prove their worth. The old saying 'it's not what you know, but who you know' was very much in evidence, bit of a problem for the likes of myself. The one or two management and supervisory positions applied for did not invite an interview let alone an answer. (Note - it was around that time that there was an anti-military feeling in the populace owing to the Vietnam war, a resentment that lasted for very many years for all Vietnam Veterans.) However, lowering my sights I applied for a carpenters job, one of my army trades with the following response "Have you got a ticket?" "No," "Are you a member of the union?" "No." "Well I'm sorry there is no vacancy for you." "Well, have you got any other jobs cleaners or storeman?" "Well, yes we can fit you in there", saying something like, "yes, I can handle a broom alright, there are only two things that can go wrong with a broom, either the bloody head will come off or else the handle will!" and with a smile I got the job, terrible pay I'd thought \$54 a week, about 27 pounds Sterling but it was a foot in the door.

After much 'umming and arring' Enid and I decided on a house and a plot of land, the very place where I am now writing this some 26 years later on.


At work I chatted to those that I could during the course of duties the so called tradesmen were all on contract work with very few bodies on wages. Within three weeks a carpenter asked if I would work for him asking "had I any tools", he would pay me more. Within four weeks I was a 'chippy', very basic work making prefabricated panels eight feet by four feet covered with sheeting and then injected with a foam in a large press that set like a solid sponge to put it in layman's language, they were for prefabricated housing units and buildings for a mining company at Shay Gap, in the north of W.A. After eight weeks I was assisting with pricing many jobs on my own, later work took me to the country in the same firm. The jobs constructing dust proof buildings to house equipment for high radio communication towers. Later I quoted my own jobs.

The house, the family home to be, was said to be completed and we moved in four days before Christmas 1972. The only Christmas presents that year was our swimming pool oval and five feet six inches at its deepest point and measuring thirty feet by fifteen feet, ready to use on moving in and has been in use ever since for approx. 9 months out of 12.

The completed house in fact wasn't and some tradesmen were called back to rectify faults at their own expense. Part of the agreement with the builders was that I make the final payment on satisfactory completion and on six months of moving in. In fact it was to be over a year before I authorised the bank to make the final payment via my signature on the appropriate form, things that had to be corrected or made good during that time were as follows:

- Several items not to specification
- Poor workmanship
- Work not completed
- It wasn't a case of being fussy - a bath that leaked from chrome fittings - : not hold water
- No sink plugs supplied
- A toilet that would not flush
- Ill-fitting flyscreens that fell out
- Broken tiles on roof

To name some to the 18 listed complaints.

Landall Homes		Division of Landall Limited (Incorporated in A.C.T.)	
		STATEMENT A No 2554	
12 Cleveland St., Dianella, 6062. Phone 71 8855		P.O. Box 67, Moray, 6042	
D.H. & E.W. Newman,			
Lot 897 Barker Drive,			
Sorrento, W.A.		20. 12. 1972	
JOB No. 1057	copies to Dianella.	A. 2554	
Contract Price		13481. 00	
Stamp Duty on Transfer		71. 25	
Registration of Transfer		12. 00	
Shire Rates adjusted to. 30.6.73		34. 88	
Water Rates adjusted to. 30.6.73		19. 04	
Stamp Duty on Contracts		1. 00	
Land Price		5700. 00	
Memo 1593			
Add bench cupboards adapted to take Simpson 33 Stove		462. 00	
Add 3" grano pad 7'6" x 2'6" outside laundry		5. 00	
Memo 2125			
Re laysewerage line to accommodate proposed swimming pool		55. 00	
Memo 1593			
Delete P.C. Item for split level stove & alterations to cupboards			300. 00
Cash Payment Rec. 7909			570. 00
Cash Payment Rec. 8796			167. 00
Cash Payment Rec. 9106			5046. 25
Cash Payment Rec. 9684			5150. 00
Cash Payment Rec. 9999			2000. 00
Cash Payment Rec. 10042			55. 00
Balance now due			6592. 92
		\$19841. 17	\$19841. 17



Left - new DunCraig home front garden approx. 1 year after moving in

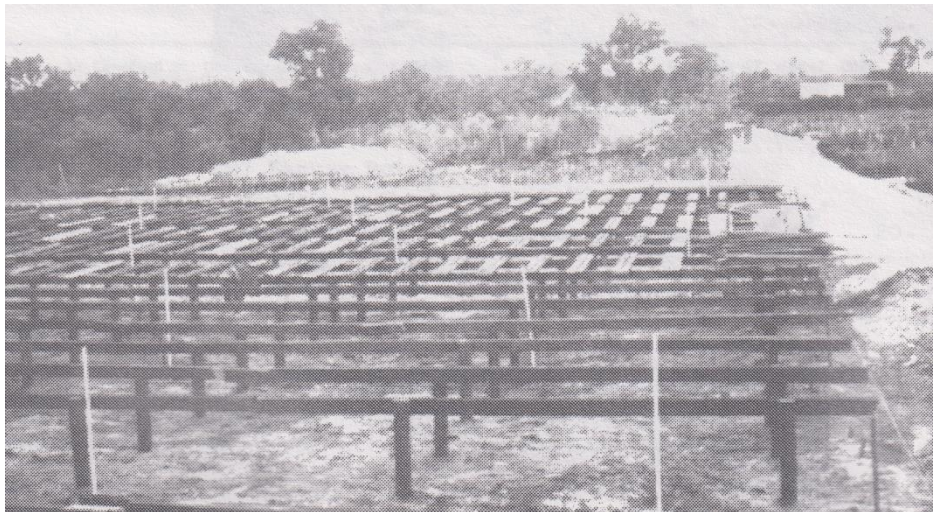
Below - an aeroplane flight ride for the boys whilst mum was at work. Taken at Yanchep airstrip



At work there were various jobs assisting with caravan construction, transportable accommodation units and offices for mining companies and also transportable homes. With the latter I travelled with others to the owners sites where the process of stumping had already taken place. To enlighten the more un-enlightened, the homes were built in sections of 10 ft. in width and varying lengths and then assembled on site having been positioned via traversing jacks from the vehicle transporter to the wooden stilts and then secured with brackets and metal banding, many country homes were built in this manner being some 3 ft. off the ground or thereabouts depending on what the ground levels dictated.

Early in the New Year 1973, I secured employment much nearer my new home, saving myself 34 miles daily travelling time and expense, just a little over 3 miles away. The new job as a nursery maintenance man on \$70 a week with regular overtime available, the work varied and interesting, concrete laying, construction of shade houses and production benches up to 40 meters long, display benches and patios in the public display areas, fencing and brickwork when required plumbing and pipe work to service many sprinklers and wash down points, service the trolleys and trailers and small tractors, when required delivery of big plant orders to assist the delivery girls. I remember once having to deliver Travellers palms that normally sold for \$2-50 but being stock that was moving very slowly it was put on special and priced at \$4 with free delivery in the metro area for orders over \$20, they sold the lot in short time.

Always plenty of work and not enough time to do it in. regular overtime became the norm. Working numbers varied from under 20 to close on 30 and that included young school leavers two of whom were on apprenticeships within the trade, there were sales staff, indoor production staff, outdoor production staff and general labour, a foreman, manager and three bosses, all gainfully employed. It was there that I met an ex-serviceman, Colin an ex Aussie SAS soldier and Vietnam veteran much younger than myself. We have remained friends since with the family, Sue unfortunately being left on her own with the children rather earlier whilst Colin went North on his own.





Top - work at the Wanneroo Wild Flower Nursery constructing benches.  
 Bottom - Nigel making himself very useful during the school holidays

Whilst working at the nursery I made friends with a rather older man in his late sixties, Paul Masser, who was still coaching junior soccer. He and I attended a St. John's Ambulance First Aid Course held two evenings per week for eight weeks. Social outings were few and far between and we found the course enjoyable getting a certificate at the end. Later I joined Pegasus Association, an Association for all ex airborne soldiers, parachutists, glider borne troops and pilots of the Army Air Corps. Annual dinners, dances, BBQ's etc started to become our social life.

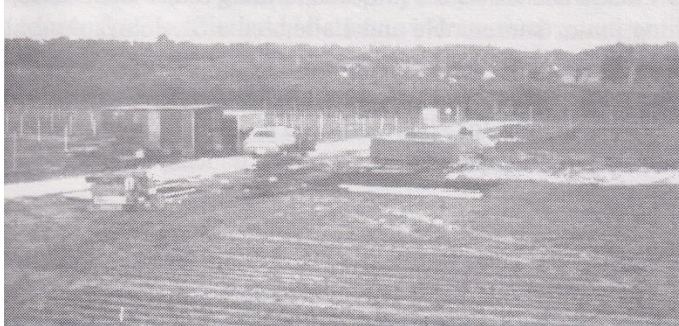
Some months after starting and the three boys all at school, Enid started work on the production staff part time, it was another interest that provided some pin money. I initially bought her an old 'banger,' a Ford Prefect for \$100 very similar to my first Car. as a means of getting to and from in my absence. It lasted for a while, serving the purpose and finally giving up in clouds of blue smoke. So we bought another, Enid insisting she pay for it from her wages, but since we did not believe in hire purchase we found that we had a zero credit rating. We paid cash, well we had to; however all was well within the household. Enid subscribing to items we otherwise would not have had at the time and thereby making life more comfortable. I guess I stayed at the, what was known as the Wanneroo Wildflower Nursery, for a couple of years before being offered a job by the younger boss, to set up a new nursery from scratch.

George Lullfitz had made a name for himself in the business and the working directors mutually agreed that George could go his own way, taking myself with him subject to my agreement, "since" as I said at the time there should never be moves unless one sees ways to better oneself. He totally agreed, and with what was then a substantial rise in income, free petrol for my car, but a further 3 miles to travel, I left to start work on what was ten acres of virgin bush.

George, having stated his requirements and locations of, mud map style, and whilst the 'dozers were still clearing and burning I set about the planning, initially pegging out white sticks proposed limestone tracks and pathways, buildings etc. to get his confirmation and second thoughts, there were to be many of the latter. I produced a semi-professional plan drawn to scale of the proposed requirements in black ink showing the initial set up and the stages of development planned, for the approval of the local shire, stating detailed plans of the individual buildings would be submitted prior to construction and approval of the shire clerk. This was followed up by an invitation for myself and the owner, George to meet the shire clerk. A very informal meeting, impressed with the proposed development and the plan submitted, questions were asked on my ability it having been stated that I was to carry out all the construction work, satisfied with my answers we were given the go ahead, the site being subject to progress inspections.

Timber, all good quality from salvage yards, brought in for use, two inch galvanised pipe in 6 meter lengths

second hand bought at 56 cts. per foot, almost 300 pipe lengths for the initial order used for construction and fencing, large timber packing crates removed free from business yards were put to good use. A second hand Ute and a tractor were bought plus a selection of used tools and barrows. Thus equipped and with detailed individual plans drawn at home I set to work levelling the required ground and constructing formwork, pouring concrete (ordered in 6 cu. mt. loads) with George helping with spread and compaction and the placing of anchor bolts where required.



Left -10 acres cleared, some irrigation installed, limestone road laid, rough store come tractor shed built, second building materials lying around, my old Ford Station Wagon, the beginnings of the Lullfitz Native plant Nursery

Right - the first 80ft. glasshouse built with second hand materials and rushed into use before it was ready.



Below - view from the rear of the nursery with a little more progress made



The second glasshouse under construction after a short 4 day electric welding course built with 2 inch second-hand galvanised pipe

Consideration had to be made re site drainage and all roof run offs for the collection of rainwater to a central large concrete tank that was planned and later built by the designers - Tiger Tanks Co Ltd. All work sheds, stores, rest room and toilets early on were timber framed with CGI skin with doors and windows and an eaves gap to disperse heat, smooth concrete floors with a fall either to the end or side to clear cleaning water.

The first glass house, 80 ft. x 18 ft. by 9 ft. high at the apex consisted of timber trusses on timber side post with rafters that supported glass retainer slides, the latter bought with glass all second hand, the 'Z' clips made from scrap galvanised ties, the whole covering three brick beds the full house length, waist high and 3 ft. wide, the brickwork by hired contractors, the complete structure costing \$3000 plus, a saving of around \$8000 at the time going by quoted prices from specialist builders. Two glass houses were built, the second one with galvanised pipe trusses and post. Prior to building the second glass house I went on a four day electric welding course in Perth to acquire the necessary basic skills, the course more than paid for its outlay and the experience found many uses thereafter.

With a potting shed 60 ft. x 20 ft. complete and the first glass house attached to and bedded with soil, fitted with misters and control boxes, the shed fitted with work benches chairs and other requisites, water on tap both bore and rain, work started when the head lady from the indoor production staff from the previous nursery joined us some three months or so later after our start date.

Construction continued but with then the additional task of making up soil mixes as required for the small plant cuttings, all turned over with a miller's shovel, a few weeks further down the track and two more experienced women came on staff.

Some two acres of timber plant benches were eventually completed almost half of which were under tall shade houses built on copper treated pine poles buried 3ft. 6 inches and standing 10ft. above ground level with horizontal rails covered in wire to support the shade cloth and the sides covered to prevent wind bum. In addition I had earlier assisted a contractor brought in to dig wells to provide us with ground/bore water and also lay out 4 acres of reticulation piping, all buried 18 inches below ground and the sprinkler stand attached there to, each with a timber support.

A very large shed and adjacent office building built mainly on my own, the former to house stores, vehicles, a cool room, a large ex concrete mixer to make up soil mixes, a workshop, fertilisers, sprays, spraying equipment and various other chemicals, pots and trays and tools of trade, it would have been 100 ft. x 35 ft. and 15 ft. high, the roof trusses for this were bought 2nd hand and adapted to suit. The two halves of each truss bolted together and lifted in place by hired crane onto prepared welded galvanised pipe side posts that had been bedded in concrete, securely bolted in position and then all adjusted true, with wire diagonals prior to concreting in the corner bracing. I enjoyed the construction work having to overcome many problems working on my own. I was in effect my own boss and working long hours to get everything set up and working in the least time possible and as economical as it could be done and doing a good job that would last. With George's OK I took on additional labour including my own two young sons in the school holidays, along with one or two others at differing times to carry out menial but necessary tasks. Nigel in fact became very useful in his ability to handle the tractors and trailers, something that he had had some practice with smaller tractors in the previous nursery. Wayne although still very young was enthusiastic with weeding and moving pots around and helping generally with minor things, their pay rather paltry being 60 cents and 30 cents per hour respectively to begin with, but nonetheless an opportunity to earn some money and good experience early on in life which was appreciated.

My time was much in demand as production increased, working six days and check visits on the seventh day every third week, often called out to fix a malfunctioning water controller or something else in between, often being told by my beloved wife that I may as well take my bed up there. About this time Enid having not been well on and off for a while being edgy and tearful, and having sought advice and help was informed that a nervous breakdown very likely the cause. Contact was made with a recommended specialist for treatment who, after the initial interview, said he was able to get her back into good health, but it would take time a minimum of two one hour visits per week to start with. It turned out to be a very necessary and rather expensive exercise at \$75 a visit for a year when the number of visits were gradually reduced myself being requested when and when not to attend the actual session. The final 3 visits over a period of two months when I asked how much longer this needed to go on, to receive the reply "as long as you think it necessary Mr. Newman" I stated with Enid's agreement, that the session now be the last one and that we contact him if need required in the future.



He agreed and wished us well. I'm sure that guy had 'a lend of us' as the saying goes, about two years and depleting my bank balance in the process. However money management having been a continual exercise particularly since arriving in Australia, I set about the task of building up for the proverbial rainy day as has generally been a habit of mine throughout life.

An elderly pensioner was brought in part time easing the load and George's brother Robert a university lecturer who initially took some interest was beginning to put in more time, mostly at weekends. There was always construction work to attend to but its priority lessened as the production and growing processes increased. I spent quite a lot of time going out to collect cuttings material from wherever George had arranged or directed, bushes, trees, flowers, vines and prostate ground covers etc. and brought them back ASAP for the girls to work on. girls since they were younger than I. Time was found to build some superstructure on a four wheel one ton trailer to transport trays of rooted cuttings, and with the Ute tray back, a few thousand could be moved in one journey, the bigger nurseries having become interested in the product (all native plants). With the second glasshouse in full use cuttings in both were grown in a controlled humidity 24 hrs. a day, the glass having been painted white to reduce heat and glare damage from direct sunlight. Growth time varied with plant type, but once established were moved to outside benches under shade to continue the growth process and after further time where applicable moved to benches in the open to harden them off and bring to size required for sale.

One particular project order involved the collection of saline resistant bush cuttings from Garden Island WA of plants peculiar to the island, when a large amount of 'restructuring' for the want of another word, was taking place to update the Western Australian Naval Base. Several trips were made to collect large sacks of the material from selected stock, the sacks being dunked in sea water prior to the drive back to Wanneroo, about an hour and a half drive away, for immediate conversion to cuttings. After the desired growth, each in its plastic container was sold for use back on the island for a little less than 40 cents each. Many thousands were grown/sold and delivered back to the landscape gardeners.

Further part time staff were taken on including a full time office woman. I was asked to carry out a business analysis to ascertain what production was required to cover the projected outlay (a) to run a viable business and (b) to recover nursery establishment costs over 'X' number of years, outside normal working hours mind, a useful interesting exercise that at the time I undertook willingly, the experience was to come in useful later.

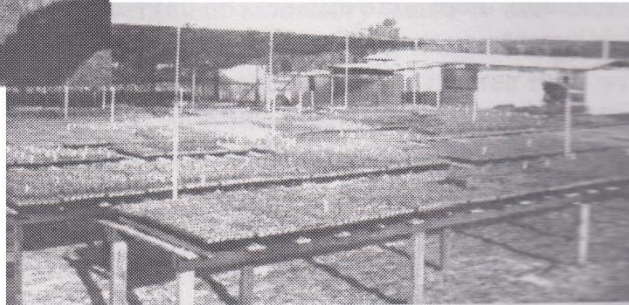


Top – Self made trailer top to transport plants all grown from cuttings and tarpaulin to protect from wind burn



Above – After a day of hard work

Right – acres of plant benches, some under shade



Right - "but still scrub up well", at home with Enid and Wayne in our backyard



The collection of wild flower seeds proved to be another source of income, an elderly gent well versed in the subject and supplying people in need country wide, lived locally, I met him, both he and George were very knowledgeable on what grew where and when to collect, interestingly at a time when farmers were suffering low income and we were on their land collecting seed to onward sell. At one time so busy not able to fill orders, students were employed to collect, my responsibility to provide drying and harvest frames, segregate the seed from husks/pods and other rubbish and pack in 1/2 or 3 lb. bags. As an example Wisteria being one, a climbing blue flower vine required it was thought for reforestation work in Vietnam after the armies wartime chemical clearance of jungle forest. Some 46 lbs. were sent off at \$20 a lb. from memory, many other varieties were collected one particular seed difficult to collect and process valued at \$80 lb. Letters also sent to the UAE (United Arab Emirates) offering assistance in their reforestation of the deserts, and sent seeds of saline resistant plants that would also be useful for animal fodder at their request, but nothing further was heard, not even reimbursement for products sent to my knowledge.

Having got everything up and running with the organisation working well, all activity concerning production took priority and more shade was required, whilst digging holes for supporting posts I slipped and twisted a knee resulting in hospitalisation where I had a cartilage removed. The operation was done the old fashioned way, a large cut and muscle shrinkage, almost having to learn to walk again. During the long recovery period I received the DCM. (Don't Come Monday), it was in fact notice of termination of employment. A little later it was finalised with the payment of 7 weeks accrued annual holiday pay plus a further week in lieu of notice and the entitled 15% extra that accompanied such payments at the time, there were also several days accrued sick pay, I cannot recall taking holidays or sick leave prior to that time since arriving into the country.

Given a very good reference, but I had got the sack at age 46 for the first time in my adult life, a replacement had been found at a lower rate and I guess that's how life was at the time. Some four to five weeks after the operation I made a start on digging a well in my front garden, several concrete well liners 48 inches in diameter were bought and delivered (my search for work was not very encouraging) so with buckets, ropes and an extension ladder I began to occupy my time digging. The first sixteen feet down it was all sand and easy going, the liners slipping down around myself as the bottom was continually dug out and removed, thereafter lime stone formed part of the excavated material to 26 ft. At that point the liners jammed and would not move even with the persuasion of a front-end loader that I'd asked assistance of that was working locally. 42 inch liners were used thereafter slipping through the larger known as telescoping down in the business. From that point on it was mainly limestone to a depth of 52 ft.

Having bought the smaller liners, an employment opportunity, opening that I thought I might try my hand at came about, so I applied, was excepted, and started a two week salesman's course at my own expense with 'Curtain Man' in the yellow van, as the adverts stated. There were eight men on the course and I was one of two to be employed and spent a further week on familiarisation with a young guy, Malcolm Cole, who initially refused to believe that I was a trainee salesman, thinking instead I was to learn later, that I was an inspector checking him on his area round. We became good friends for a long time after, he even asking if he could help with my well digging, which he did just for the experience.

Two weeks into the job proper I landed one of the company's biggest sales, over \$14000 worth of curtains, rails and fittings within the women's wards at the home of 'Little Sisters of The Poor'. Income was on a commission basis only when I started, 7% I think it was, there being eight vans on the road all radio fitted with allotted area backed up by extensive advertising, later remuneration came by way of \$100 retainer and 3% commission reducing the better salesman's income considerably. A controversial decision by the management subjected to argument by those affected that remained unresolved for my remaining time at the company. At about the same time the big road train haulage drivers, nationally went on prolonged strike. Many businesses big and small in Western Australia relied on road trains for supply and the rag trade as such was one. All salesman's vans carried material samples for customer selection and within a short time many became unavailable and through lack of communication salesman were not informed, resulting in vans having to backtrack perhaps 30/40 miles for client reselection. This resulted in lost sales, time, income and opportunity for further sales, all of which could have been avoided with good management, as I told a director's wife, and to cut a long story short I walked out. I was recalled and asked to reconsider, but having got a carpenter's job the same day a few streets away left.

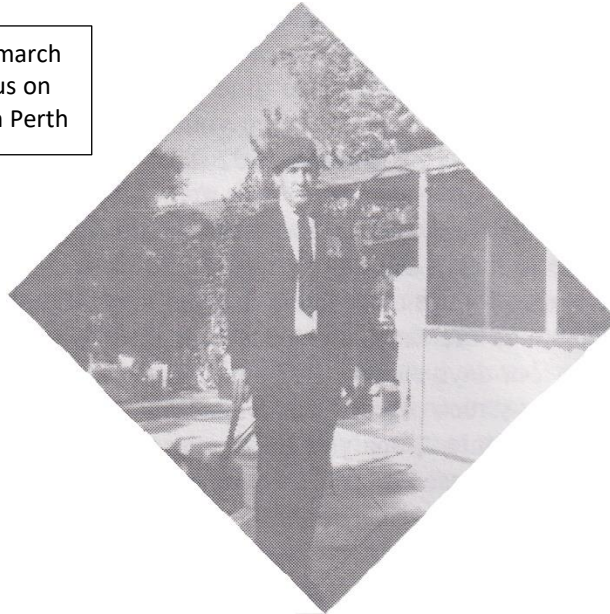
I had been working on my well when time permitted and with the help of an electric jack hammer, explosive plaster shots, my two younger sons and Malcolm, I had completed the digging process of my well to a depth of 52 ft. by the time I left work as a salesman.

I had been advised by the water board that I would find water at that depth, but having hit very hard capstone rock a drilling rig was called in to complete the process i.e. to drill 30 ft. below the level of water once found and put in place an 8 ft. stainless steel sure screen the best available at the time, attached to a 2 inch galvanised suction pipe. This was completed over four days costing me \$800, but in hindsight money well spent. Water is found at 54 ft., the screen placed in excellent water producing river sand, no iron stain and a minimum saline content, analysis by the government laboratory stated it was excellent drinking water. I purchased a GEC 3 hp. electric pump and installed it myself and had an electrician fix up the electrics. The pump produced 40 gallons per minute free flow with a total lift of 56 ft., ample supply to water the property in two stations and still does so today 26 years later at the time of writing and still drinking the water in preference to the chlorinated tap supply to all houses.

I started the new job less jacket, tie, creased trousers and polished shoes with a company constructing components for living accommodation in the Arctic circle, basically frames to house large polystyrene blocks designed to key together with inner and outer skins. I came in on the end, or towards the end, of the project with less than three weeks to complete, thereafter three weeks of shop fitting and store partition work at various locations before being selected to go and work at the new Swan Brewery then under construction. Monstrous copper-like vats already in position inside a virtually empty very large building of brickwork inside steel columns. My work turned out to be sheet metal work in a gang cladding interior walls that had to be timber strutted to facilitate sheet fixing, some twenty five feet high with the aid of mobile scaffold towers, extension ladders and lifting gear. Despite ear plugs and pads the noise was unbearable as various parties went about their work hammering and beating around the vats, guillotines dropping multiple sheets on concrete floors, rollers and benders creaking and cranking, compressors and power plants buzzing, all amplified by the large hollow of the enclosed incomplete building. I had endured many conditions in life but none so noisy compared with that. The supervisor was questioned as to whether there was employment outside or elsewhere, his answer saw me walking out not to return and forgoing pay owed.

A few days later application was made for the position of security officer at a large shopping centre, success came my way and apparently chosen from a list of forty applicants. The security supervisor was an ex British Infantry Captain and I do not recall seeing him after my initial interview. I gathered that there were eight on strength to cover the rotating shifts over the 24 hour day, the 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. shift worked by one man only assisted by all the latest electronic gadgetry and a direct line to the civil police. Not a very satisfying occupation, the boredom broken a few times with attempted break-ins and a few scares when faced with gangs of layabouts, both black and white, whilst driving around the outer car parks in the supplied small van. Three months was more than sufficient, the pay was adequate but the hours of working did not go down well with my wife, prospects were nil and I felt there were better things in life, after all I did not enjoy what I was doing, so with seven days' notice I left.

Ready for a march  
with Pegasus on  
ANZAC day in Perth



My next venture, a straight forward approach to a guy working in the forecourt of a small reticulation company, "have you got plenty of work pal?" "Yes. sure have." "Are there any work vacancies going?" "Do you know anything about the work?" "Yes, I have done a fair bit." "Hang on a minute, he went inside and reappeared with a young bearded fellow, we introduced ourselves there on the spot followed by a crossfire of questions. I was then introduced to another. Jim Woodhead, a partner in the company, he stating that he was ex-army, ex SAS. "Oh really, I'm ex 22nd SAS", after a very short conversation, "when can you start?" "Tomorrow would suit me fine," "good we'll see you tomorrow start 7 a.m. "OK great, thanks very much I'll see you at 7 then."

I found the other partner to be somewhat anti army, believing all army people had to have somebody to look after them and tell them what to do all the time, but conceded SAS were a bit better, ignorance, arrogance and apathy I found to be the traits of many Australians outside of their own little world. Anyway I was to be to start with, the assistant maintenance man to a much younger man an ex Vietnam soldier. Much of the work I found to be straight forward, easy and common sense, but the operation of the various electrical controllers had to be learnt. Just after a week later I had my own truck and work schedule, so in my usual manner of keeping my eyes and ears open I picked up snippets of information from the company 'sparky' and reticulation installers plus the odd direct questions to Geoff the manager who allocated my work. I got on fine with all, often having to deal with Trish the older office girl regarding customer contact. Wages were OK and one was expected to do overtime when asked so I had no problems and the new old guy became Don.

The company, Project Reticulation, had two drilling rigs, three regular reticulation installation teams but hired others as business demanded from time to time, one maintenance truck, two support vehicles for the rigs, one general run around truck, a couple of cars, an air compressor, well sinking equipment and several trailers. The two partners, both working men not afraid of hard work, spent much of their time with the drilling rigs. My job, in addition to maintenance work, involved my following the rigs when they were very busy to air develop the bore holes and install the submersible pumps ready for electrical connection, the 'sparky' usually on site at the same time and then run a test flow to ascertain the amount of water at a given pressure in order that a sprinkle" system may be designed if so required.

In the summer months it was all go, wells were quite popular and in many Perth suburbs water could be found within a couple of meters of the surface. Anything deeper than 25ft then bores were advised supposedly being more economical all round, particularly where rocks and limestone might be encountered. My rounds found me dealing with various pumps; jet, pressure and centrifugal and different types of submersibles, the odd well over 100 ft. in depth and they were the very old ones before bores were thought of for domestic use. Some very old, very tricky and even dangerous jobs were undertaken replacing rusty old triple belt driven pumps with the up-to-date all-in-one centrifugal pumps. Problem solving that involved either replacing worn check valves, dealing with air leaks, or finding blocked or collapsed screens, the latter rather an expensive job that required a drilling rig on site.

One Mt. Lawley job 112 ft. deep with liners telescoped to twenty four inches required a replacement motor as ascertained by the owner. I lowered myself down checking each rung of the rusty old ladder with safety ropes attached and a bag of tools attached to my belt to work in darkness with the aid of a torch, having arranged to have two men at the top whilst down. I was to make noise or talk owing to the stagnant or lack of air, silence being the signal for retrieval. At the bottom a small cave had been excavated to house the pump seated on house bricks, there was very little room to move inside the 2 ft. liner, shoulders touching each side, to my front the side had been knocked out to allow the suction pipe and check valve now between my legs to go down to water level and then an estimated 30ft below. It was exceptionally warm and I remembered working up quite a sweat, the effort perhaps half-mental having to work in such a confined space at such a depth. Penetrating oil placed on all the joints to be freed and then hammered, the power leads were disconnected all having been made safe at the switch gear on the house by a sparky and checked by myself before entering the well. Unable to loosen the joints they were then hacksawed free. Finding the pipes very much the worse for their age replacement being recommended, a rope was lowered and the pump levered into a position where it would swing free when lifted, having secured the rope I climbed out. The pump was pulled to the surface whilst I cleaned up and because of what I had found we cleared the site, replaced the cover, left the pump for client inspection and made our way back to base. I learned later that they had had trouble in finding someone who would go down the well. To my knowledge the company did not install a new pump there for reasons I know not.

Later I was one of a party to work on an old well for a Mr Richard Court, owner of a boating and water sports shop, actually the son of the premier of W.A. and later to become the premier himself. The well situated in the middle of a tennis court sealed from sight with 4 inch breather pipes running under and to the side of the court. 60 plus feet deep, the well lined with spiked railway sleepers to form a square hole, quite a large maintenance job concerning the pump and its wiring and also involving the concrete lids and surrounds which were covered in bitumen to match the court surface on completion.

As a general helper out in all sorts of situations, including planning and designing of systems, I covered all aspects of the business. At one stage I dismissed my own assistant for refusing to work on a difficult task, that of laying pipes in an old bitumen car park that had been covered with 4 inches (100 mm) of soil with the idea of forming a lawn. I was to find out that the job had been under quoted there being no knowledge of the bitumen base. K I got a rocket from the boss saying that I had no authority to sack an employee, so I said right call him back but I refuse to work with him and nobody else will. He was given official notice with pay in lieu of.

Every Friday evening, payday, drinks were on the company, an excellent idea to get to know everyone and it boosted the teamwork all round improving attitude and performance. A couple of boat trips were also organised for the workers, the partners both being keen sailors had their own boat, I joined in, enjoying the experience and the liquid refreshment supplied.

At one point in time for reasons unknown to the staff there was a cash crisis and it was made known to all that a couple of trucks would have to be sold to pay our wages and buy stock. My company vehicle owned with only 18000 k's on the clock was one. On being told the price I went home with the truck as usual. I felt very confident with my work, I would tackle anything, do anything, and often thought that I could do that sort of work for myself. Was the company going under I asked myself? Anyway, next day I made an offer of \$3000 cash and was then asked to go into the office to talk about it, amongst other things, would I be prepared to use it for work or had I other intentions and after some 'argy bargy' about conditions and pay etc. my offer was accepted. The truck was leased back at \$40 a week with all running cost paid and myself as only driver and a substantial pay rise to boot.

There was time for self and family and I'd still managed, regardless of what I had been doing for a living, to go for a run along the beach twice a week and maybe walks in between with 'Champ' the family dog, a Doberman Labrador cross as and when I could.

An incident also worthy of the space since it may well have denied me my own, when I was asked to give assistance to a new man on the job said to be very experienced in all aspects of the business the task in hand to install a couple of submersible pumps. Bob was a young man in his early twenties of big build that justified his strength. He appeared very confident and I had arranged to meet him on site with my assistant Owen, a very young man still finding his way in the 'working for a living world', willing but not yet able and lots to learn. Bob

had brought all that was required for the job in his truck whilst I called in from my own rounds to assist. The bore located and the gear unloaded we laid out the black polyurethane delivery pipe and attached the pump to it whilst the cables and stainless steel supporting wire were unfurled and lain alongside the pipe by Owen. There was no electrician on site I had assumed he was yet to arrive so that we could do a test run to ascertain the supply rate. Bob and Owen went back along the pipe line while I secured the stainless steel wire onto the pump anchorage lug and then set about attaching the green/yellow earth wire to the earthing terminal and that's as far as I got on that job.

Of course in hindsight I shouldn't have touched the electrical wires but often had to when removing pumps for repair, so just attaching an earth wire whilst awaiting the 'sparky' was quite safe I'd thought! There was a flash, everything went blue, I could not let go of the wire, my body vibrating and yet feeling paralysed, could not shout and yet I knew what was happening and could see through a blurred vision. Owen ran toward me then turned and ran back, the power went off and I lay on the grass shaking as the two rushed up to me "bloody hell are you alright Don I'm sorry mate?" Alert and shaken, I looked at my hands and said "give me a few minutes". "Did I want a drink, did I feel alright, what do I do in a case like this." I said "get me to a doctor pronto." Bob disappeared and Owen told me he was wiring up back in the porch. A couple of minutes later I was helped into a truck, even though I felt reasonably able en route to a doctor, explaining to a very upset Bob that I considered myself extremely lucky, for a brief moment he relaxed and said "oh. you are OK then?" "Not on your nelly mate the doctor should be able to tell me the score as damage could be done internally to the heart, stuffing up the beat rhythm and all sorts of things."

The Doc said I was lucky, 400 volts could have been a lethal jolt, the current had taken the shortest route through my arms and chest. The heart beat was normal, obviously a fit man I was to go home and rest for a further two days and then report back to him. Bob took me home and then reported back into the works office where he handed in his resignation I: transpired that he was not aware of a recent new international electrical wiring code. What used to be red, black and green had become blue, brown and green/yellow, not that he or any of us employed as pump installers were 'sparkies' although it was advisable to know since new pumps from Europe were wired in the new code. Only electricians were permitted to connect to the domestic supply.

As time went on and conversing with others working in the business I was giving serious consideration to starting out on my own, confidential advice was received from various sources in answer to my many questions. Often towards the end I'd been sent out on reticulation jobs without a plan, designing on the spot prior to installation which was a great experience. I had a free hand in advising customers and how I carried out whatever was required, keeping the client happy and satisfied with one's work was the name of the game and I had no problem with that, in fact I quite enjoyed the occupation. Almost another year had passed when I decided to give it a go at the ripe old age of 50 and gave a months' notice to quit which appeared to be appreciated, although seven days was the norm.

I borrowed \$5000 from the bank to start a running account, most tools to do the job I already had and those that I did not have were purchased. The drawing board made in my own little workshop and the necessary requisites for plan drawing purchased from a stationery supplier. A small unused bedroom became the office in which was placed a second hand large eight drawer desk and all the required stationery and little later having designed my own quotation forms I moved the office to the carport having enclosed it to become a cosy spare room/garage. A second hand digging machine came my way via a friend in the business for \$400, designed and had made a galvanised tools and fittings tray to fit in the back of my Datsun utility with room for the digging machine and a small working area. The overhead pipe carrying roof rack came with the vehicle so, fully equipped and ready to start I took the plunge, the business registered as "Don's Reticulation Services", myself and wife as partners. An accountant available from previous employment requirements had helped with advice for the new set up, an order placed for a weekly advert to appear in the local rag, liability insurance taken out, signs for vehicle and garden adverts made. The previous employment left with accumulated pay for the usual reasons and four customers ready and waiting on the new enquiries book, the venture began.

The first week income had doubled excluding all outlays, three quotes completed and accepted on the spot and several enquiries entered, there was thought to be seven or eight reticulation businesses operating in the northern suburbs, five of whom were advertising on a regular basis, some eighteen years later there were thirty. A couple of weeks or so after starting and working a 12 hour day to keep clients happy, having under estimated the amount of work that I might get, number two son Nigel, who had a job brick paving and concreting, said he

would like to work with me if I needed an off-sider, which I certainly did. Nigel was quick to learn and had a general ability to do anything he applied himself to. As parents we had tried to get him an apprenticeship in mechanics or as an electrician to no avail, he just taught himself in whatever he was interested in. Paul was a non-starter in that he wanted to do what he wanted to do at that stage, moving from job to job, bit of a worry ' for us as Mum and Dad, money earned was money to spend, however he went his way seemingly always work of sorts available and apparently happy with his lot.

Nigel started on a piecework plan, I liked to refer to it as an incentive plan, similar to my own early upbringing so the more you work the more you earn and to this day I still believe that this is the way to go. He started off on 40% of the labour cost of every job that we did, I considered the profit margin on stores used etc. to cover running costs and the remainder as a living wage plus, this worked well until the winter months in particular May, June and July when work appeared scarce for the first couple of years. We worked well together and I enjoyed his company, at times employing extra labour to get through the volume of work that came my way. If Nigel made suggestions I listened and if the alternatives appeared better we did it his way, moving ahead and getting referrals and accordingly a continuation of the business work. Bores and wells were part of the service offered, both sub-contracted out to known very experienced operators. I did try the latter myself but the problems encountered prompted me to leave it to the experts as I continued on with what I could do best, it wasn't a case of losing out on such deals because of the pre-negotiated price with the 'subbies' thereby allowing myself room for overheads and I was after all supplying them with work.

Competition was always considered, most clients getting three quotes, some up to six. The boastful customers who stated I would be the forth quote they'd had. in fact I did not waste my time with, three was normal and it was never a threat, getting viable work was more important than high pricing to a new business trying to get established and to this end I worked hard with full books to the point where waiting time was not acceptable to would- be clients. A trial period of sub-contract labour installations team did not work since I became unproductive myself in supervisory duties and corrective work. I reverted to the family concern only.

Number three son Wayne joined me on leaving school and eased the problem, by which time Nigel had become fully competent in taking on a full reticulation job, leaving myself to carry out maintenance and quoting of jobs liaising with drilling and well digging contractors and also assisting with any job in progress. All my evenings and most weekends were spent drawing plans, meeting new clients that I could not meet at other times, doing office work, ringing back clients that Enid had taken the initial enquiry from to arrange a meeting and quote. I paid on a regular basis my supplier of all things business wise, unlike many others who only bought in job lots and still run up a slate. I bought in box lots having my fittings and materials tray on the Ute keeping the various trays full and keeping all separated in type and sizes and also a varied supply of sprinklers for replacement as required when on maintenance runs, and accordingly received quite a generous discount revised from time to time with the ups and downs of trade pricing.





**Don's Reticulation Service**

Above - well established. Wayne with the trench cutter

Left - the result with the turf lifted out

Below - another job on a bare sand block



With time competition increased as others joined in the fray for a living, two firemen that I knew of who worked their 40 odd hours in one shift for a good weeks wage and then spent the rest of the week installing reticulation for extra greedy dollars, there were others with obviously insufficient experience and no pride in their work making a dreadful mess of people's lawns and gardens, some not knowing or not caring that when replacing turf that it should be put back green side up. In fact I was amazed that such work appeared to be accepted by the public. Once being asked if I would tidy up and correct such a job, out of curiosity I asked if a plan was available and then shown a coloured crayon drawing of fairly good primary school standard, this whilst working further up the street, I stated I wouldn't be seen on the property let alone park my vehicle there adding, "you didn't pay for that work did you?". "Well, yes they asked for it saying that they had done the work." Don's Reticulation plans were A2 size (16 x 24 inches) or 40cm x 60cm drawn in Indian ink on blank cellophane type sheets produced by a printing firm showing legend, company name, scale, with spaces for client name and address, date drawn by and copy rights etc. along the bottom, a copy of completed plan was given with each quote to potential customers, a practice that I was advised against by friendly competitive firms who stated they found their plans were being used and under quoted by some unscrupulous operators. After consideration I continued with the practice, knowing the plan was a good selling point for several reasons and accepted the gamble, knowing unscrupulous types help make up the variations in the populace, customers and businessmen alike.

As explained to my sons and all who worked with me from time to time, every job should be worth another, presentation, care and tidiness throughout as well as on completion will result in hopefully recommendation. The system worked well eventually getting Don's Reticulation on the books of several builders for show homes reticulation and real estate agents for rental property maintenance which along with a constant flow of referrals kept employment fully booked, aided by the response from my adverts. During the winter months, once established, the odd request came in for full property reticulation, but otherwise it was mainly maintenance work which did allow time off. holidays or whatever for the boys. Personally I was not bothered one way or the other I enjoyed my occupation and whilst earning I was not spending. In the trade business was said to start in August becoming very busy October through to February when it began to tail off through autumn but not always the case as I found.

A couple of the material supplying companies held seminars trade evenings introducing new products etc. providing buffet and refreshments to entice interested people along. They proved to be very interesting and informative and sometimes entertaining, keeping us all up to date not only in products but tools and machinery and better alternatives to do whatever. At one event, on the subject of new pop-up sprinklers (a device that pops up out of the ground when the water pressure is turned on to spray water) it was stated that a new type for gardens had been introduced, it was a 12" long pop-up and an example shown, when one guy shouted that he could do with one of those for his missus, a touch embarrassing for some office girls present but hilarious for most. It was a chance to socialise with others in the industry, in fact how I had come to hear of the digging machine that I had bought.

1984 found the business with a new utility vehicle that Wayne helped me to select, a cash purchase, the long hours and hard work had paid off. I had paid off my initial loan in the first year of business and was then able to afford wants and needs as and when required, I'd bought a large measuring wheel (a push along) to speed up the measurement of the domestic blocks that I was quoting on and a lesser one for the drawing board to calculate pipe work requirements from the plans quickly and had long since at the time secured the services of a plumber to provide an outlet from the domestic water supply, learning this was the way to go soon after starting out on my own.

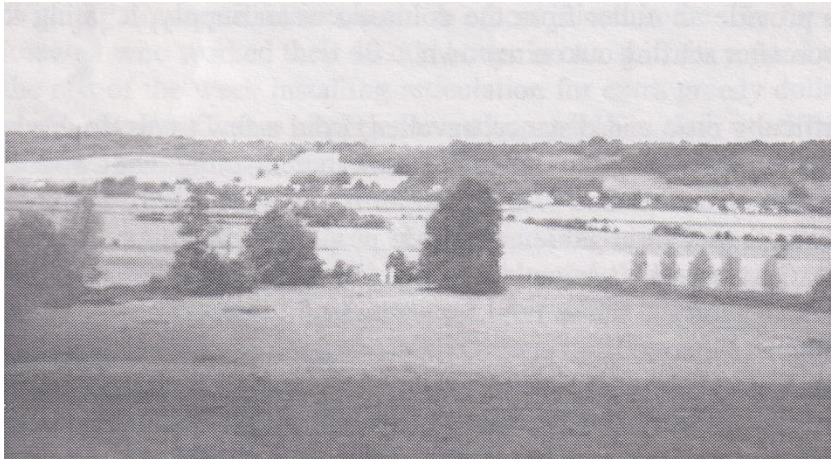
Jobs were priced on a difficulty ratio and distance travelled, I did a few times double and double again a quotation when not wishing to undertake work, but ensuring that I would be covered for time in the event of acceptance plus a margin of course. For example, rock} terrain, areas of mass concrete and little gardens, hillside properties and stepped gardens with high abutment walls. On the odd occasion getting the job, a challenge sometimes but never defeated. One job close handy to home I did for a retired farmers wife after she had three refusals from far bigger concerns than I, two saying it was not possible and the other saying yes it could be done, but very expensive and he did not want to do it. I had explained that it could be rather costly and was asked to submit a quotation, and as with others who had doubts, it was stated that if the completed system does not work, you will not have to pay for it, on the strength of the last remark I think I got the job. The only problem was insufficient water, three gallons a minute free flow which once restricted to obtain the required pressure to operate sprinklers not at all practical for a normal system. A large tank installed alongside the house with

attached 2 hp. pump, the water levels controlled by float switches as was the pump off switch. It took five and a half hours to fill the tank from the domestic supply and twenty minutes to empty it, the property being watered in two stations with advice to water in the evenings, so that the tank would fill overnight and thus not take the water from the taps during the day. The lady was extremely happy and very grateful and nothing was ever heard from the lady again.

With advertising cut back to once a month all round just to let newcomers to the sum . know of our existence the work flowed in on a regular basis, we were prepared to anywhere within a radius of fifty miles and often did. The amount of travel based on time and accordingly added to job costing.

June 1985 in the middle of the off season I made a trip back to the UK to see my aging mother the two boys attending to whatever business cropped up, Enid being a nonstarter where flying is concerned stayed at home. Rather an uneventful trip being bed down for almost a week soon after arrival with traveller's bug. A fair bit of the time spent visiting old friends and places, long walks with my brother Sid then living at home with Mum and a few visits to the local pubs in Folkstone Kent in the evenings. Three days in the Aldershot area (Hants) taking part in the Airborne Forces Day march with a friend from Perth. John Hatelly with whom I had agreed to meet on the day. We were both members of Pegasus (Airborne Forces) Association of W.A. (inc.). I have remained a member for almost 25 of the 26 plus years out in Australia, serving on the committee for some 17 years, three of which as the President, a further term I declined about two years ago. Now being late 1998

England just did not look the same, nothing ever is when one goes back to anywhere, but this was worse. Plastic bottles and bags, cans and paper, even dog dirt littered the pavements and Folkstone used to be such an up-market place where the better off spent their holidays. Country lanes were overgrown and car wrecks did not improve the countryside scenery. A visit to my old unit turned out to be a disappointment, they were away on exercise with the exception of a small rear party. Being greeted by two old Corporals that I had known previously, then Captains. I asked if there was any chance of accommodation, it being very much sought after and scarce around Airborne Forces Day, to be told "no, the Quartermaster staff are not around". After twenty minutes chatting I left, anything but impressed to find a room in a countryside hotel a couple of hours later I guess 7/8 miles out.



1985 visit to the UK

Above - Billing and the old Swingbridge taken from the public right- of-way path adjacent to Olantiegh Towers

Right - Close up of the old Swingbridge, then very much overgrown



Meeting with old friends, the family that used to live at Well Cottage when we were all kids Derek, Gwen and Jean Ammon, Sidney and I and the two mums

Back home in WA I picked up the threads and carried on working for another year, making hay whilst the sun shines as they say. Nigel left me to go and work elsewhere whether for a change or better income or whatever it is not remembered now. The winter of 1986 proved to be rather a lean one and Wayne who had been planning a trip around Australia with his mates thought that this would be the ideal time to go, all his mates dropped out so he went off on his own on a reasonably new motor cycle being a very competent rider by then. I carried on until the better season appeared largely on my own, there being quite sufficient work for one.

About this time having been recommended by one of the staff at Dovens clinic (Chiropractic/Naturopath) I was attending to hopefully rectify the 'old war wound' re parachuting. I booked in for a basic masseur course soon after. Three hours a week for several weeks, mixed students of all ages and females by far outnumbering males. A practical course from the word go, embarrassment and shyness soon overcome with different partners every lesson and by necessity down to underwear, following soon after bras were also absent by those wishing to remove them as suggested by the female instructor. One is quick to appreciate the benefits of massage more so as the recipient. By the end of the course I had purchased a fold up massage table, regretfully it became a one way treatment at home and soon lost its attraction.

In 1987 pains in the back prompted me to go see a doctor who, after examination, advised that I should look for a less laborious occupation saying most people use their body, but with my past occupations in life I had abused mine and the effects were now just beginning to show. I took on board what he had to say and tried it, thereafter to take care or rather more care in what I did. At 57 the prospects of taking a new turn in life work wise were very dim indeed to say the least so with care I carried on often getting extra labour to do the digging or pump pulling out when required. It was difficult to turn my back on what had become a good business.

Soon after that notification came that I had been selected for a business audit by the taxation department, not being overly concerned about the check, more concerned about the interruption to my business working diary, all things done as stated by my accountant should be done, but as expected one or two minor things were picked up that I had to produce paperwork for later. Other than that the taxation account that I had been adding to on a weekly basis was never used for that purpose, always having sufficient in the account to pay annual taxes, consequently the taxation account became a nice little nest egg and interest earner with the interest rising to 17% during the 1980's. I had a satisfactory report from the inspector who said the general book keeping was good.

Enquiring for labour at the local Social Security Office to be informed my work came under the builders labourers union and that there were no junior rates, only senior rates apply and that I would have to allow for travel allowance, lunch allowance, no work wet weather payments, hot weather no work payments i.e. over 37°C and possibly danger money for working over open trenches, all of which would be dangerous 6 inches deep, all for a fifteen year old with no experience whatsoever. They had to be joking, but they were not, my sons and I had worked in temperatures up to 40°C and in showers of rain, it was difficult to believe. No wonder there was such a high rate of youth unemployment. I had learned from a solicitor, I had one on tap just in case, that it was quite legal for me to arrange employment and have a privately agreed written statement stipulating wages, hours, etc. to be signed by the employee, but to keep it from union eyes and ears otherwise I could be black listed i.e. stopped from working by various means, I ask you, and legal as well but that's another 'Australianism.'

Wayne and I continued on for a further long summer slog, at Christmas time there was always a rush to get jobs completed, through general conversation around I'd found that my acceptance rate must be one of the better ones amongst my contemporaries in the business at just on 80%. My rates had increased in line with material increases and a more generous margin for the workers, and as work increased (there is only so much work that two men can do) I plumped the price up to whittle the load down, and perhaps vice versa as the winter drew near, the system worked to get some very regular employment. I had always allocated Fridays for maintenance there being a constant demand for it and it was more productive than the reticulation installations financially quite often continuing in to the weekend.

During my last winter at work, by which time many more small reticulation businesses had established themselves, all eager to be self-employed and make a dollar, work became a little more scarce. Wayne left and found full time regular employment thus ensuring continuing income.

Keeping myself occupied albeit with a reduced income and working on my own I continued on into the summer months where once again work a plenty came my way. Jobs were refused, many, there being no hope of completing them in the time required by clients, so I gave maintenance priority for the reasons already given doing one reticulation job per week.

All work and no play appeared to suit me at the time, I rarely watched TV or read a newspaper, I listened to radio broadcast, news and the like if it was convenient whilst at work. Work was more or less my hobby and the fact that it was financially rewarding was the incentive to keep it moving along. However, like all good things in life it had to come to an end. and rather suddenly at that, at the age of 59 something happened on the last day of a job that I was engaged on. giving severe pain in the back whilst digging, sheer perseverance saw the job completed, a tidy up, stores and tools loaded a test run before calling out the client for approval and payment.

Having driven home, hobbled inside and Doctor called, I later on found myself in hospital where I remained for ten days, all business affairs being postponed by my wife Enid until further notice. My working life had suddenly come to an end. At hospital, three facet block injections were given under local anaesthetic, one at a time two days apart after sessions of x-rays had shown well-worn spinal discs with some displacement affecting the nerves. The treatment worked with whatever it was supposed to do, and provided I declined any invites to lift heavy objects and refrain from digging all seemed to go well not seeking further treatment for three years.

Several accounts were outstanding at my sudden retirement, amounting to over \$15,000 owing to ourselves and we owed about a \$1,000 for materials. Some difficulty had always been experienced in getting some clients to pay for services requested and completed, with rare exceptions always the better off people, four such clients from the Nedlands and Dalkeith areas, the rich suburbs of Perth. One doctor/surgeon taking nine months to pay an account of \$4,000, another in the medical field about the same time for a lesser amount of \$2,800. Another, a manager living in the northern suburb of Mullaloo shared a bore with a house immediately opposite across a five meter wide road and had fully automatic reticulation installed to the back and front of his property, on completion stating that he was unable to pay as his firm had not paid him a promised bonus, dealing with his wife who apologised profusely saying they would pay and offered to do so on a monthly basis, taking two years to do so. And yet another did a moonlighter on me after I had completed the installation of a well and full property reticulation, efforts by a debt collector failed to locate him, however about two and a half years later I received a cheque in the post for \$2,500 and apologies for late payment stating that he had lost his job at the time and went north to earn money to pay off debts. These were but a few of the examples encountered to finalise payments owed, having long gotten use to going around to clients houses and asking if there was any danger in their paying off their accounts, not once but several times.

Getting back to the \$15000 owed at the time of my injury and the consequent cessation of work, eight clients were still owing after repeated calls to settle up, so with a solicitors advice and a letter warning of possible court action, four paid all dues, the remaining four appearing to accept the challenge one of whom being a builder believed he had a right of redress stating that his bore and reticulation were not working satisfactorily. Always willing to investigate complaints and rectify any wrongs (note all work was given a twelve months guarantee) the builder among all people not understanding the design principles, had in fact added several sprinklers himself to two of the three stations and thereby lowering the pressure of all the other sprinklers in the same station when in operation. His problem for exceeding the design even though unknown to him at the time, the system was corrected by adding another station at his cost and he then paid all dues. The remaining three were issued with summons, one paid up within a week and two apparently still prepared to go to court.

I contacted the solicitor who advised me not to proceed as the amount of money involved would not cover the expense of prolonged court proceedings, some three thousand dollars at stake. Regardless I instructed the solicitor to go ahead, the final outcome being that both paid up prior to their cases being heard, yes it had cost me, I had lost some cash but not all but importantly and to my satisfactions they did not get away with it and the threat of action was worthy of pursuit. The only problem after that was getting the money from the solicitor's office, a point that had not been envisaged, and it took months to finalise surprisingly.

On 16th January 1992 I was admitted to St. Anne's Hospital for a prostate operation said to be a re-bore job but one that left more than a mark for the rest of my life.

The business name kept open until all financial matters were cleared and then the disposal of assets, the Datsun

1200 having by then covered 175,000 k's and the engine still reliable, rusty in places, the seating very good having been renovated just a few months previous, retreads well worn, driven by myself for about twelve years, nine years in my own business, sold for \$1000. The digging machine had had its 5 hp. motor exchanged for a 7 hp. motor and all had been kept in good repair sold for \$1500. A few business friends disappointed that they did not get first refusal and would have paid more so it was whispered to me at a later date, new like machines having become very expensive.

A measuring wheel went for what I had paid for it after years of use, miscellaneous tools went in dribs and drabs, the newer Nissan Ute kept, still in excellent condition after five years use. I'd had both trucks serviced on a regular basis knowing only too well that breakdowns cost more in lost time than the actual repair work. . The Ute was eventually sold for its purchase price, there having been a big vehicle price increase in the late eighties.

Business enquiries continued to roll in and were passed on to friends still working at it, in fact some nine months later I had the telephone number changed because of such enquiries, but still I was sought out through the address on my previous quotations, the last one in 1997, eight years after retirement when the gentleman said "wouldn't you like to take on a cash job now then?"

My Doctor having assessed my medical condition soon after release from hospital and knowing my past, stated in his opinion was attributable to military service, possibly parachuting and that I should write away for claim forms, in the meantime to claim for sickness benefit locally, the latter refused having a too big a bank balance.

Having been given a few pointers by an ex-army friend's wife in the know, I disposed of some cash assets. It had been my intention to have a decent mode of transport on retirement, so the time then appeared to be opportune. A Nissan Patrol four wheel drive vehicle, top of the range model was purchased with several add-ons, making a sizeable hole in savings costing \$46,000, this plus a caravan and two and a half acres of land were bought bringing the level down to a suggested nest egg.

With the doctor's certificate I applied for and received a disability pension. Meanwhile an application had gone to the UK for a service disability claim which was subject to medical examinations, these were then arranged via the DVA (Department of Veterans' Affairs) in conjunction with the RSL (Returned & Services League), two medical examinations by two different doctors plus my own doctor's report required one assumes to fulfil UK Ministry of Defence requirements. Eventually a 20% War Pension being awarded.



2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> acre country block bought and worked on for several years at Woodridge -  
65 k's north of Perth. WA. Planned on but never lived on

On 6th February 1990 I organised a surprise party for Enid it being her 60th Birthday. Around sixty guests were invited, all hiding behind dining room partitions, as the restaurant owner led us to a table for two when the surprise erupted with a rendition of "Happy Birthday."

Early 1990 (as is best remembered) we received a visit from an old school pal of mine, Peter Sexton accompanied by his sister Jean and her husband Ken, perhaps better known as Mr. and Mrs. Town. We had met them at the Perth airport, all as prearranged for we had been in contact by letter for many years, she having been a regular

visitor to my mother which was very much appreciated and particularly so in the later years of her life. The three of them stayed at a large hotel in Perth having booked the accommodation before they let me know that they were coming out. From day one we endeavoured to make the most of their time acting as tourist guides, picking them up in the morning in my Nissan Patrol driving to wherever, taking them to many places worthy of a visit, as we'd thought, giving them a printed itinerary of our proposals and remained quite open to change if they so desired, and of course dropping them back at the hotel in the afternoon. Ken and Jean made another visit the following year arriving on 5th March 1991 and stayed with us at our home address for a more relaxed style of holiday for three or was it four weeks. During 1995 they appeared again this time with friends Nigel and Barbara staying over in Perth for a few days as part of a much longer tour.

Becoming somewhat settled into the retirement routine, although advisedly now restricted in some of the normal pursuits of everyday living, various short trips to the South West of WA were made in caravans (plural) since we started out with a caravanette, a small minibus/van and decided in a very short time that it did not suit our needs. The first caravan with a trip to the south and another further longer trip up north with friends was never completed as we found out the sleeping arrangements, a very small uncomfortable bed did not suit the back complaint we therefore turned around and came back home. Soon after trading that particular van for an up-to-date single axle pop-up van with single beds and thought at the time to be the ideal layout.



November 1990 - a course in flying at Jandakot to get the PPL

In November 1990 soon after my 61st birthday I started on a flying course with the Aviation Academy of WA at Jandakot Airport, training on a two seater low wing monoplane, a Piper Tomahawk, rather faster than the normal Cessna aircraft used for trainees. Being assured that flying anything else afterwards would be a breeze in the single engine versions, a lot of home study, all went reasonably well, the highlight being the first solo flight receiving congratulations over the radio whilst taxiing in, from individual flight controllers in the tower, the chief instructor on parking and a couple of pilot instructors and staff back in the office. It made one feel as if you had really achieved something but thereafter things did not always go to plan experiencing some difficulty with landings, in particular the cross wind landings and took rather longer than most to master the art. My regular instructor was replaced with another at short notice a few times resulting in confusion of progress consequently, I say, causing me to fall out of a tight circuit whilst flying solo, at full revs.

I had not practised tight circuit training with an instructor although it had been demonstrated to me, it was to have been the next lesson when I was left to fly solo. Having climbed to 4000 ft, a good safety height for the practice remembered from the demo lesson, all round observation procedures were carried out and the nose was put on the horizon, somewhere on the second circuit I lost it, obviously banking too steeply thereby pretty well losing all lift. Down I went, engine screaming not far off vertical nose down, 4000ft is not very high doing that especially for a novice. Assuming I'd reached sixty knots (say 100 ft. per second) and it may well have been double that or more (my own opinion) there was a bang/crack, the Perspex canopy covering the cockpit split front to rear as I pushed the throttle in pulled back steady and levelled out. Fortunately the canopy still anchored



in place, by which time the ground was far nearer than normal transit required, having regained composure I climbed back to 1500 and reported the incident back to tower and asked their advice.

At Forrest lakes seven minutes later, the reporting in approach point for the airfield about six miles or so out, I reported in on the radio "Juliet Zulu Alpha to Tower now at Forrest Lakes over" and received the reply "Juliet Zulu Alpha flight level 1000 proceed with caution fly slow within the safety limit, over". "Juliet Zulu Alpha to Tower, am already doing just that, wilco out." A little later given the all clear to join the circuit, I did so and made a good landing and taxied in to be greeted by a bevy of instructors to inspect the damage, later filling in an incident report form at the office with much questioning from one of the senior pilots. 'Chuck' McAlwee I think that's how his name is spelt, an ex US. Fleet Air Arm Command Pilot employed in administration within the Academy I'd thought, appeared impressed with what had happened overall and voiced words to me to that effect. Personally, nothing was heard of the matter again, I completed the course took the final fixing test and written examination and was awarded the PPL although restricted as I had not been given any instruction on navigation, even though I'd read up on the subject and it was found not to be daunting, supposedly I guess having done a lot of compass work and map reading in many countries. Sometime after the course I hired a Piper Tomahawk and took Wayne up for a flight around the Jandakot flying training area.

Joining a four wheel driving club soon after the flying episode I was to find some very challenging driving not experienced in my previous adventures, it also proved to be a good testing decision not only for myself, but for Enid too, along with the Nissan Patrol learning how to handle it in really rough conditions and of course the new caravan as well, the latter after some eighteen months of use including cross country travel dirt tracks and some very rough dirt roads that had become corrugated in their sun hardened surfaces, all of which took its toll on the caravan design. Eventually the door would not close, the thing had actually bent over its single axle pulling the frame out of square popping a few rivets and spacing a couple of panels on the inside, and the wet weather season proved it was no longer waterproof coming in around the windows of which that particular van sported many, it spent a lot of time in the repair yard costing quite a lot of money and a lot of time of course when it could not be used. Having put everything right it was decided to trade in once again.

Once again we were in possession of a brand new caravan and although we had decided not to, we finished up with the same make of van, a Jayco 16 ft. 6" by 8ft wide (5.029 m x 2.438m) solid top, off set single axle for more stability in tow, all mod cons and a full size double bed and would you believe water proofing problems that I managed to fix myself

Suddenly at the age of 62 Enid's brother Cliff died on 30th May 1990.



Enid's 1985 Holden Calais (top of the range) alongside our first pop-up caravan

Caravanning out with  
friends, Bryan and  
Audrey Cole

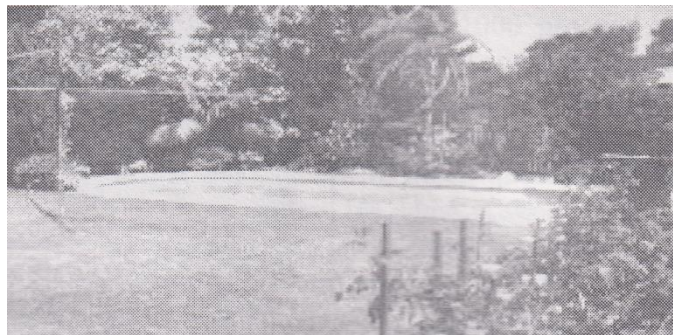


Soon after retirement from the workforce and having recovered reasonably well after the hospital stay, thoughts turned to fitness and adopting some form of activity. The Doctor had advised that I give running a miss, something that I had enjoyed throughout life to keep the metabolism ticking over, three or four miles along the beach with the dog and back again before breakfast when work time permitted was quite normal. As an alternative I bought me a mountain bike, supposedly a good one costing \$450, an early morning routine then commenced, when at home and before breakfast. Within a couple of months or so of riding I had built up to a comfortable exhilarating ride of 40 km (25 miles), time then becoming a factor anywhere between 1 hr. 40 min. to 2 hrs. depending on the strength and direction of the wind since one half of the ride was within a stone's throw of the open sea. Several modifications were made to the bike, narrow tyres, a good strong cham. alloy wheels and spokes, carrier and a more suitable seat and bell plus a small gadget to measure/register speed distance and time were all added.

A very pleasant activity to keep fit especially in the summer with all the early morning bikinis on display and sometimes bare bosoms bouncing on the beach sands, one such scene causing me to run smack bang into a lamp post, injuring pride more than anything else. A quick dip in the pool at home after a ride assured a good appetite for breakfast, this routine remained for four years when some discomfort was experienced in the right hip and since that sort of reaction is taken as nature's warning, riding the bike ceased as a routine form of fitness, and shanks pony for an hour each day took its place followed by a little workout with hand grips, bull bar dumbbells and chest expander with a few limbering up exercises which included hanging upside down on an inverter gym (a device bought for me by Enid to ease the trouble I had been having with my back) a form of traction that I had previously been going elsewhere for, and then the usual swim, still the routine at time of writing.

During a break in our travels around the country, I applied and paid for a place on a public speaking course, it being one of many varied courses offered to the public in community halls in and around the suburbs and was surprised to find that women outnumbered men three to one in a class of twenty. The basics had not really changed from military training, but it was interesting to get the modern approach to the subject, I had felt that I needed a bit of a booster in the practice and quite enjoyed the two weekly lessons over the six weeks.

Our backyard pool that has been in almost constant use since its installation in 1972, the exception being perhaps the coldest 3 months of later years in life



A few of us had left the 4 WD club after some disagreements and started up another similar club, yours truly being conned into writing up a constitution, being the President and having a bash at secretary and treasurer because no other volunteer came forward. We had a couple of very knowledgeable guys with us and organised some very good runs, exploring the Shannon, D'entrecasteaux and the Sir James Mitchell national parks south east of Windy Harbour and very long trips along the coastline sometimes fishing and once getting some instruction and practice at abseiling two of our numbers also being members of the state emergency service. Abseiling I thought was much the same as parachute training i.e. have confidence in your instructor and faith in your gear. Dave and Owen the instructors. Looking back we had quite a lot of expertise in the group, an Indian couple, he a professional photographer and she a nurse by the names of Dennis and Joan. Nigel who had been doing cross country driving as a recreational enthusiast for twenty odd years, a policeman and four or five others perhaps like myself rich in life experience. We camped on farm lands and drove through forest tracks negotiating steep slippery slopes, river crossings, log bridges, mud and some very rough ground. Other trips found us amongst giant sand dunes several hundred feet in height and slopes at the angle of repose where knowledge of the use of gears and the appropriate tyre pressures were essential to get one through.

On the 24th February 1994 my younger brother, Sidney Arthur Newman, came to stay on a pre-arranged visit of eight weeks, his first real visit overseas excepting the little hops over the English channel. He was of course very interested to see how big brother lived and where, he at the time was living alone and was free as to do as wherever his fancy took him. We occupied his time on a very casually planned schedule, all our suggestions meeting with approval to show him around and provide continual interest. He decided he would like to have a look see of the Eastern States not realizing of course what a vast country Australia really is. He flew over there and had booked in with one of the long distant coach firms to travel around, but found the long coach trips to get anywhere, as he put it, very boring and tiring and decided that that sort of touring wasn't for him and returned after a week. He enjoyed the time out here, the holiday, the home cooking, the family type life, the weather and the swimming. We enjoyed each other's company, nostalgic chats in the evenings and filling in the gaps where we lived apart with our own families. He having married at age twenty much sooner than myself at twenty eight he had two boys and two girls whereas I had three boys, but as cousins they would not know one another, the odd visits when military life allowed occurred when my lads were very young, and of course we came to Australia in May 1972 when Paul was twelve, Nigel had his ninth birthday on board ship, and Wayne was only five years old. Sid left us fixing on to Hong Kong on the 14th April '94 for a short stay before returning to Folkstone in Kent, his home in the United Kingdom.



Left - my retirement vehicle 4.2 litre diesel 4WD with all the extras Nissan Patrol. Shown driven in to be dug/driven out as a 4 wheel drive club exercise.

Below - a midday break stop in sand dune country



4 wheel driving along the beach in national parks south west of WA.  
Own vehicle used for recovery, bringing up the rear

1994 one particular trip took eight weeks to travel up the west coast of WA seeing en route carcasses of kangaroos, sheep and cattle alongside the roads, on which could be seen magnificent eagles and large Carion

Crows feeding on the remains. Surprisingly foxes the cunning intelligent animal brought to Australia by the early settlers from UK were often seen along the highway having become victims to passing traffic, and yet its counterpart the Dingo, the wild dog of the outback were never seen or reports heard of as having become roadside casualties. they too are considered intelligent perhaps more so than the 'pommy' fox as the above may suggest. We explored all places thought to be of interest, across to Broome noting as one does that petrol and diesel became more expensive at the remote roadside road houses and then following the highway meandering through the mountains to Darwin at the north top of Australia, five 4 WD vehicles. 3 towing caravans and 2 with camping gear

Outback station - taken from nearby high ground



One of the rivers feeding the Argyle Lakes in the north west of WA, said to be one of the biggest man-made lakes anywhere

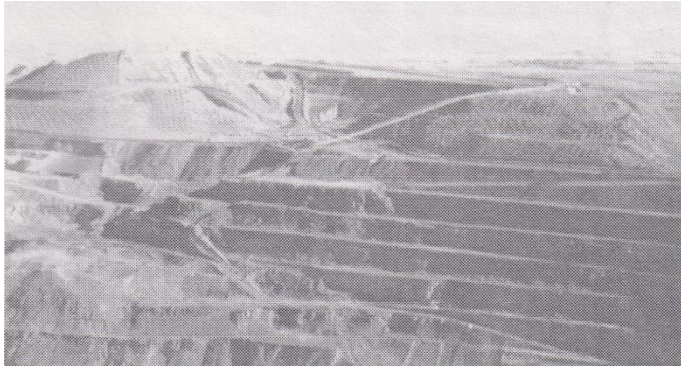


We had the opportunity to meet up with and speak to the odd Aboriginals, saw where they lived and how, and got the white man's impression of them as neighbours, quite an education for the likes of ourselves, very many of these were noted to be what is known as Full Bloods compared to all the half breeds and lesser coloured Aboriginals found further south in the west - more about them later.

Darwin at the top end as the saying goes, was flattened by Cyclone Tracy on Xmas aa 1972. But at the time of visit, a very modern city with big stores open 24 hrs. a day a week, large wide roads, sizeable harbour and airport and a choice of I think three caravan parks, over a week spent there during which Enid and I paid a visit to an old pal, Colin Jackson ex Aussie SAS mentioned earlier now living there before visiting all other towns of note en route to Alice Springs. Down through the middle of the vast country stopping at caravan parks or wherever when convenient, the main highways very straight with each crest bringing another line of sight to infinity, often with just sufficient tarmac for one line of vehicles with stony compacted red earth wide shoulders on either side, slippery when wet and very dodgy with flying stones and thick dust from passing trucks when dry.

The vast expanse of mostly featureless country, uninhabited and sometimes with the horizon on three sides disappearing into the blue haze of distance. When coming to a halt for comfort stops, the utter silence is eerie, the quiet deafening in the words of my wife. I had experienced similar many years earlier in the Sinai Desert in Egypt where wildlife too appeared to be non-existent. Such a trip has to be experienced to be believed, some find it boring, personally I was all agog remaining alert and interested engaging in chit chat over the two way radio to whoever was travelling with us, in some areas on the go for four hours before meeting other vehicles.

At Alice Springs, civilisation in the middle of nowhere and surrounded by rocky mountain terrain, the township was quite modern in a quaint way, black and white appeared to mix more freely, business appeared to flourish, certainly catering for the tourist. At its Southern end through what is known as the gap, the road, river bed and railway pass between high rock ridges (200 ft. perhaps) and a hundred plus meters wide. The river like most in the outback only runs in the wet.



Above (left) - open cut mining pit, iron ore at Mt. Newman

Above - one of the 200 ton dump trucks, some driven by young girls. Tyres said to last between 9-12 months and cost over \$2,000 each

Middle - Mt. Newman Mining locomotive. 3 are said to move a train of iron ore one mile or more in length, and trucks are emptied at their destination by turning them upside down on a rail platform

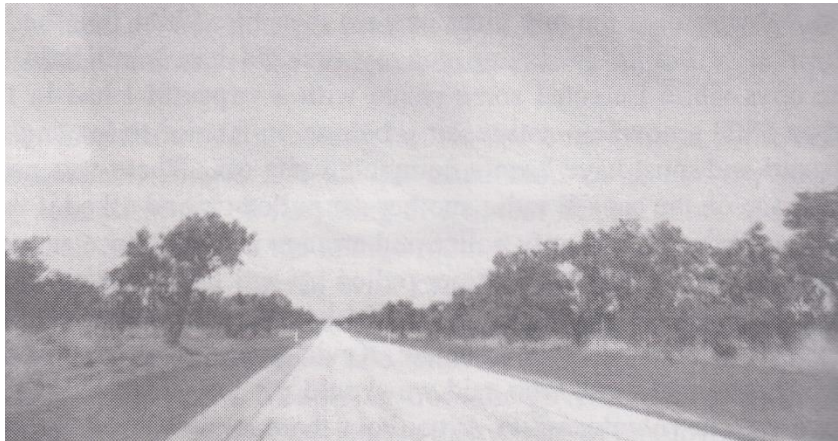
Left - 50 ton shovel scoop to fill the big dump trucks using electric power fed by a very large cable from mine power station, since the constant supply of fuel for such a large machine would be impracticable

Travelling south 180 km down the Stuart Highway there is a turn off to the west 190 km to Ayers Rock, the largest monolith in the world, also known as 'Uluru' in the native tongue. Five miles around its base the rock rising up out of the shrub 1200 ft. and more perhaps, much more when climbing with all the gullies and false crest one has to cover to reach the trig point where a register can be signed to record your own efforts. It was a steep climb being accompanied by Doug Bushby a member of the club rather younger than myself we stopped a couple of times for a breather taking in the views whilst doing so and giving the old ticker a break at the same time, I was after all just two months from my 65th birthday. On the way down we passed the remainder of the club who had attempted the climb still on their way up, Doug and I completed the up and down in one and a half hours we within the two to two and a half hour average. It was then that read a notice advising that the climb was not for the unfit and aged persons and any that did so, did so entirely at their own risk, stating quite a few had died in the attempt. I had remembered my son Wayne recalling the adventure up Uluru on a wet misty day, an added incentive for me to do likewise. While in the area we had a look at the Olgas, another rock outcrop said to be worthy of a visit on the tourist map, the Devils Marbles another formation that took up some of our

time en route somewhere along the track was worthy of the visit.

Continuing on southward through what some have described as monotonous landscapes calling in to a couple of interesting road houses for top ups and relief and spending one memorable night in the bush off the highway in wild west style sitting around a large fire made up in the centre of a dried up water course, telling jokes having a bit of a sing song whilst we kept the throats moist with liquid amber, port or nips of whatever one had to ward off the cold night air, just 1km. north of the South Australia border and obviously not so very far from a favoured night stop for some of the very big road trains.

Road views to infinity, a common sight in the driver's



Eventually Coober Pedy came into our sights on a windy day with clouds of dust and sand blowing around and the first impressions were 'what a dirty looking place', the town of opals surrounded by a desert of holes and piles of spoils (the old diggings.) We all booked into the Oasis Caravan Park the only such park to have metered showers, we guessed water was rather less than plentiful it took 20 cents to adjust the temperature 20 cents to get wet and soap over and another 20 to rinse off, well to start with anyway. There were quite a few places of interest to visit, underground houses, hotels and even a church and many shops selling opals, the Old Timers Mine, a Museum and a bus tour of the mine. I noticed a comment in the travel diary 'this place really is the pits.' It didn't take long to have our fill of this place so we moved out and onwards to Port Augusta stopping at road houses for necessity or those that took our fancy en route.

At Port Augusta we rested for a couple of days, some deciding to go on to Adelaide for a look around, Dennis and Joan went south to Port Lincoln and Enid and I thought we would take our time and mosey back across the Nullarbor heading homewards, stopping at Ceduna, Madura, Norseman where Dennis caught up with us and then Cunderdin being the last stop before home at Duncraig.

We had travelled a total of 12235 km. using 2165 litres of diesel costing \$1710, spending \$686 at caravan parks, with food, leisure and drinks etc. estimated at something over \$1500 in 8 weeks on the road. Looking back through the travel diary kept by Enid a little more reporting worthy of note on our Aussie travels is included.

An incident 180km from Karratha on a very remote section of the West Coast Highway, on a very hot day black smoke appeared ahead, it looked like burning oil or rubber, we were soon to discover a bad accident being first on the scene, a van similar to an L300, the type some use as camper vans, had rolled over at speed. A youngish couple were sitting on the ground and a young lad nearby with a bleeding head and grazed arms, the young man endeavouring to console a young woman who had been driving and had apparently dropped off to sleep, we learnt that they were Robyn and Lorraine after speaking to them for a few minutes when I asked "just the three of you travelling alone" to be told "no there is another boy in the van and I can't get him out." On investigation a lad of about 11 years old lay whimpering with the crushed roof pinning him down, the engine still smouldering I shouted for Robyn to give assistance, and half crawled half reached inside the van and with a piece of wood levered and bent metal out of the way, but he was trapped by his head that appeared to be squashed so using my elbow and forearm as a fulcrum I levered the springy roof whilst Robyn pulled the boy clear and we then lifted him free, he had a very large lump to the rear of his head. Having got my first aid box I left Enid to clean

up and comfort the boys while I erected some shade with a tarpaulin I had in the car. The van having had an S800 renovation and repair job done on it prior to leaving for their holiday was not insured and must have been a complete write off. There was no response to my call for assistance on the car CB radio another car pulled up and asked if they could help in any way, they were asked to notify- police and arrange an ambulance as soon as they could and they drove away. A road train driver pulled up and tried on his radio to get through saying it was unlikely, he left saying he would keep trying further on. a number of cars stopped, one being an ex-business associate. Kevin Yeoman, who asked if he could help, another carried a trained nurse who said we should get the young lads to hospital as soon as possible, a couple volunteered to drive them there straight away Enid suggesting that Lorraine go with them which she did giving both Enid and myself a hug before she left. We remained 2 12 hrs. with Robyn until the police arrived and then later that day camping at Karratha caravan park where incidentally we met Jack Absalom a TV personality. A visit next morning to the local hospital with presents, we met up with Lorraine and were surprised to see both boys with heads bandaged in a swimming pool, the resilience of youth what a fine example.

Still on the same adventure and moving up the West Coast Highway toward Broome and then inland and north to Darwin, back down the centre of Australia to Port Augusta. We, those with whom we travelled, took the opportunity to visit Aboriginal communities to see how they lived, how they occupied their time etc., nothing seen and reported truthfully would do anything to compliment, impress, improve or raise the beliefs, mainly misconceptions that the demeanour and living standards of native Australians, had, or were improving despite the enormous amounts of money supposedly being allocated and spent in that regard. I heard from a well-known (to me) reliable witness that the Aboriginals in the Kalgoorlie area were often seen as a matter of habit to urinate and defecate and on more rare occasions fornicate in public areas in broad daylight. I have to admit that I have not seen the latter two functions being performed, but with a few rare exceptions the Aboriginals generally appeared very scruffy, unkempt and dirty and yet displaying an arrogance seemingly unbecoming to themselves as they daily wait for liquor outlets to open or otherwise drink and smoke in their little groups in whatever shade might be available, few work, almost nil in some country areas.

On the positive side there have been some splendid examples of very fit young Aboriginal men playing footy in the State and National leagues and one young female that come to mind representing Australia in athletics. Maybe the tourist only see the one side of Aboriginal life. Those having been to Wiluna in WA may well have heard of the native owned government supplied cars/vehicles running out of fuel and left on the outback roadside more often than not with the keys still in the ignition, these are recovered by tow truck, the local garages keeping a tally of all such expenses including breakdown and maintenance, the garage owners being recompensed by government inspectors every couple of months or so apparently, running into the thousands. One wonders what sort of checks and authority could control such a so called legitimate activity.

I was personally approached at Port Hedland by a young coloured fellow, "nice vehicle" he said pointing to my Nissan Patrol, "cost plenty money, yeh?" "Yes I replied, a lot of money but good value." "Not as good as my Range Rover over there, you white man bloody stupid, you buy, me black man and government pay everything." Areas north of and east of Broome, similar stories to the activities of those at Wiluna were repeated, vehicles supplied to remote settlements and some not so remote were left damaged and may be with seized engines through lack of oil, and garages notified by the drivers, all were collected, repaired, refuelled and returned to the designated settlements at the costs of the taxpayer.

At one particular location modern looking houses had been built at some earlier time and fitted out with cookers, fridges and all the usual mod cons, but anything movable or saleable is very soon disposed of. Anything of a timber nature, doors and window frames, roof components, all are burnt on the lounge room floor with roof tiles removed to let out the smoke. The outside areas littered with cans bottles and fast food packaging, there appeared to be no dividing lines between dwellings, just barren unkempt space. The houses we learnt were subject to annual repair and renovation, completely fitted out again as per new house, contractors getting a nice living from the government contracts and obviously not willing to voice their concerns and deprive themselves of employment.

On return to Perth, interest in all things native having been aroused it came to notice that Aboriginals get very low fixed interest rates on a mortgage even to those being just one tenth aboriginal, one tenth, who checks what and justifies entitlement? There are also other extra monetary assistance entitlements, for those renting accommodation, remote living allowance in addition to the supply of free vehicles, a payment allowance for



sending their children to school plus for some reason a supplementary payment for school clothing and footwear. Even a dog allowance, but only for two dogs per family, domestic bills are paid by Social Security if hardship is proven, one man overheard to ask for twenty dollars for food for his dogs and then seen to spend it on a carton of beer.

Many will have heard about the families travelling between Social Security Offices by taxi across the state (apparently there is one to every three or four towns) to claim Social Security payments from each office, if they are questioned in any way about the claims, they state that they have been subjected to racial discrimination, just hearsay, (SS staff have been instructed to avoid that at all cost) so to avoid any public outcry the claimants get paid.

Press reports have appeared about the assimilation of native families into the suburbs around Perth from time to time, as always their anti-social behaviour, houses often becoming over crowded, raise resentment particularly when it is made known many refuse to pay rent, feed from local charities and practise some other habits already mentioned. One such family that lived in Karrinyup WA, were evicted for just the very reasons mentioned and took their case to court based on racial discrimination and to everyone's surprise were awarded \$20,000 despite the fact, if my memory serves me right, they owed over \$2000 in rent to Homes West, the government department responsible for housing both black and white non home owners. Since the award was against Homes West the taxpayer foots the bill of \$22,000 plus, mention was made on radio that Homes West would appeal against the court ruling but nothing has been heard at the time of writing, as was suggested in conversation, they were probably told not to in order that the matter would die a quick silent death.

A 1998 press report stated that 'they' represent just 3% of the population Australia wide and yet account for 30% of the prison population, an interesting little fact, more than interesting perhaps action should be taken in some quarters. Claims for land rights in the mid to late '90's exceeded all expectations, the stampede having been initiated by some High Court ruling on the subject (five of the most senior Judges in the land had divided opinions on Aboriginal land rights, voting three for and two against, on the final ruling) sometime earlier. This placed a large number of farmers, lessee's of pasture properties, some mining companies and exploration ventures in turmoil as to their future whilst the politicians appeared to procrastinate about legislating on the matter, a situation that caused much concern in very many communities in every state in Australia, dividing political viewpoints and unlikely to be resolved to the satisfaction of all and thereby sowing the seeds for a new political party7 "One Nation."

Having travelled fairly widely and seen the so called underprivileged people from various lands, many where no social security or funding of any kind existed, it is difficult to understand the situation as found in the land down under, nothing seen anywhere else compares with some of the hapless, helpless indigenous, mainly country people of Australia, despite the millions of dollars that have supposedly been allocated and spent for their betterment.

By some extraordinary coincidence, the day after the above was written the 5th august '98, mention was made on the evening TV news that the family evicted earlier in Karrinyup had been re-housed back in the same street to the dismay of many of the residents, and that the appeal by Homes West for the \$20,000 awarded against them was to go ahead. This news was followed by a report the following morning from the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs on ATSIC, that irregularities had been found in 44 of the 65 offices checked, and that any that failed to open their books for inspection all financial aid would cease. Amazing how the new Party One Nation has stirred those responsible into action, despite comments to the contrary as one would expect in the political arena. Later in 1998 Homes West won the appeal, true justice prevails.

Re-reading later I realised I must have got rather carried away in my thoughts and perhaps getting somewhat political however in the interest of readers, maybe overseas, I have decided to include these paragraphs. After all who really owns Australia, is there really any difference between Aboriginals and any other people on the earth? The 'Brits' have never owned England, the 'Japs' Japan, the Germans Germany, nor have the French ever owned France. History shows all have had to fight to defend the territory they occupy and control. Only the triumphant celebrate, for the defeated it has always been the same, if you cannot beat them you join them. Planet earth, or any country on it, cannot be owned by anyone and that includes Australia but some would have us believe that Aboriginals were the original legal custodians. They did nothing to improve the country, its soil or its animal life, or even their own lives they merely caught or hunted or dug up and gathered whatever was

available. Australia has opened its doors, people from anywhere on earth can apply for citizenship, and once granted have equal rights with everyone living here to vote and hopefully have a say in the control and improvement of the country. That is real democracy as we have all come to believe is the right and fair way in life.



Our 3 minder sons Paul, Wayne and Nigel  
Taken in 1995

Early 1995 I once again became President of Pegasus (Airborne Forces) Association of WA (Inc.) which occupied quite a lot of my time, a daily fitness routine still keeping alert in all respects. My youngest son had left home deciding that he would like to invest in his own house and bought a nice little three bedroom property some twenty minutes away, leaving Enid and I living alone once again as we had started out some thirty seven years earlier. Our social life then consisted of dining out with friends once a month or thereabouts, attending the odd Pegasus or some other association function, and in that year we actually went to a cinema for the first time since leaving England and also managed to squeeze in two short caravan trips to the south coast area as this year turned out to be a very active one concerning myself and the association, it being fifty years since the end of World War II. There were many remembrance services and parades to which I and sometimes a few others were invited to attend, myself in many instances laying a wreath on behalf of the Association and perhaps attending the social get togethers afterwards meeting many VIP's in the process; Sir Charles Court ex-Premier of Western Australia who I believe had some connection with the Burma Star Association or that's where I met him, The Governor of Western Australia His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery AC MC, who wore the Special Air Service wings departed from his normal course to have a few words having been attracted by the sandy SAS beret I was wearing on a couple of occasions, the Brigadier COC of the armed services in WA I guess, all of whom I found very easy to converse with.

President of Pegasus (Airborne Forces) Association of WA (Inc.) on an ANZAC Day march



Attending one of the many memorial services held throughout the year.

Left to right:  
John Hyson ex Glider Pilot  
Bidge Root war para trained

Extreme right:  
Ken Barnes served in 9 Para Sqn  
RE as a cook NCO during my  
own time with the Sqn.

Re-elected to continue on as President the following year. I was to find myself involved with a couple of complicated welfare cases, one of whom by the name of E. Dover was a companion of Roy Farran, the Wartime SAS Officer of some notoriety, so I heard some firsthand accounts of almost unbelievable wartime SAS exploits. With the help of the RSL Welfare Officer we managed to secure quite a substantial amount of financial aid from the British Legion and from his original unit the Royal Corp Signals in the UK to fight a court case within the family over property ownership, which incidentally our members solicitor was optimistic and very confident that she would win the case. In fact she lost the case for our member who died in the final stages of the hearing, apparently from stress. Our own fund went down a little as it sometimes does in dealing with welfare but this is exactly the reason why such associations exist, helping those in need amongst our numbers.

Time was also spent visiting other house bound members & listening to their active service activities, incredible stories. The teller of one being a survivor, one of ten men of the three hundred or so who were driven into a wide fast flowing river in Germany and were slaughtered under withering machine gun fire as they attempted to escape by swimming across, apparently soon after a parachute drop. The same individual was in Singapore prior to, and at the time of the Japanese occupation, and obviously involved in some racket, as he and an officer had so much currency in notes that they had to bury it in an army kit bag, and although visits to the island have been made since no way has been found to get the booty out. The story is that the treasure still lies, now in the playing field of some girls high school.

As an Association and like many post WW II associations, we were becoming an aging one and like some others were unable to attract or keep the younger members that we did attract. Membership numbers did move to a high of almost a hundred but dropped to a little over eighty during my second term. As is the prerogative of a President I asked to see and inspected the accounts and records of the Association, a worthwhile little exercise, some records of members just did not exist and many subscriptions were years behind, one by ten years who I knew regularly attended the marches, another poor soul a so called defaulter, five years behind with his

subscriptions according to the ledger. The then treasurer wasn't to know but I remembered quite clearly attending his funeral with my wife, we both knew him very well as he had been the footy coach to a junior team in which my younger son played, he had been deceased five years at the time of the check. Members not seen or heard of for X number of years were placed on the ex-members list, and for others that were unfinancial for more than twelve months I asked that they not be sent newsletters, it was stated at a meeting two years later that letters were still being sent to unfinancial members, a reversed decision or just forgotten? There were some doubts about the eligibility of five members often raised in little corner conversations by some members which I made some endeavours to resolve, not all enquiries were officially answered but somehow the fact that the 'confidential' letters were written, resulted in those that were named losing contact with the Association. However despite all, the comradeship/brotherhood remained strong amongst the regular attendees and the annual Anzac day marches saw between fifty and sixty putting in an appearance including two octogenarians, on one occasion three amongst their numbers.

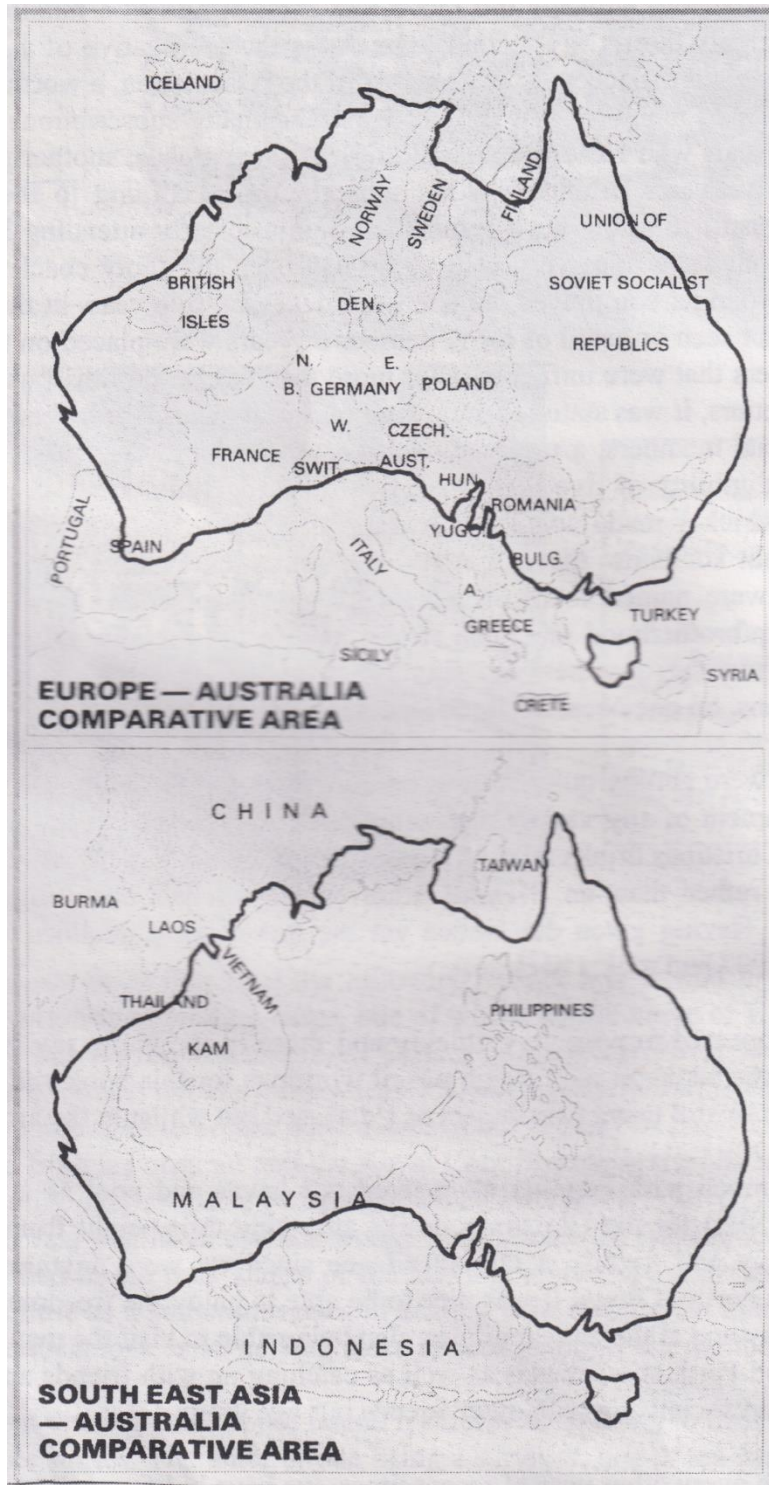
Some of us were getting quite a lot of practice with the formality of funerals, suggestions for entertainment of any variety met with little response the exceptions being, the annual march, the Christmas drinks and the annual dinner, but the latter had to be brought forward to mid-day rather than an evening affair which as had been suggested did increase attendance. Having given due notice via the newsletter I declined not to stand for re-election in 1997 and took a back seat.

Time still appeared to pass very quickly and those in the know say it's all related to age. much of it was taken up with rough pencil workings for this book and the eventual typing of a rough draft still using two fingers as I'd started out whilst in the army.

Keeping in touch with Pegasus we offered our lawns and pool as a venue for a garden party come BBQ for the Christmas drinks attracting thirty eight from memory including wives partners and friends, a fair attendance since we were anything but central being fifteen miles north of Perth. It was nice to be able to enjoy the freedom from responsibility on Anzac day and at the annual dinner, also being able to visit the many exhibitions put on in and around Perth at weekends as well as catching up with friends and family still in the workforce and socialising with other friends our age group.

1998 as with every other year of recent times, we have bid farewell to the passing of some friends (dropping off the perch) both within the Association and outside it, a constant reminder that we are now in that age group. Perhaps an inappropriate remark could be, "well that's life."

Nothing has changed in recent times that has not already been written about, "and so life goes on."



## GLOSSARY

Recruit.....	Undergoing military training
RE.....	Royal Engineers
SAS.....	Special Air Service Regiment
Spr.....	Trained Soldier of the RE
Tpr.....	Trained soldier of the SAS
Pte.....	Trained soldier of an infantry unit
Crap Hat.....	Arrogant airborne soldier's definition of any other soldier not para trained. Often superior to himself
L/Cpl.....	Lance Corporal - well trained soldier
Cpl.....	Corporal - skilled soldier able to instruct
JNCO.....	Junior Non-Commissioned Officer - L/Cpl or Cpl
Sgt.....	Sergeant - highly skilled soldier
S/Sgt.....	Staff Sergeant - very highly skilled soldier
SQMS.....	S/Sgt employed as Sqn Quarter Master Sgt.
SNCO.....	Senior Non-Commissioned Officer - S/Sgt. or Sgt.
WOII.....	Warrant Officer Class Two
SSM.....	WOII employed as Squadron Sergeant Major
RQMS.....	WOII employed as Regimental Quarter Master Sergeant
QMSI.....	WOII employed as Quarter Master Sergeant Instructor
WOI.....	Warrant Officer Class One
RSM.....	WOI employed as Regimental Sergeant Major
SMI.....	WOI employed as Senior Master Instructor
YO.....	Young Officer undergoing training
Rupert.....	An inexperienced YO possessing the 'element of surprise' men will follow anywhere wondering what they will do next
2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt.....	Second Lieutenant usually well educated, often lacking practical experience employed as Junior Tp Officer
Lt.....	Lieutenant Junior Officer able to accept responsibility
Capt.....	Captain as Tp Commander or 2I/C of minor units
Adjt.....	Captain employed as Adjutant to CO's of major units
Major.....	Officer Commanding minor units or 2I/C major units
QM.....	Major employed as Quarter Master to major units
Lt Col.....	Lieutenant Colonel Commanding Officer to major units
Brig.....	Brigadier in command of a Brigade
VIP.....	Very important person
RSME.....	Royal School of Military Engineering
IRA.....	Irish Republican Army
MM.....	Military medal
RN.....	Royal Navy
Sec.....	Section about 12 men including 1 Cpl or 2 LCpls
Tp.....	Troop of 3 secs and 1 HQ sec. Captain. S Sgt. Sgt Junior Officer
Sqn.....	Squadron 3 Tps and HQ Tp. Plant Tp and MT Tp
Regt.....	Regiment 3 Sqns Plant Sqn and RHQ
HQ.....	Headquarters
RHQ.....	Regimental Headquarters
RV.....	Rendezvous or FUP (forming up point) - meeting place
LZ.....	Landing zone or heli pad for helicopter landing platform
DZ.....	Dropping zone for supplies or personnel e.g. parachutist
A/Per.....	Anti-personnel as in mines and booby traps
A/Tk.....	Anti-tank mines and weapons e.g. PIAT (projectile infantry anti-tank).
ULU.....	Jungle
CaseVac.....	Casualty evacuation
Int.....	Intelligence
Sanger.....	Weapons pit built up with large rocks and stone
CB.....	Confined to barracks means much more as a punishment
STOL.....	Short take-off and landing refers to aircraft type

DTL.....	Deep trench latrine - soldiers for the use of
Dvr.....	Driver
Op.....	Operator
Ops.....	Operations as on military operations
Para.....	Parachuting units and trained parachutists
DR.....	Despatch rider
LMG.....	Light machine gun
MT.....	Motor transport
MO.....	Medical Officer - military doctor
MTO.....	Motor Transport Officer
PTI.....	Physical Training Instructor
APJI.....	Assistant Parachute Jumping Instructor
Admin.....	Administration
PSI.....	Permanent Staff Instructor
RMP.....	Royal Military Police
RP.....	Regimental Police
REME.....	Royal Electrical Mechanical Engineers
RAMC.....	Royal Army Medical Corp
ACC.....	Army Catering Corp
RAEC.....	Royal Army Education Corp
APTC.....	Army Physical Training Corp
FELF.....	Far East Land Forces
MELF.....	Middle East Land Forces
BAOR.....	British Army of the Rhine
Chopper.....	Helicopter



**"Spot the obvious mistake"**





**ON GUARD:** Ron Martin, from Hastingleigh was among the volunteers called to arms

'Haricot' and covered the Hastingleigh, Wye and Bodsham areas. I am the only one still alive. I know there were patrols over Crundale and on the Marsh, but we were never told who were involved or where were their underground bases, just in case we were caught by the Germans."

The researchers have located several underground bunkers and made contact with a few surviving members of the local resistance movement, but many of the wartime secrets have already gone to the grave

Mr Plunkett said: "Many of those involved have died without telling their story to anyone. Only last week at Charing, Sir Peter Wilkinson passed away, closing yet

another chapter in the remarkable story."

The most mysterious piece of the jigsaw puzzle is the special duties section, consisting mainly of women. They were intended to act as secret wireless operators, spies and messengers.

Using a string of dead-letter boxes they would have passed on intelligence about enemy troop movement to the Auxiliary Units. Very little is known about the remarkable women chosen for this role.

Anyone with information on the men and women who served with the underground army can contact Adrian Westwood on 01233 330209.

■ 60 years on - the Battle of Britain recalled, page 25.  
Memorial service - page 17

## POACHERS WERE RECRUITED

TOGETHER AGAIN: Harry Hall (left) who was based at Godmersham, Ron Martin (Hastingleigh) and Geoffrey Beyts (Bilting), now living in Spain

# Together again: our secret army

**T**HE last time Harry Hall, Ron Martin and Geoffrey Beyts met it was the summer of 1940, but even then they were most likely unaware that their paths had crossed.

The trio were members of the Auxiliary Units, Britain's most secret wartime resistance movement, set up after the fall of France and the Dunkirk evacuation to act as a last-ditch defence against the expected German invasion.

Sixty years after that momentous summer the three met, along with 50 other UK resistance members, at a reunion held at the Museum of the British Resistance Movement in Suffolk.

Helping to bring together the secret army of young war heroes were two Ashford men researching the XI Corps Observation Unit, the official military title of the Kent-based units, supported by the Kentish Express who provided

by Mike Bennett

transport for the veterans.

Adrian Westwood from Ashford council and Jamie Plunkett a field manager with English Nature, have been tracking down the men and women involved, and their underground bases.

The Kent coast between Dungeness and Sandwich was the most likely site for the German invasion codenamed Operation Sealion, but the British Army, severely depleted of men and arms following the German blitzkrieg across Europe, was in no shape to take on Hitler's finest storm troopers.

Mr Westwood said: "Winston Churchill all ordered a secret army to be formed of men

who knew the Kent hills, forests, and marshes, such as farmers, foresters, gamekeepers and poachers.

"Secret underground bunkers, observation posts and wireless stations were built

along the North Downs, on Romney Marsh, and the Weald ready for the men to hide when the Germans invaded.

"Their suicidal role was to ambush German patrols, sabotage railway lines, roads and bridges, assassinate German officers and destroy supply depots - anything to slow the German advance. They would have had a life expectancy of two weeks."

The headquarters of the Kent Secret Army was at a remote Bilting farmhouse called The Garth. Here, hand-picked local men were trained in the black art of sabotage, explosives and hand-to-hand combat.

Ron Martin, who lives in Hastingleigh, said: "We were taught how to use plastic explosives, to kill sentries with a knife, to set traps, set booby traps and generally how to cause as much mayhem as possible. We learnt some pretty nasty stuff."

"My patrol codename was

DATE POSTAGE MY FATHER WAS A MEMBER



## An Ex R. S. M

Don recalls his childhood pre World War 11 and War years as an impressionable teenager. Witnessing aerial combat/ aircraft armadas and assembly points of soldiers embarking on active service. As a naval cadet and experience on HMS mine sweepers.

Don joins the Royal Engineers with service in Europe and Deserts then transfers to the SAS in Malaya. As a parachutist Engineer in Africa, Cyprus, Libya, Bahrain and Persian Gulf. Finally as a WO1 to R.S.M.E. to complete 22 years.

Migrating to a Australia with a young family , his life work and partial realisation of dreams.

Autobiography by  
D H Newman

*Life of a  
Post War  
Career  
Soldier  
1929 to 1999*

