



Airborne Engineers Association

Regd Charity No: 1009201

NEWS LETTER

JANUARY 1996

PRESIDENT

Major General G Field CB OBE

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From the Chair!

Dear Members,

First I would like to introduce myself as Bob's replacement. Bob (Fergy) Ferguson has been in the chair since the conception of the Association of Airborne Engineers. He has experienced all the trials and tribulations of getting it "off the ground," and we owe him a large vote of thanks, for his hard work and patience on our behalf

Although the format of the Newsletter has been well received, the layout has changed slightly. The order of the Branch Information has been altered, as we hope to encourage "**The Squadron**" to provide more articles and information about their current tasks. The Newsletter is the Associations link between the past and present and I would like to encourage you, the members, to submit articles (fit to print!). Come on, we all have tales to tell and if you have photographs we will make sure they are returned to you safely.

The Association has been well represented at all major reunion and remembrance events in what was an eventful year. All our Branches are now well established with new members continually joining. I am sure, you would wish to thank the local committees for all their hard work this past year. Special thanks to Ripon, who hosted the 1995 AGM, I believe it was a very successful weekend.

I look forward to meeting most of you in 1996 and wish everyone a belated Happy & Prosperous New Year!

Tom Ormiston
Chairman
Airborne Engineers Association

The Airborne Engineer

The finest soldier in the land,
Without a doubt, the Airborne Engineer.
A builder a constructor,
The combat soldier without fear
With initiative and many skills,
He treads through deserts, jungles, mountains too.
Always strong and very fit,
His pride and stature of which there are few.
To build a Bailey Bridge is no mean feat,
"One, two, lift," is the shout we all hear.
Working through the day and night,
A soldier of renown, the Airborne Engineer.
Descending in a parachute from the sky,
Equipment a very heavy load.
An agonizing march to the "rendezvous"
A muddy trench his abode.
He will rise above the call,
Of anything duty bound.
Through bullets, smoke and fire
He crawls his way along the ground.
A minefield he has to clear,
He grits his teeth with pounding heart,
A soul with courage is his badge.
Safe clearway he must make, before the battle start.
Soldier of travel and dialogue,
An element of danger he will seek,
Bravery beyond the call, the Airborne Engineer,
His motto on heraldic crest "UNIQUE ET UBIQUE"

J.M. Thompson, January 1996

Committee Members

Position	Member	Address	Code	Phone
President	Geoff Field			
Vice President	Ian Wilson			
Chairman	Tom Ormiston			
Secretary	Ray Coleman			
Membership	Chris Chambers			
Treasurer	Bob Mathews			
Historian	Fred Gray			
Entertainments	Dave Rutter			
1 Sqn	Bob Jones			
2 Sqn	Ollie Atkins			
3 Sqn	Bob Sullivan			
4 Sqn	Eric Richards			
9 Sqn	OC, SSM, Cpl			
131 TA	Bunny Brown			
591 Sqn	Tony Jackson			
Aldershot	Moggy Metcalfe			
Birmingham	George Barratt			
Chatham	Eric Blenkinsop			
Yorkshire	Bill Rudd			
North West	Alan Marshall			
Northern Ireland	RSM R Brown			
Shop	Jan Chambers			

Appeal - A Comrade requiring Communication

Anyone who served with "The Squadron" in the 1950's will no doubt remember a "Park Troop" sapper called Rees "Taffy" Price, who operated the squadron's bulldozer. Sadly "Taffy" has fallen victim to "Motor Neurone" disease. This debilitating illness has now virtually paralysed "Taffy." He has also lost the power of speech, although his brain, thought and memory process functions normally. "Taffy" is only able to communicate by blinking and at times by a "feeble" smile. I do not think many, including myself, can begin to understand the frustration of having an active mind, trapped in a body that does not respond to the commands given by the brain, but sadly, that's "Taffy's" lot!

The purpose of this Appeal, is to ask members of the Association to write to "Taffy," bearing in mind you will not get a reply. You can be assured however, "Taffy" will get much pleasure and comfort from the letters he receives. He has a pal called Bill Rogers, (Bill recently became a member of the Association) who is also an ex-member of 9 Sqn, who visits and reads his letters to him. It doesn't matter whether you knew "Taffy" or not, or what you did in the Squadron (within reason!), I implore you to write. I am sure you have many funny tales to tell that will brighten his life considerably! Remember, keep the "Sport Pages" clean and respectable, as others may read his letters for him.

Write To:

Mr W.R. Rogers c/o Rees "Taffy" Price, 9 Tudor Street, Ferndale, Rhondda, Mid Glamorgan CF43 4LL

or

Mrs D. Price, 35 Addison Street, Blackwood, Gwent. NP21JX

Ray Coleman – Secretary

Activity in the Association has now calmed, after the very hectic period since the last Newsletter. Many members have been involved in VJ Day celebrations throughout the country and also many Airborne functions, both here and abroad.

Again this year, many made the September pilgrimage to Chatham for the various reunions at the Veterans weekend. It appears a marvellous time was again had by all. On the Sunday parade, a fine contingent of Airborne Engineers were prominent and as always, a credit to the Association!

On Saturday 23rd September 1995, our President arranged a splendid visit to the Tower of London for approximately 100 personnel. Those who were lucky enough to attend, enjoyed an unforgettable occasion. Sunday 24th September saw many members attend the "Double Hill" service at Paulton in Somerset, where wreaths were laid on behalf of the Association. After the ceremony we were honoured by the attendance of Sid Burrell and Eric Skentelbery from the Royal Hospital.

October saw the Yorkshire Branch organize our AGM at Ripon, a magnificent occasion, enjoyed by all who could attend. Our sincere appreciation to Bill Rudd, Ken Hart and their superb committee. At the AGM we unfortunately bade farewell to Bob (Fergy) Ferguson, our outgoing Chairman, who has led so well during the last seven years. Our best to "Fergy" and may we continue to see you often. Nonetheless we welcome aboard our new Chairman, Tom Ormiston, and we wish him well and assure him of our full and continued support.

The 11th November saw several members take part in the Armistice Day service with 22 Engineer Regiment at Tidworth. We would wish to take this opportunity, to sincerely thank them for their wonderful hospitality. After the main service, the Association contingent led by Col. Ian Wilson held a small service at the grave of Lt. Col. John Rock.

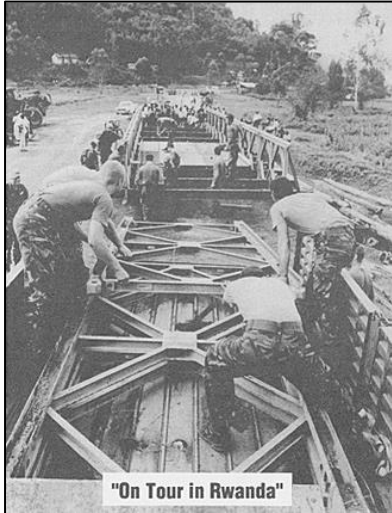
1996 is our 10th Anniversary and it is our intention to have an outstanding reunion in Aldershot on the 5th October. Mark this date in your calendars now and make it a reunion to remember!

To all our members, wherever you may be, a Happy and Prosperous New Year!

News from "The Squadron" and Around the Branches

"The Squadron"

The past eighteen months have been something of a blur for the current members of 9 Parachute Squadron RE. Having spent nearly 70% of the time away from Rhine Barracks, in which time, there have been three operational deployments. This included a major construction project and the not inconsiderable task of supporting 5 Airborne Brigade, in locations as diverse as Kenya, Scotland, Poland and Crete. It is the intention of the **"The Squadron"** to provide regular updates for the AEA Newsletter. This will keep all members abreast of our activities, regardless of **"Airborne Vintage."**



The most publicised deployment followed quickly on the heels of our return from the Falkland Islands, being part of a 500 strong humanitarian relief mission in Rwanda. This was the first operational deployment for the whole Squadron since 1982. We were surely the correct men for the job, as two weeks after the initial news broke, members of "The Squadron" main body was arriving in Kigali airport! Unfortunately, "Maroon Machines" had to be temporarily packed away in favour of the standard issue UN blue beret-except on Arnhem Day, when a sudden blossoming of "Maroon" was witnessed!

The next four months was spent providing crucial and much appreciated engineering support to all those in theatre, UN forces and Rwanda nationals alike. The flexibility and resourcefulness of "The Squadron," made us ideal for operating in the rather unreliable environment. Consequently, we quickly established ourselves by providing drinkable water, electricity and essential route maintenance on the main supply routes in theatre. This put us firmly at the heart of UN operations.

Following our return in December 1994, the majority enjoyed a few weeks Christmas leave. Thirteen volunteers did a quick about-turn and headed off to Cyprus, to take up the role as UNFICYP Engineer Detachment. During the next six-month period, we provided engineer support to Sector 2 of the UN line dividing Cyprus and the Turkish held northern territory of the island. Many construction tasks were undertaken, such as relocating the RHQ and Company offices of the Queens Royal Lancers. Our spare time was put to some use, as by June 1995 we were;

- Cyprus Minor Units X-Country Champions
- Regimental Football Champions
- Four players selected in the Army Rugby Squad
- Two men were presented their Army X-Country Colours

besides completing many free fall parachute descents. Last but not least, LCpl. Wilkinson's record beating performance of 6,009 sit up's in 3 hours and 13 minutes! LCpl. Wilkinson replaced a gunner from 7RHA as the island sit up Champion! The detachment returned in June 1995 appreciative of some UK leave and the chance to show off their sun tans.

Meanwhile, closer to home, "The Squadron" had been nominated by 36 Engineer Regiment to undertake the construction of the Royal Engineers Demolition Training Bridge (REDTB) at Minley. This project lasted six months and proved to be one of few recent Corps construction projects to be completed on time and within budget! The bridge itself was designed to offer a full range of demolition targets, using different materials in construction. The result was some excellent construction experience for men and management alike and confirmation of "The Squadron's" construction ability is now standing in the RSME training area.

Training for "The Squadron's" first tour to Northern Ireland for fifteen years, began in July at Aldershot. This was completed with three weeks intensive rural and urban training at Lydd and Hythe in Kent. Following some leave in August, "The Squadron" left for a six-month tour in the Province in September. The tour witnessed the

departure of the OC Maj. Iain James MBE RE, as his period in command ended. This brought the arrival of the new OC Maj. David Hudson MBE RE. The current cease fire has had many effects on life in the Province, but one certainly to keep Sappers gainfully employed. Many construction tasks were undertaken, such as building a new QM's department and improving security arrangements at various barracks. Demolition work became the most notable squadron achievement. Permanent Vehicle Check Points (PVCP's) and Patrol Bases (PB's) have been dismantled in many locations, as the cease fire was brought into full effect. The work has been continuous and has gone exceptionally well.

The rugby team drove its way into the final of the Northern Ireland Minor Units Rugby Final, with some exciting and typically physical rugby! A top score of 97-0 was achieved against the Royal Irish Depot and then we defeated the RMP's by 51-6. As Northern Ireland Champions, we continue into the UK Championships and attempt to become Army Champions.

Aldershot Branch

Airborne Forces weekend turned out to be a miserable wet affair, with the veterans on parade getting a soaking for their efforts! Apart from this hiccup, the weekend proved to be as popular as ever for those attending. Numbers were down on previous years, several factors accounted for this, not least the weather forecast, which was correct for a change! Nonetheless, the John Rock room was soon buzzing with tales of the canal zone, as George Jones, over from Australia, met up with John Elliot, Rick Mogg, John Smith, Reg Embersen and a few others from those ancient far off times! This reunion provided them all with the opportunity to recall their soldiering days, spent in the heat and dirt of Egypt. It was pleasing to see our regular attendee's from Birmingham, including Bob Jones, Tom Carpenter, Bunny Brown and especially Bill Helsdon, formally of 9 Company. Bill has been confined to wheelchair for some time now and was brought from his home in Streatham by Arthur Cottle. This was Bill's first visit to Aldershot, since he left the Army at the end of the War.

We are pleased to welcome John Smith, Tom Armstrong, Joe Wallace, Colin Lovely and John Ferry, as new members to the Aldershot Branch.

The branch has decided that during the winter months up to March, meetings will be held on Sunday at midday. This, we hope, should help those members who travel long distances and avoid those wet dangerous roads during the long dark months of winter. Hopefully, it will encourage wives and girlfriends to come along and enjoy a Sunday lunch drink in the John Rock room. In September, Tony Manley and Dave Rutter, ably assisted by their families, put on a great Sunday Lunch Bar-B-Q. It was well attended and much appreciated by all those present. Additionally, by a change of Branch rules, we have decided to reduce the number of meetings in a year, from the present eleven to eight. Other meetings may be convened when there is an activity or function that requires discussion. We will maintain the four planned functions each year, plus Airborne Forces Weekend and the Christmas Dinner.

If any member of the AEA finds himself in our area, then please come along to our meetings. We are constantly seeking new members, but that is not a requirement to visit! Just come and enjoy yourself in our company, you'll be most welcome!

Birmingham Branch

At our recent AGM, all the committee members retained their posts except Brian Clare (Ex-Vice Chairman) who had to stand down, due to personal commitments. Brian was replaced by Mike (Ozzy) Holdsworth. Additionally, we have decided to move our meeting place from the Birmingham United Services Club, to the Sheldon Ivy Leaf British Legion. The Club is on the main A45 Coventry Road on the outskirts of the city. Meetings will be held on the second Thursday of each month.

Looking back on the last year, we undertook several profitable functions, which were well attended by all. Our Guest of Honour at the Dinner Dance was, Brigadier I.D.T. McGill (Engineer in Chief) and our two notable branch members, Col. Chris Davies and Col. Andy Dixon (Ex 131 & 4 Para). We also had a visit from a couple of our overseas members, Peter Smith from New Zealand and George Tipping from Spain Pete took the opportunity to return the Troop Flag that went missing from Weymouth in the 1970's! George, who has lived in Spain for the last 12 years and is now moving onto Las Vegas in the US, decided to return a trophy, which went missing from the troop bar twelve years ago! We wish them both well in the future and trust they will get over this sudden impulse of honesty!

In the coming year, we look forward to planning our normal functions of Beer & Skittles in March, Bar-B-Q or Pig Roast in June and maybe a Clay Pigeon shoot. Members' request will also be considered and decided upon. We also intend to fully support the Aldershot Branch with the AGM and Reunion Buffet & Dance. We would hope we can equal or improve on the turnout for the recent AGM at Ripon. This also allows us the opportunity of congratulating the Yorkshire Branch for their excellent organisation.

Lastly, the Branch would wish to send their Best Wishes to the new AEA Chairman, Tom Ormiston, or should it be commiserations!

Chatham Branch

Looking back-Sunday **11th June Bar-B-Q** was a resounding success! Thanks to a tremendous effort on the day by our entertainments team and secretary, ably supported by John Stubbs and Danny Exton. It was good to see Bert Fordham and Terry Porter (Ex 301 Para Sqn TA Croydon) with their ladies. Without doubt, the highlight of the day was, Ray Coleman and Bob Seaman meeting in the centre of the hall like "Stanley & Livingstone." It appears they were roommates some forty two years ago in Moascar! The afternoon of the Bar-B-Q was rounded off by a very enjoyable quiz competition presented by Mike Fisher and Keith King. Thanks to Tom Downie for the loan of the equipment.

Then we move on to what was to prove a "**Bitter Sweet Autumn**"- **Chatham Veterans Weekend, September 8th/9th & 10th**. The Friday night buffet dance was once again, a great evening and we received tremendous support from the Yorkshire Branch and the lads from the Potteries. The highlights of the evening were, the pictorial display of 3 Para Sqn wartime exploits, thank you Jim Rogers, and 9 Para Sqn post war activities from 1948 to 1965, thanks to all contributors!

Saturday night saw again the 6th Airborne RE reunion and the Veterans Weekend coincide. Nonetheless, several members, visitors, guests and their ladies headed off by coach to the Victory Club. This was again, a very enjoyable evening, unfortunately the ladies dinner was not up to the standard of previous years. Others' we gathered, enjoyed the hospitality of the WO's & Sgt's Mess 1RSME, until the **very** early hours of Sunday morning. However, we were there, on parade, on Sunday morning, just to prove stamina and will power had not waned over the years. It was a joy and a fitting end to the weekend, to see such a strong contingent of Airborne Engineers on parade. Just a shame there was not room for all in the Cathedral!

Thursday 14th September, brought the funeral of our dear friend and member, Capt. Les Neave MM, who sadly passed away on the 6th September 1995.

October 20th & 21st - Those who were brave or foolhardy, ventured north of Watford Gap and were privileged to take part in and thoroughly enjoy the Association AGM. An event hosted and superbly organised by the Yorkshire Branch. Thank you Bill, Ken and all members for your hospitality!

Thursday 26th October - Brought the funeral of another dear friend and great character, Wally Linham, who had died suddenly the previous Thursday.

Sunday 17th December - **we** rounded off the year with a Christmas Luncheon for some thirty members and their wives.

Looking Forward to 1996 - We shall again concentrate our efforts on three main functions:

March/April	Games Night
June	Sunday Bar-B-Q to present the opportunity to our out stationed members to join us.
September 13th/14th/15th	Chatham veterans weekend, so put aside your superstitions and come to our buffet/dance reception on Friday 13th

Yorkshire Branch

AEA AGM in Ripon 1995

The AGM was a success, not just from the formal side of the weekend, but the social side was most enjoyable also. Success is only measured by the reactions at the time and the feedback since. There were 102 members seated at the formal meeting, while the ladies had an interesting shopping trip to Harrogate. 180 members and guests booked in for accommodation and 200 plus joined the social on the Saturday evening. The success was due to the experience Bill Rudd and I have gained, in running the annual Ripon REA Weekend (This again to be held on the 7th, 8th & 9th June 1996.) We were ably assisted by Charlie Dunk and JC behind the bar. It was especially pleasing to see members who came from all over the UK, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Cornwall (not a separate country, but a long way to come!), Wales and Australia being the farthest country mentioned.

The AGM was held in Deverell Barracks, Ripon, North Yorkshire. Visitors remarked on the beautiful surrounding area and confirmed their intention to return! Accommodation was arranged in spiders, which brought back many memories. However, gone are the 18-20 man's rooms, to be replaced by division into bunks. The food and service were excellent, with the bar being run on Sgt's Mess lines of "Last member up closes the bar!" Once the official entertainment and raffle had concluded, the majority of visitors made their way to bed. This gave way, to a good old-fashioned sing song and it was amazing how many of the words came back after all these years

The Sunday morning clean-up was a bit of an embarrassment, there were so many willing volunteers, clean up was completed in record time! All too soon, it was time for the visitors to make their long journeys home. We must give a special thanks, to those members who kindly folded their bedding up for us. This made life so much easier on the Monday morning, when we had to hand everything back.

Apart from the essential, but formal side of the AGM, it is a great opportunity to meet friends and comrades, many of whom have not been seen for years! Many a light was swung and many a pint was "scoffed" during what seemed a very short weekend. On behalf of the Yorkshire Branch, I would like to say thanks for allowing us to stage the AGM and for the support we received! It was good to meet so many old friends and bosses! We would be more than willing to welcome you all back in a few years' time!

Branch News

During 1995, our members attended, Hardwicke Hall Parade in Derbyshire, where great hospitality was received from the PRA, VJ Day in York, Chatham Weekend (excellent Branch social and good turnout on Sunday morning parade) and lastly the Tower of London visit, which was so memorable, we would really love to go again! (**Hint**) The Branch Christmas lunch was held in Wakefield on 3rd December 1995. Because our members hail from such a wide area, we have often talked about holding a meeting in a location apart from Harrogate. This was the first one, thanks to the efforts of "Ginge" Goodfellow and a total of 50 members (and 3 dogs!) attended. An excellent time was had by all; so much so, we are looking into a different venue for an October Fest!

Dave "**I was never any good at hitting the DZ**" Ruddock completed a couple of freefall jumps recently for the St. Gemma's Hospice in Leeds. Although he left collection of the money until the last minute, he did manage to collect **£172.20**, well-done Dave!

The Branch still seeks the elusive "**Serving AEA Member,**" but we are hot the trail of one as we speak! Lastly, on behalf of the Branch, a Happy & Prosperous New Year to all members and their families, roll on the next AGM! Our next meeting will be held in Harrogate on Friday 1st Mar 1996, for details phone Bill Rudd on (01765) 606808

North West Branch

Being one of the newer branches, we are still recruiting, but our strength is now twenty-three with an average attendance at meetings of 50%. Our most recent meeting took place on Saturday 7th October at the St. Helens Rugby League Club. During this meeting, prompted by the Chairman, a constructive debate took place as to the way forward for the branch. Many ideas were discussed and after a period of reflection, finalisation of those ideas will take place at our next meeting on Saturday 27th January 1996.

We are sure there are many more Airborne Sappers in the region, including North Wales, who we would like to contact and encourage to join our friendly branch, where they can be sure of a warm welcome. Only by increasing numbers and a willingness to participate can a branch flourish!

Our first AGM is planned for the 27th April 1996 at the St. Helens Rugby League Club, starting at 14:00 Hours. Unless, the venue and/or format changes at our January meeting, the date and venue for the AGM are fixed! At the AGM, we shall be seeking to enlarge the committee by appointing a social and membership secretary.

When the branch was formed, Tom Purves and Tony Hogan, volunteered to take on the posts of Secretary and Treasurer. We are extremely grateful to them, as without this help the branch could have foundered. Tom has now stood down and Alan Marshall has taken over. Our search continues to replace Tony and hopefully another volunteer will come forward! In conclusion, I implore all Airborne Sappers in the area to come forward and help us build the firm base we need, for this branch to go forward and flourish! Lastly, may I take this opportunity to wish all members of the Association, a Happy & Peaceful New Year.

Northern Ireland Branch

Due to Course Commitments no News available for this issue.

Chris Chambers

Association Membership Secretary

Since the August "News Letter," a further twenty-six (26) have joined us, detail as follows:

Kevin Weightman	299/300 Sqn 131 Para Engr Regt (V)	1952-1957
Leonard Ord	9 Para Sqn RE.	1982-1988
Ewan Merer	9 Para Sqn RE	1995-to present
Raymond East	1st & 9th Sqn. RE	1947-1968
Wilfred Waterworth	3rd Airborne Sqn RE	1947-1949
Mitchell Missen	9 Para Sqn RE	1989-1992
Terence Wiltshire	16 Para Workshops & 9 Para Sqn RE	1965-1995
Colin Norman	299 Parachute Sqn RE (V)	1959-1963
Kevin Bridge	9 Para Sqn RE	1980-1983
Tom Rhodes	9 Independent Para Sqn RE	1965-1971
Alan Norman	299 Para Field Sqn RE	1965-1971
Paul Andrew	9 Para Sqn RE	1992-to present
Gordon Mitchell	9 Independent Para Sqn RE	1953-1956
Tom Marshall	9 Sqn RE	1947-1948
Simon Doherty	16 Independent Para Bde 59 Independent Cdo Sqn RE 131 Independent Cdo Sqn (V) RE	1974-1976 1977-1979 1983-1984
Danny Exton	9 Independent Para Sqn RE	1956-1965
Ian Morrison	9 Independent Para Sqn RE	1972-1977
Arthur Waller	131 Para Engr. Regt.	1954-1956
Jack Thompson	299 Airborne Sqn RE (V)	1947-1951
Ian McGill	9 Indep Para Sqn RE 9 Para Sqn RE	1971-1976 1979-1982
Robert Dixon	3 Para Sqn RE	1942-1944
William Smith	1 Para Sqn RE, 2 Para Sqn RE	1940
Mark Totterdell	9 Para Sqn RE	1989-1992 1995-to present
Ernest Reddin	3 Airborne Sqn RE 9 Independent Airborne Sqn RE	1946 1952
Lawrence Hosick	9 Para Sqn RE	1976-1979
Nicky Ablett	9 Para Sqn RE	1994-present

X

To all the Above, "Welcome to the Association"

My thanks to all of you who have forwarded your address changes, the corrections have now been entered to the computer.

Contact has been lost with the following members:

Michael "Brummy" Dowling

Mick Harper

Major J. Mullin MBE

Major C. Sweeney

Can anybody help with their whereabouts?

Please keep me informed when you change your address, especially our serving members, when you change units. Just to refresh your memories, all changes of address should be sent to: -

**Mr Chris Chambers
Membership Secretary
24 Longfield Road
Ash Nr Aldershot
Hants.
GU12 6NA**

It is encouraging to see "The Squadron" lads joining the Association and each of them in turn has persuaded a friend to join. Therefore, I would take this opportunity to say, "Thank you lads and well done." You are the future of this Unique Association!

A happy & prosperous New Year to all of you and your families wherever you may be!

**"Happy Landings"
Chris**

☛ ***Stop Press*******

1996 Membership Directories Now Available, these can be purchased via the Shop at £4.00 each, plus £1.00 for postage.

News Items

Arnhem Jumps!

Members of the Arnhem Veterans Parachute Team, who jumped at Arnhem on the 16th September 1995. Both gentlemen, late of 1st Squadron RE.



Gus Woods & Tommy Hicks

Information

A former Glider Pilot, Mr Tom Smith of Ipswich, has written asking for information on the passengers he carried to Arnhem in 1944. From the information he gave us, he piloted a glider carrying three soldiers, a jeep and an air compressor. One of the soldiers was a sergeant, and the other two were the driver and operator, all from 9 Field Company RE. His glider was a Horsa, Chalk number 1002, from RAF Fairford. From the load manifests it would appear that this was from 3 Platoon, glider number 19 (although the list shows four men). The sergeant and one sapper sat up front, while the third man sat in the rear. On landing, both pilots decided to stay with the sappers and try to reach the bridge, in this they failed. The second pilot who was injured on the last day of the battle, died of his wounds after reaching the UK.

If, any former 9 Company man has any recollection of this incident, would they please contact me on (01252-617584) or at the address given in the list of committee members.

Overseas Visitors

New Zealand member, Bob Gillespie paid a visit to Aldershot during November and met up with the membership secretary, Chris Chambers. They visited 9 Squadron where they were made most welcome. This was followed by a visit to the Airborne Forces Museum and this proved an enjoyable and interesting experience for Bob. He was most impressed with the layout of the displays and a demonstration of unarmed combat. This was laid on for a party of visiting Czech Airborne VIP's and it was fortunate Bob could take advantage of this display! In true Sapper fashion, both Chris and Bob just "tagged" along and were accepted as part of the group!

Later they paid a quick visit to the PRA HQ, then it was back to town for a few beers! Here they met some ex-Para Regiment guys and swapped "tall stories" and "friendly insults," which rounded the day off nicely.

Greetings

Over the festive period we received greeting cards from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Spain, Germany, Singapore and France. We thank our colleagues for their kind thoughts and wish all members overseas a Very Happy & Prosperous 1996.

Historian - Fred Gray

Items Donated by Members

Several items have been donated by members, which are in the care of myself as Property Member. These items are in the form of photographs, documents, books and a few personal items. The main collections are photographs of the Squadron and Company groups of 1,2,3 & 4. Also, 591 Para Sqn, 9 Para Sqn and 249 Field Company, and 261 & 286 Park Companies. These photographs are of all wartime units. Other 9 Sqn photographs from 1959 onwards are in the Squadron complex at Rhine Barracks.

Troop photographs of the Squadron in the Canal Zone are also in the collection and will be framed and hung in the John Rock room shortly. Personal recollections have been donated by the following:

G.A. Johnson	4 Para Sqn
Donald Cooper	HQRE 1 Airborne Division
Allan Jack	591 Antrim Sqn
I. McHarg	2 Para Sqn
Colonel Chris Davies	9 Para Sqn RE-The War Diary of 9 Squadron in the Falklands (1982)
Arthur Hendy	1 Sqn-Original Version of the book "Wings of Wind" by Peter Stainforth of 1 Sqn. This book contains, names' & regimental numbers of the Squadron that fought at Arnhem.

Two copies of the Royal Engineers journal have been sent; one contains an account of the "Battle of Arnhem" by Captain Eric Mackay. The second copy is the official version of events, regarding what happened to the men of "Operation Freshman." This account was written by Donald F. Cooper.

The smock, beret and belt worn by the late Captain Heggie of 9 Field Coy at Arnhem, has been donated by his wife. Norman Penny has given a "swagger" stick of the Royal Flying Corps. There are many other items of interest to Airborne Forces, including photographs and documents. When time allows, I will produce a list, so members can see what the Association has in the way of memorabilia.

Men of "Operation Colossus" in P.O.W. Camp Italy



Top

L/Cpl J Maher RE, Sgt Walker RAF, L/Cpl Jones, Cpl Julian, L/Cpl Tomlin RE, Spr Prior RE, L/cpl Pexton,
Spr Struthers RE, Cpl Grice, Sgt Lawley RAF, L/Cpl Henderson

Middle

Spr Davidson RE, Spr Parker RE, Sgt Durie, Spr Ross RE, RAF, Sgt Shutt, Sgt Clements, Pte Samuals,
Spr Phillips RE, L/Cpl Humphrey,

Bottom

L/Cpl Watson, Cpl O'Brian RAF, RAF-TPR Nastri, Cpl Fletcher, Pte Parker.

The Tragino Aqueduct

This item of interest was originally printed in the Newsletter in 1990 when the association had slightly more than three hundred members. Now the membership has passed the eight hundred mark and we have a good number of young Sappers joining us, I thought it would be appropriate to print it again. Especially as we now have a photograph of the men who took part in that historic raid. The photograph was sent by Major Tony Jackson 591 (Antrim) Squadron, and the names added by Mr Jim Mahar, who actually took part in the raid and is a member of our association.

On the night of 10 February 1941, thirty-five men were dropped by parachute into Italy from six Whitley Bombers, which had taken off from Malta a few hours earlier. They were the men of "X" Troop, No 2 Commando, this was the very first airborne operation the British Army had undertaken.

The aim of the operation, codename "Colossus" was to destroy the aqueduct over the River Tragino and seriously disrupt water supplies to the province of Apulia, particularly to the dockyards and military factories at Brandisi, Bari and Foggia. The destruction of the aqueduct was of secondary importance, the main aim was to test and observe the ability of the organisers to insert a body of armed men into enemy territory and then organise a rescue operation once the task had been completed. The first part was eighty-five percent successful, but the withdrawal and rescue were a disaster.

The troop was made up of seven officers and twenty-eight other ranks, one of them being an interpreter of Italian birth, but who had been living in England for twenty years. Of the seven officers, three (including the OC Major Pritchard) were from Infantry Regiments. Lt Dean Drummond was from the Royal Signals and Flight Lt Lucky from the Royal Air Force. Captain Daly and Lt Peterson were Sapper officers. The men were all volunteers from the Infantry and Corps of the Army but about one third of them were from the Royal Engineers. Eight Whitley Bombers had been allocated for the operation, six as troop carriers and two for a diversionary bombing raid on the nearby targets. Each aircraft had six paratroops on board except the one in which Captain Daily was flying, as one man dropped out just before take-off. Additionally, a weapons and equipment container were slung underneath the fuselage.

Due to navigational errors, the six troop carriers failed to reach the DZ together. Lt Dean Drummond was the first man to reach the aqueduct shortly to be joined by the remainder of his stick. Four more aircraft arrived about one hour later until the party numbered six officers and twenty-four men. One man, L/Cpl Boulter (Staffordshire Regiment) fractured his ankle, he had to be left to his own devices, as this was the agreed plan in the event of injuries. Two of the five weapons containers failed to release from the aircraft, so all the explosives in addition to the weapons, which were stored in them were lost to the raiders. More seriously, the aircraft carrying Capt. Daly and four of his demolition party were in the wrong valley, which was miles away. With them were more valuable stores and weapons. The losses in explosives amounted to half the total considered necessary to destroy the target. Major Pritchard told Lt Peterson RE, he was now the senior demolition expert and to get on and blow the aqueduct. The men set about collecting the explosives from the scattered containers. To help them in their task, they had several Italian civilians who had been captured when they showed too much interest in what was going on. After a check of contents, Lt Peterson could only muster eight hundred pounds of guncotton slabs. Worse news was to follow, when it was discovered the supports of the aqueduct were of reinforced concrete and not brickwork, as they had been led to believe. The Sappers set to work laying the charges to the best advantage and were rewarded sometime later by an almighty bang and a ruined aqueduct. They had very little time to admire their work as the explosion would have immediately alerted any police and army forces in the vicinity.

Major Pritchard split the men into three parties, the largest one he commanded himself, the two smaller parties were commanded by Lt Jowett and Lt Lea. After a brief word of thanks for a job well done and an explanation on how they would RV with a submarine at the mouth of the River Sele in four days' time, the three groups set off. Three slightly different compass bearings were used for the coast, over a distance of sixty miles of extremely rugged terrain.

Captain Daly and his four Sappers had no alternative, but to make for the submarine RV. They heard the noise of the explosion and realised they were too late to take any part in the demolition of the target. Of the four groups making their way across the mountains, it was Captain Daly's who were to get closest to the RV point.

After a very harrowing march, lasting between two and three days, all the groups were captured. The exhausted paratroopers had very little firepower, to put up any kind of fight against the large number of troops looking for them. Not a single shot was fired, for the simple reason, the first people on the scene were children, followed by women and finally by the Carabinieri and Army. The British soldiers could not open fire with so many civilians around them and there was no alternative, but to be taken prisoner. All the groups had similar experiences.

By the standards of the Second World War their treatment, although harsh, could have been much worse had the operation taken place after Hitler's notorious "Commando Order" was published. One man, who was not officially a soldier, was taken out by the Italian Fascists and shot. He was the Italian interpreter, Trooper Picchi. The Italians considered him a traitor, although he had been living in England for twenty years. A second Italian, Trooper Nastri, managed to bluff the Italians into thinking he was British, because he spoke with a cockney accent. He survived the war in a POW camp.

As the four groups fought against the mud and the snowcapped mountains, trying to reach the coast, they were unaware the submarine sailing had been cancelled two days before the planned RV. The reason for the cancellation is not known, but there are two possibilities. One of the bombers on the diversionary raid was damaged and had to ditch. The pilot, was unaware the mouth of the River Sele had been chosen as the RV point for the rescue attempt, decided to ditch his aircraft in the same area and signalled his intention back to his base. The planners back in England, thinking one of the raiders had been captured and forced to give away the rescue plan, feared an ambush, so rather than risk a submarine, cancelled its sailing orders. The second possibility was, did the planners think it was impossible for the men to cover the sixty miles across the mountains, in hostile territory, with the enemy looking for them and so leave them to their fate? Only the planners know.

We all know the feeling of apprehension when waiting for the green light to go on, just before leaping out into the darkness on a night jump. Down below, we expect a flat DZ with full medical facilities and above us a canopy, which has been tried and tested over many years. After landing, we can, in most cases, be taken back to barracks for a meal and a night's sleep. Imagine the thoughts of "X Troop" as they sat with their legs dangling through the hole in the floor of the bomber, whipped by the icy blast of the night air. Down below, snow-capped mountains, crossed by gorges and riverbeds, and ground strewn with rocks. They were about to

jump into enemy territory using parachutes, which were in a very early stage of development. They did not know when, how, or if they would ever see England again. They, along with the whole of No 2 Commando had volunteered for "hazardous duty," even before they knew what the duty entailed. The techniques of parachuting were so new, even some instructors had not jumped before. The result of the raid is now history, what is not so well known is, only eleven awards were given to the men. One DSO, Three Military Crosses, Four Military medals, and three MID's. Most of the civilians who acted as porters in collecting the explosives, were later awarded medals for their "gallant conduct" in the face of the enemy. The majority of the troop were to spend the remainder of the war in a POW camp. A few managed to escape when Italy changed sides in 1943, but most were taken to Germany and imprisoned there. The survivors of the Tragino Raid meet every year on February 10 and 1996 will be the fifty fifth anniversary of that historic raid. The Sappers who took part were: Captain Daly, MID. 2/Lt Paterson MC, Sgt Shutt, Sgt Durie MM, Cpl O'Brian, L/Cpl Watson, L/Cpl Jones, L/Cpl Tomlin, L/Cpl Maher M I D. Spr Struthers, Phillips and Davidson.

Obituaries

9 Parachute Squadron RE

Members of the AEA who served in the early fifties, will be saddened to learn of the death of John Harris. John died suddenly, at his home, in the fishing port of Brixham on 22nd June 1995, he was seventy-two

John joined the Army in 1942 and mustered into the Royal Engineers. In 1944 he volunteered for Airborne Forces and in the same year met and married his wife Andreen. He was demobbed in 1947 but rejoined the Army in 1951. He served with 9 Para Sqn in the Middle East and was 2 Troop S/Sgt at the time of the Suez War. In the mid-fifties he left the squadron to serve with 131 Para Engineer Regt TA in Liverpool and Edinburgh. He retired from the Army in 1968 and returned to his native Brixham. John worked in the construction industry for the next twenty years and became a leading figure in his local branch of the Royal British Legion.

Our condolences go to his wife Andreen, his three children and nine grandchildren. He will be missed by his many friends.

9 Parachute Squadron RE

Members of the Airborne Engineers Association will be saddened to learn of the death of Captain Les Neave MM, after a long illness lasting six years.

Les joined the Army in April 1945 opting to serve with the Royal Engineers. His first serious taste of soldiering came when he was posted to 55 Squadron in Korea. A few months after arriving in the Squadron he was given a Mention in Dispatches, shortly followed by the award of the Military Medal for brave conduct. He served his time as Bridging QMSI at the RSME Chatham and in 1961 was posted to 11 Independent Field Squadron as the Squadron Sergeant Major. It was in this Squadron, he could apply his knowledge of bridging, when constructing a five hundred and fifty-foot triple, triple Bailey Bridge over the River Tampasuck in North Borneo.

On his return to the UK he took up the appointment as Regimental Sergeant Major of 36 Engineer Regiment. In 1967 he was commissioned and after various appointments became the Quartermaster of 9 Parachute Squadron. At the age of forty, he was probably one of the oldest men to attempt "P" Company selection and pass. During his time with 9 Para Squadron, he completed two tours in Northern Ireland and was given the honour of taking the salute on a Squadron parade shortly before he left for civilian life. He continued in Airborne Forces for a further eight years with 131 Engineer Parachute Regiment (TA).

In civilian life, he took up an appointment as Manager of the restaurants, within the trading house of the Baltic Exchange. He continued in this employment until he was forced to retire with the onset of his illness in 1989. During his illness he never allowed it to dominate his life and he continued to travel the world with his wife Peggy. He became a great garden enthusiast and whenever possible carried on with his pleasure of sailing and caravanning. It was only in the later stages that he was forced to give up these activities.

Les was given a military funeral at the Garrison Church, Brompton and is buried in the Military Cemetery. His funeral was attended by many of his friends; the Standards of the Airborne Engineers Association, Royal Engineers Association and the Chatham Branch of the Parachute Regiment Association were on parade. The bearer party was provided by soldiers of 36 Engineer Regiment and the bugler by the RE Band Chatham.

Our condolences go to his wife Peggy, sons' John, Christopher, Peter and Paul, daughters in law Barbara, Kim, Wilma and Elizabeth and to his ten grandchildren. He will be sadly missed by his many friends.

9 Independent Airborne Squadron RE

Major Walter Frank "Tubby" Linham RE (Retired), 15th June 1928-19th October 1995

"Think of him still as the same, I say he is not dead-he just went away"

Three years of Army apprenticeship training in Group 43A produced a Bill Bricklayer and very much more. Wally or "Tubby" Linham was one of the "special breed," who benefited totally, from this particular style of group training. This group training, which in his early life, developed the strong characteristics that stayed with him throughout his career and into civilian life.

On leaving Chepstow and embarking into adult service, he followed the set pattern of basic Sapper training, in 163 party at Malvern. Afterwards, it was down to Chatham to complete a Bill Bricklayer course. By January 1947, Wally, with many of Group 43A, had volunteered for Airborne Forces and the Parachute Training Course.

Having passed selection, he joined 6th Airborne Division in Palestine. After the breakdown, he joined 9 Independent Airborne Squadron RE, within 16 Parachute Brigade, serving in Hameln, Aldershot, Cyprus, Egypt and back to Aldershot. By this time, "Tubby" had established himself in the rank of Sergeant.

November 1954 saw "Tubby" move on, but within the Airborne Forces structure, to the Army Air Transport Training & Development Centre at RAF Old Sarum, Salisbury.

His next tour of duty, took him to Hong Kong and Singapore. He returned to the UK in 1959, where he spent three years at the Training Regiment at Cove. He returned "home" in 1962, when he became a Permanent Staff Instructor with 131 Airborne Regiment RE (V), looking after the Edinburgh Squadron. Finally he returned to 9 Squadron in the post of SSM at Aldershot and completed a successful tour of Aden.

In 1967 he was commissioned and posted to 36 Engineer Regiment RE at Maidstone. His second officer tour was as Adjutant of the Royal Monmouth, Royal Engineer Regiment (V) RE. After a twelve-month break, as the RE resource's officer for the Army Aldershot Show, he returned to Monmouth as the Regimental Training Major. To be asked to return to such a prestigious post, for a second tour, was a measure of the high esteem he had earned in his first tour. The final tour was with 35 Engineer Regiment in B.A.O.R., from which he retired from the Corps. Thirty-four years of sport oriented, physical soldiering, endured and enjoyed. He was supported throughout by his wife Kate and loved by his two sons, Steven and Andrew.

Until his retirement in 1993, "Tubby" worked as an Administration & Financial Manager in the Distribution Industry. His work took him to Brighouse in West Yorkshire, where he became a very competitive member of his local Golf Club.

Diary of Events 1996

Date	Event
16 th March	2nd Para Sqn. RE Reunion-Birmingham
26 th April	4th Para Sqn RE Reunion-Uppingham
6 th July	Airborne Forces Day-Aldershot
7 th September	6th Airborne Div. RE Reunion-London
13 th /14 th /15 th September	Chatham Veterans Weekend
15 th September	Double Hills Ceremony-Paulton
28 th September	1st Para Sqn RE Reunion-Donnington
5 th October	10th Anniversary AGM Dinner & Dance-Aldershot
11 th November	Armistice Parade 22 Engr. Regt.-Tidworth

Association Shop

Items available & applicable pricing!

Description	Price	Postage & Packing UK
Association Ties	£12.50	£0.50p
Association Blazer Badges	£11.00	£0.50p
Association Jumpers Maroon with Blue Pegasus & words "Airborne Engineers" (Sizes: 38"- 48" to order)	£18.00	£2.40p Recorded Delivery
Association Sweatshirt Maroon & logo as jumpers- Sizes: Med/Large/X-Large to order	£13.40	£2.40p Recorded Delivery
Association Polo Shirts Fred Perry Style, Maroon with Logo* Sizes: Large/X-Large	£13.60	£2.20p Recorded Delivery
Association Shields	£15.50	£2.30p Recorded Delivery
Book "The 9th" by Tom Purves	£14.00 Membership Price	£3.50p Recorded Delivery
Stick Pins c/w Parachute Wings	£2.60	£0.50p
Christmas Cards c/w AEA bade on cover-Packs of six	£3.25	£0.50p

Cheques should be made payable to **Airborne Engineers Association**

Thanks to you all for your continued support, I hope to see you at the forthcoming events, until then, I wish you and your families a Happy & Prosperous New Year.

Until next time, I remain Yours Aye!! Jan

Association News Letter - Payment

As discussed at length, during the AGM at Ripon in October, the funding of the News Letter can no longer be borne from Association funds. It was proposed, a sum of £4.00 would be enough to maintain the quality of the News Letter and provide three copies annually to each member. This was proposed and accepted by all those present. Now is the time we have to ask individual members to subscribe, to ensure they receive further copies in 1996.

To offset some of the workload from the Association Treasurer-Capt. Bob Mathews (Sqn Admin. Officer), Dave Rutter has offered to assist in the collection of members subscriptions. The current News Letter, is unfortunately the last you will receive **Free of Charge**, as the Association will be bearing the full cost on this occasion. Payment for the next issue of the News Letter and subsequent issues in 1996, must reach Dave Rutter by no later than Monday 6th May 1996. Should your subscription not be forthcoming by this time, unfortunately, it will be assumed you no longer wish to receive the News Letter.

Method of Payment

By Cheque-Made Payable to the Airborne Engineers Association for £4.00
By Postal Order-Made Payable to the Airborne Engineers Association for £4.00

Please ensure all cheques and Postal Orders are crossed, for security of payment to the AEA. PLEASE DO NOT SEND CASH!

We did review the possibility of payment being made by Standing Order and/or Direct Debit. However, this would result in the Treasurer receiving a statement with hundreds of names on it. This would then involve a great deal of administration, extracting the relevant information for our News Letter records.

To ensure all members making a payment, receive their copies, please complete the Proforma attached to the rear of this Edition (**tearing out via the perforated strip!**) and send this with your payment. If you would like a receipt, please enclose a Stamp Addressed Envelope (SAE) and a copy will be sent back to you.

The News Letter is the only medium we have, of staying in touch with all our members, especially those who cannot make the various branch and/or national functions, for whatever reason. Editions over the last year, have received a very favourable reaction, we wish to continue this style of News Letter and improve on it. Not only do we need your subscription, we also need your ideas, by way of stories and photographs. In this edition, "**The Squadron**" has subscribed by way of an article and committed to furnish articles on every occasion the News Letter goes to press. "**The Squadron**" is what brought us together, I trust we can count on your support to maintain this Camaraderie and this **Unique Association!**

Airborne Engineers Association Reunion

Following the AGM of the AEA to be held in 5 Brigade Sergeants' Mess during the afternoon of Saturday 5th October 1996, a Grand Reunion Buffet/Dance is to be held in the Princess Hall, Aldershot. As was said, at the last AGM, increasing contractor involvement of the catering staff and facilities, means we can no longer expect to pay greatly reduced prices for our catering at these events. Simultaneously, we needed to find a suitable location to hold this reunion. These two factors, unfortunately are reflected in the increased price for these tickets.

Entry to the function will be by ticket only!

Due to the employment of civilian catering contractors, we cannot cater for individuals arriving on the night.

Ticket sales will close on Friday 27th September 1996.

Location:	Princes Hall, Aldershot
Date:	5th October 1996
Timings:	Commencing 19:00 Hours till late
Bar Timings:	19:00 Hours until 2am
Buffet:	20:30 Hours-21:30 Hours
Dance Band:	Vai Miller (should inspire Fred Gray to get up and strut his stuff!)
Grand Raffle:	Drawn at 23:00 Hours
Cost:	£15.00 per person
Tickets:	By application and payment Only!

Method of Payment

By Cheque-Made Payable to the Airborne Engineers Association for £15.00 per person

By Postal Order-Made Payable to the Airborne Engineers Association for £15.00 per person

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To ensure all members making a payment, receive their tickets, please complete the Proforma attached to the rear of this Edition (**tearing out via the perforated Strip!**) and send this with your payment. If you would like a receipt, please enclose a Stamp Addressed Envelope (SAE) and a copy will be sent back to you. Please support this reunion and this **Unique Association!**

Accommodation in the Aldershot Area

Cedar Court Hotel	Eggars Hill, Aldershot. Tel: 01252-20931 £45.00 per couple, bed & breakfast with en-suite
George Hotel	Wellington Street, Aldershot. Tel: 01252-330800 £40.00 per couple, bed & breakfast sharing bathroom (Double & twin bedded rooms)
Beehive Pub	264 High St Aldershot. Tel: 01252-23179 £25.00 per couple, bed & breakfast sharing bathroom
Rose & Crown	Grosvenor Road, Aldershot. Tel: 01252-20621 £30.00 per couple, bed & breakfast sharing bathroom £15.00 single bed and breakfast
Brewers Fayre Travel Inn (New Complex)	Willems Park, Aldershot. Tel: 01252-344063 £35-50.00 per double/family room with en-suite (Recommended) Colour TV & Coffee/Tea making facilities Meals are not included (40 rooms available)
Avalon House	41 Queens Road, Aldershot. Tel: 01252-21615 £32.00 per couple, bed & breakfast sharing bathroom £16.00 single bed and breakfast (Recommended)
White Swan Inn	161 North Lane, Aldershot. Tel: 01252-20528 £32.00 per couple, bed & breakfast £20.00 single bed and breakfast
Trafalgar Inn	1 Short Street, Aldershot. Tel: 01252-543500
Mrs Davies	123 Church Lane East, Aldershot 2 singles, 3 twins & 1 x 3 bedded room £10.00 per person, per room only Tel: 01252-330865 £15.00 per person, bed & breakfast
Mrs Coe	45 Elston Road, Aldershot. Tel: 01252-21410 from £13.00 per person, bed & breakfast
Potters International Hotel	1 Fleet Road, Aldershot. Tel: 01252-344000 £65.00 double room £45.00 single room All rooms en-suite, plus usual extra's £16.00 single bed and breakfast

Reunion 5th October 1996 Buffet/Dance – Proforma

Members Name & Initials:
Number of Tickets Required:
Payment by Cheque or Postal Order: £
Membership No:
Full Postal Address:
Post Code:
If possible, please seat me with the following members:
Send To: D.J. Rutter "Fermain" Hazel Road Ash Green Aldershot Hants. GU12 6HR
Tickets will be forwarded with your next Edition of the News Letter, if on the distribution list or during the AGM meeting.