



# THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS JOURNAL



The following articles were originally published in the printed version of the Journal in December 2000, Issue No. 2

# The Airborne Engineer

December 2000 Issue No. 2

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## Greetings from the President

Brigadier Garth Hewish MBE

I feel privileged to have this opportunity, as your President, to write in this Christmas edition of our Journal. It is my chance personally and on behalf of your Committee, to wish all Association Members and their families and friends Season's Greetings and sincere Best Wishes for the year ahead. I do this as we approach the end of what, I hope you will all agree, has been a successful and busy year for the Association. A year, which sees our membership at 1056 and an Association able to seat 396 for a Millennium Dinner at our AGM in Blackpool. Well done everybody involved and in particular the Committee and their helpers who do so much to ensure that the Airborne Engineers Association continues to flourish. I hope that our founder members who I know still keep a watchful eye on our progress are satisfied that we are moving forward along the right lines.

Our Engineer-in-Chief, Brigadier A E Whitley CBE ADC, as our senior military guest at Blackpool was very impressed by the occasion in particular and by our Association in general. He very much appreciated being invited to join us. Let us go on impressing, let us continue to draw strength from the particular brand of comradeship engendered by our membership of the family of the Corps of Royal Engineers, be we serving or retired, and by our special link with Airborne Forces. Let us all feel pride in our Association and all that it stands for. Further, could we each resolve to bring at least one new member into the Association during the year 2001 - there's a thought!

Finally, may you all have a Joyous Christmas and may you prosper and above all enjoy a healthy year ahead.

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## From the Chair

Bob Prosser - Association Chairman

The year has ended with what can only be described as a fantastic Millennium Gala Ball and AGM. 396 people sat down to a most enjoyable meal. Our guest was the Engineer-in-Chief Brigadier Albert Whitley CBE ADC who gave us a most amusing, interesting and encouraging rundown on the Corps' activities. He endeared himself to us all, young and old alike, with his patriotic reference to the solid foundation on which the Corps stands today, The Mayor of Blackpool gave a wine reception prior to the dinner and apologised for being late. His personal assistant said it had not happened in the 10 years since she has been in the job, but we told her they did not have to be worried about entertaining Airborne Engineers - they are always so well behaved!

Our vice-president gave a wonderful speech which had everyone in fits of laughter. It's a pity he could not hear the speech himself but in the early hours of that morning he had dived into the swimming pool wearing his hearing aid and with it still switched on! "What did the sharks have to say Bill?"

The weekend broke even while all the costs were met, due without doubt to the generosity of all those who brought such an array of expensive prizes. This allowed us to have three raffles with everyone buying tickets. May I thank you all for the colossal effort.

The other major events, which have taken place this year, in reverse order, are:

- The Airborne Service in York Minster.
- The Memorial Service at Cromwell Lock.
- The Double Hills Memorial Service.
- The dedication of the new Standard and blessing of the Union Standard at Brompton Chapel on the REA weekend at Chatham.
- The opening of the Pegasus Bar in the King Charles Hotel in Chatham.
- The Sixth Airborne RE Reunion dinner in the Victory Club in London with a presentation to John Shave for his dedicated efforts in the past.
- The 1st Airborne RE Reunion Dinner and the presentation of the Memorial to Donnington Church of a lectern, kneeler and name board - all crafted in beautiful English oak.
- The opening of the Airborne Museum at Elvington which houses a fine display of RE Airborne memorabilia.
- Construction of a seat at Weston-Super-Mare, dedicated to those who died at Double Hills.
- The Airborne Day at Hardwick Hall.
- The Airborne service at Brecon cathedral.

Our Standard has been carried with pride at all the major events during a Millennium year that has been extremely busy but also very rewarding. Members can feel proud of what has been achieved. The Association is stronger than ever. With my wife Sheila and all the members of the Committee, may I wish you all a very happy Christmas with good health and best wishes.

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## 9 Parachute Squadron- Anecdotes

Brigadier IDT McGill CBE

In response to an earlier letter from Bob Prosser, I promised one or two anecdotes about 9 Parachute Squadron, during the time I was fortunate to be a part of the Squadron (as OC and earlier as 21C in its last 2 years as an independent squadron, before it became part of 36 Engineer Regiment - which I later also commanded and so was privileged to see more of 9 Squadron)

Having kept no written records of my times with the squadron, save for the odd letter, and hence cannot write accurately about the winter operational tours in South Armagh, based in Castle Dillon, in 1974/75 and 1980/81, nor in detail about any of other operations and numerous exercises involving the Squadron in many parts of the UK and wider afield in such places as Hong Kong, Vanuatu, Cyprus, Canada, Brunei, Kenya, the Sudan, Italy, Germany, France, Denmark and elsewhere. However, there are 2 incidents, which I still remember and which highlight the Squadrons unique spirit, zest for action, humour and team spirit.

The first concerns LCpl Pashley who was a very keen young NCO who had earlier transferred to the Royal Engineers from the Parachute Regiment - and subsequently joined 9 Squadron. Sometime in the summer of 1980 and soon before the Squadron began training for its sixth Northern Ireland tour, a man called Jimmy Stevens declared the island of Vanuatu (formerly called the French New Hebrides in the South Pacific) to be independent. The resulting international concern led a combined Anglo-French Task Force being despatched to the island to ensure that no serious disorder broke out and the UK's contribution to this Force was the Spearhead unit at the time (42 Commando Royal Marines - there was some fruitless discussion whether it should not have been the Leading Parachute Battalion Group instead).

Just before 42 Commando embarked by air from the UK for the Forward Mounting Base closer to the island the planners realise that the Royal Marines would have problems landing in Vanuatu should Jimmy Stevens or his supporters block the island's runway or disable the airport. 9 Squadron was tasked to supply a section to carry out a parachute assault on the runway to clear it for follow-on landings by 42 Commando. Despite misgivings about the reality of such a task for only a section (conventional wisdom would have dictated a much larger force) the whole squadron, to a man, immediately volunteered to be chosen as one of the section, which the planners reluctantly agreed could be enlarged to 12 men!

As the OC at the time I picked the section and the men eagerly sorted themselves out and soon deployed, it eventually turned out there was no opposition; the Force deployed peacefully and the 9 Squadron soldiers ended up building an assault course for the local school, doing some jungle training and assisting 42 Commando with some internal security duties. However, during the excitement before the deployment LCpl Pashley asked for an OC's interview where he expressed his intense disappointment at not being one of the section being sent to Vanuatu. I explained to him that he was due to start his Northern Ireland training the next week as a search team 21C and that there was a much greater chance of engaging in a real operation in Northern Ireland than there was in Vanuatu. Nevertheless, he was especially keen not to miss out on the chance of an operational jump and immediately requested to be removed from his search team in order that I might reconsider him for Vanuatu. I refused and, in order to soften his disappointment, reminded him that he had just married his wife and that a sudden deployment to Vanuatu, followed immediately by his joining the Squadron in Northern Ireland, was not an ideal start to any marriage and that there would undoubtedly be further operations in which he would play a part as a professional soldier. The conversation then proceeded as follows:

"Permission to speak Sir please"

"Of course LCpl Pashley"

"How do I get a divorce!"

Very sadly and less than 2 years later after I had handed 9 Squadron over to my friend Chris Davies, LCpl Pashley was subsequently killed on OP CORPORATE in the Falkland Islands during a diversionary attack in support of the SCOTS GUARDS assault on Mount Tumbledown. He and Cpl Foran (now Capt Foran MM) had just led the Infantry through a minefield when an enemy machine gun opened up at close range.

The second incident occurred earlier while I was 2IC. LCpl 'Chalky' White and Spr 'Ginge' Shipway attempted one evening in 1975 to break into the local NAAFI in Aldershot but were subsequently picked up by the Military Police, charged and court-martialled. They both pleaded guilty and I was handed the unenviable task of Prosecuting Officer. Incidentally, during all my four and a half years with 9 Squadron, this was the only court-martial involving anyone in the squadron. Throughout the trial the Permanent President of the Court Martial who was an extremely grumpy elderly Major in the Royal Green Jackets gave me a seriously hard time and it was obvious that my knowledge of the court proceedings was pretty rudimentary. Eventually the Court was adjourned in order that the members could consider what sentence to impose. During the adjournment LCpl 'Chalky' White approached me, clearly annoyed by the President's unhelpful attitude and keen to cheer me up - despite the fact that my prosecuting evidence would influence the severity of his sentence! He remarked to me:

"I'm sorry Sir. It's been us what's done the business, but it's you who's getting all the hassle and grief here today. What do you reckon that I go and sort that old geezer out for being such a rude and ignorant bastard? He should not get away with speaking to a 9 Squadron officer like that!"

Perhaps both these stories may strike a chord with you and other members of the Airborne Engineers Association. I count myself extremely fortunate, to have had the chance of serving with 9 Squadron and hope that you will get many more anecdotes from the other OCs.

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## 9 Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers

Lt JL Clark

### Operation Descant April- October 2000

At the time of writing 9 Squadron has completed five months of a six-month tour of Northern Ireland-the Operation DESCANT commitment. The original plan had been for the Squadron to be 'rear based' with a decision to move over the water 'en masse' coming late in the day. For the purposes of the tour, manpower was reconfigured to create a Search Troop of some forty-five men and two smaller troops (1 and 3) each around twenty strong.

Whilst in the Province the Squadron provide the Roulement element of 25 Engineer Regiment based at Massereene Barracks in Antrim. The troops have been involved in the usual spread of Sapper tasks: search, construction and demolition to name but three. At times the focus of the Squadron was firmly fixed on the public order operations associated with the 'marching season,' which for the large part passed without major incident 1 Troop has had the 'high profile' job of demolishing the R16 patrol base at the foot of Cloghogue Mountain and upgrading the R14 patrol base. Operation REASCEND saw the troop living in the Mill at Bessbrook. Work was carried out in what proved, on many occasions, to be inhospitable conditions; South Armagh is renowned for its greenery and greenery does not come without a great deal of rain! Work included the demolition of a 30-man accommodation unit which saw the 'tunnel rats', LCpl Mills, Spr Shaw and Spr Randle, emerge from the very well-built concrete structure like Victorian chimney-sweeps - Spr Shaw often sparked up a Lambert & Butler for a breath of fresh air.

Amidst the frenetic activity of the plant operators the Troop completed a variety of construction tasks which included: building a new Heli-landing site at R14; the construction of a 40m long walkway; the installation of an additional 4-man accommodation unit at R14, flown in as an under-slung load by a Chinook. The ensuing noise hazard caused many of Newry's die-hards to choke on their Friday afternoon potatoes.

With a composite group taken from all elements of the Squadron, 2 Troop assumed the duties of the Roulement Search Troop in April. The province-wide commitment for high-risk search operations began at a hectic pace and the troop soon became the busiest search troop that the Emerald Isle has seen for a number of years.

Jobs have varied from the widely publicised searches of bases such as Fort George prior to their closure, to venue searches including Hillsborough Castle preceding the visit of HRH Princess Anne. The Marching Season also saw a lot of work come the way of the troop with many route and area searches around Drumcree and Londonderry.

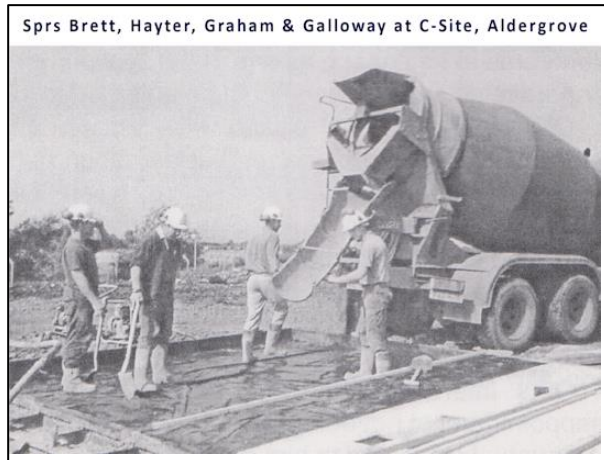
During high-risk operations, finds have included various mortars following the attacks on the G30 observation posts & RUC stations. Short & long barrelled weapons were also found during area searches. The most significant find was that of a secondary device on the rail line SW of Newry. After an initial explosion or "come-on" to bring a search/clearance operation into the area, a thoroughly professional team led by Cpl Smith (3 Tp Smudge) made all other agencies pale in comparison. The IED itself was of a very technically advanced nature and contained 20kg of HME.

Away from work Cpl Smith (2 Tp Smudge) has led expeditions to the Mourne Mountains when time has allowed, whilst the inimitable Cpl Totterdell has organised the horse riding for the fledgling Squadron polo team. He also arranged for several members of the Squadron to obtain their motorcycle licence at a cost significantly smaller than that in the UK.

On deploying to the Province, 3 Troop were initially employed at Long Kesh improving the Silver City training Facility with the addition of 120m of button-on-fencing (BOF). Subsequently the troop moved to C-site at RAF Aldergrove where began the laborious and monotonous process of constructing a storage area for the material returning from the dismantling of the Maze and the hilltop sites. Spr 'Murray' Walker had raised everyone's

hopes by mishearing C-Site' as 'Seaside' and disseminating the belief that the troop would be working on the beach for several months. Sadly this was not to be, C-Site was in fact a landfill site with no sand, sea or scantily clad young lady in sight.

On site two, teams capably led by Cpls Eddy and Straw, began work on 16 June. Only two of the troop, LCpl 'Dog' Eveleigh and Spr 'Jock' Graham were qualified concreters, the rest learnt as they went along. The task involved the creation of a series of 5 'fingers' springing from a base leg on which vehicles could traffic the site. In all there were 138 pads to pour as well as additional work in the form of providing drainage for the site. The novelty' of using vibrating pokers and screed beams quickly dissipated as the routine set in. The standard of work on site was consistently high as has often been highlighted by visitors to the site. After the completion of C-Site, the troop spent a few very wet days hill-walking in the Lake District and then moved up to Magilligan in order to enhance the public order training facility.



The troop also maintained the Lead Troop capability of the Regiment in Antrim, which involved being on high states of readiness for most of the tour. This necessitated the curtailing of social activities that might otherwise have taken place, a state of affairs that will certainly be put to rights on the return to the mainland.



Support Troop began Operation DESCANT with an attachment to the Public Order Training Team (POTT) 8 Brigade. The troop was to provide a Heavy Plant Team (HPT), consisting of an Armoured Case MWT, a Volvo SLDT and a Seddon Low Loader on which to transport the Case. The HPT was initially headed by LCpl "Scouse" Rowlands and Spr "Mush" Hickman. The use of the Rapid Advance is quite dangerous for the Infantry Company during Public Order Duties. In the first action of the training however, the only casualties were two lamp posts knocked by Spr Hickman whose rather feeble excuse was "it was dark and smoky and I couldn't see!" After twelve days training the HPT was handed

over to "Twice Born Again" Sapper Joe Davidson along with Sprs Cam Mowbray, Ross Tully and 'H' Hague.

In the next phase the HPT became involved with the rural CIVPOP and, along with the help of some airborne RLC Saxon drivers, formed a Snatch Squad, which participated in the exercise. Most of the Company Commanders involved the RE assets in the planning phase, one or two however did not and in the course of the exercise the CIVPOP were able to capitalise on some overexposed baselines. In particulars RIR heavily involved their RE assets and it showed in the exercise.



Sprs Philpot & Minnis during a vehicle search at the Maze

The Public Order Training was excellent for all who participated from Support Troop both from the plant side and the infantry side. It created a good deal of confidence to carry forward into future operations. In general call outs were both few and minor for Support Troop during the 'Marching Season.' The only moment of excitement came when they were called to clear a smouldering barricade that suddenly turned to a raging inferno on the back of the Volvo. The skip began to glow red and melt before the arrival of the Londonderry Fire Brigade who extinguished the flames. Other Plant tasks undertaken have

included support to the field troops demolishing the R16 Observation Post and construction at C-Site, Aldergrove.

Elsewhere, members of the troop have participated in surfing at Port Rush, skydiving in Ballykelly, Canoeing, water surfing, rugby 7's and five-a-side football. Away from work the Squadron, under the watchful eye of the Quartermaster, Bob Matthews, has participated in an inter-troop sports competition comprising rugby 7's, 6-a-side football, cross-country, and a fitness test. A buoyant Search Troop won the rugby, while HQ and Support Troop secured the football title. Perhaps most remarkably, cross-country honours were won by 1 Troop fresh from being cooped up in Bandit Country. Externally, members of the Squadron ran well in the Royal Engineers Half Marathon to secure the Minor Units and WO's and Sgts Mess Team titles. The football team also performed well to reach the quarterfinals of the Corps 6-a-side competition. In short the Squadron is having another very successful tour. Consistently high standards in all areas continue to set the Squadron apart. The Airborne spirit lives on and we look forward to our return to Aldershot.

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## We Need Your Assistance

The Airborne Engineers Association, in conjunction with the RE Museum, are arranging for a permanent Exhibition dedicated to Lt Col John Rock at the RE Museum at Chatham. To this end we are appealing to collectors or veterans of the period for appropriate artefacts. We need items of clothing, Dennison Smocks, over smocks, GQ type parachute harness, Steel Para Helmet, Rubber Training Helmet, Rubber soled Jump Boots etc., of 1940-42 period, to dress the exhibit. If you have any original items that you would be willing to donate to the museum for this display please contact, in the first instance. **Nick Gibson on 01634 862389.**

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## “D” Day 6th June 1944

The Personal Experience of the late Captain John Shinner RE - 3rd Parachute Squadron RE

### GRANGUES

The hamlet of Grangues lies in a valley about 5km south of the coastal town of Houlgate. About 1km further south the D27 road from Varaville towards Pont l’Eveque runs along a ridge at about 120 - 140m above sea level. Significantly, the location of Grangues relative to the river Dives is very similar to that of Ranville relative to the river Orne, some 10km further west. The terrain, however, is very different, with steep-sided valleys, small fields and orchards and woods, as opposed to the open undulating countryside around Ranville.

Among the habitations scattered along the D27 ridge is a farm, close to the road on the north side at Lieu St Laurent; a little further east, on the south facing slope and surrounded by its own parkland is the Chateau de Grangues.

In June 1944 a unit of the German 711th Division occupied the Chateau and grounds. The owner and his family, including his son and his five-year-old daughter, had been allowed to stay on, living in very restricted and uncomfortable circumstances in the basement. Their household included a very old Irish woman, who had been nanny to two generations of the family, and the young daughter of the farmer at Lieu St Laurent, who was a Red Cross helper.

On the evening of the 5th June 1944, these people and the other French folk in the neighbourhood settle down for just another night under German occupation. On the other side of the channel on the 5 June, preparations for the assault were reaching their climax. The troops were in their transit camps, isolated from the outside world, and final arrangements and briefings were taking place.

My diary records:

“D-1, 5th June 1944 dawned fine but windy at our transit camp at Harwell. We looked out of our tents as we woke up and saw that all the aircraft and gliders had overnight become zebra-like in black and white identification stripes. I made quite certain that my kit was all correct and stowed away my camp bed and stuff to be left in behind, and put it in charge of a driver who was to follow by sea.

Towards the end of the morning, the CRE and I got our small team together and with the latest and largest photos of the DZ (dropping zone), we went through final details of our plan; in the afternoon I slept for an hour, sunbathed a little, and ate a large meal at 1900hrs. At 1930hrs we left for Fairford, our take-off airfield. We had a pleasant 30-miles or so drive through the English countryside. I think we all wondered a little how long it would be before we saw it again - I know I did.

We were to fly in a Stirling of 620 Squadron. Most of our people had been up a couple of days previously for a flight to familiarize themselves with the aircraft and crew - I had missed this because I was away with the CRE at Tarrant Rushton.

Once on the airfield I felt no nervousness, just a slight feeling of expectation and excitement. The wind was still strong but was forecast to drop at about 2200hrs; sure enough, it did.

Take-off was timed for 2337hrs. At 2245 we got into our kit. This is what I wore and carried:

Underwear, string vest, shirt, battledress, camouflage scarf, airborne smock, beret, 1lb of gelignite, two No 36 grenades, .45 Colt automatic and ammunition, shell dressing and morphia tubes, code list, escape kit (magnetic “compass” fly buttons and silk maps sewn into linings of clothes) emergency rations, fighting knife, compass, map, jumping jacket, helmet, Mae west, parachute and leg kit bag containing two small packs, a map board and a Sten gun. Others carried more than this and we popped through the door of the aircraft like corks in a bottle.”

The Sappers of 591 Squadron were carrying an assortment of weapons, tools and equipment, including such items as a folding bicycle. Their primary task on landing was to demolish and remove the poles, which had been erected to obstruct the glider LZ (landing zone). For this purpose each man carried a 5lb charge of plastic explosive in a bicycle inner tube wrapped around his body - these were to contribute substantially to our subsequent troubles. It is easy to be wise after the event, but I am convinced that we underestimated the difficulties experienced by heavily laden men in an aircraft lurching under fire and that we tried to carry too much.

In the aircraft we settled down comfortably. I was in the navigator's compartment for take-off. and we were off the ground within one second of the correct time. We climbed for five or ten minutes and then I went back to my travelling position behind the main spar.

The trip across could not have been more uneventful. Until 20 minutes before jumping time we had the lights on. Then one of the aircrew went back to the rear of the aircraft, the lights went off and for a moment or two all one could see was the big luminous 'D' above the dinghy toggle. The crewman who went aft was the wireless operator. As well as his job of acting as dispatcher, he had to investigate an intercom failure between the rear gunner and the cockpit. This resulted, among other things, in the navigator receiving no estimates of drift.

"When one's eyes adjusted to the moonlight coming through the portholes, one could see ripples on the sea below. We were to jump at 0100hrs, and our last two minutes' flight would be overland. Three minutes to go, and leaning over to a porthole I could see surf and a strip of sand.

#### **Red light on!**

Then, someone on the beach picked up a handful of pebbles and threw them against the fuselage. Then another and another - only they were not pebbles, they were flak. One bit nicked my right arm - it didn't hurt, but felt a bit numb. The sky seemed to be full of vivid flashes and orange streaks. Suddenly there was a flash and a burst of flame inside the aircraft, astern of where I stood. In a matter of seconds the whole of the inside of the aircraft blazing.

Each of the sappers had been carrying 5lbs. sausages of plastic explosives and one poor chap had his hit, and it burned fiercely. Five or six of us at the forward end of the fire were forced forward towards the main spar by the flames. I felt the flames singeing my face and yelled to someone to get the escape hatch off to let out the suffocating smoke. I told one of the sappers to go forward to the radio cabin to find out what the situation was. He contacted one of the crew, but obviously things were sadly wrong up there, because they passed the order to jump and then immediately cancelled it. In any case we should not have got past the blaze between the exit hole and us.

Four parachutists aft of the fire did, in fact, jump and all survived - three becoming prisoners of war and one evading the Germans and making his way back to the beachhead. The officer who jumped at No 1 recollected, before he jumped, seeing one of the port engines on fire and had a vivid image of the contrast between the orange red of the flames and the greenish flames and dense smoke inside the aircraft. He had a short glimpse, after he jumped, of the aircraft "well alight" disappearing over a hill and assumed that there could be no other survivors.

Almost immediately after this the nose dipped, there was a horrendous rending and crashing and I had the sensation that we were being rolled over and over. It seemed to go on for an awfully long time. When all the movement stopped I became aware of something (fuel?) swilling over my face and that there was a fierce fire burning in the forward part of the aircraft a few feet away. I also realised that I couldn't move of my own accord because I was hanging upside down, by one leg, on my static line, which had become entangled with the roof of the aircraft. If I didn't do something I was going to cook in the immediate future. Again my luck was in and the urgent action required was taken by another survivor who came staggering my way. I shouted to him to cut me loose and in two seconds his fighting knife had done the job and we were both on our feet. We only had a few feet to walk because, just behind where I had been hung up, the fuselage was broken off and there was a pile of

wreckage and dead and injured men. We couldn't see any sign of the tails!

The two of us set about getting some of the injured out. As far as I could tell - I was pretty dazed and shaken – there were four of us on our feet, three or four men alive but badly injured and the others dead. The front part of the aircraft was a raging furnace and there was obviously nothing to be done for the aircrew there. We pulled out two of the sappers but couldn't shift a third man who was very firmly trapped in the wreckage. There was a good deal of tracer flying about - I don't know where it came from or who it was aimed at - and a fair amount of banging. Another fire was burning not far away and I thought it must be another unlucky one.

We thought we had crashed a little way south of the DZ and that we might be able to make friendly contact, so I left two men at the site and went with a corporal to a lane at the side of the field to see if we could locate ourselves. I got out my compass and we started off - with difficulty, because we were both injured - northward towards where we thought the DZ was. We couldn't make anything of the country - it was not as nearly as open as we expected - and after a while we started back the way we had come. We had not gone far before we spotted two German helmets bobbing up and down in the field on the left of the lane. At the same time they saw us and started to climb through the hedge. I let off at them with my Colt, but because my arm was nearly useless it went high above their heads. At the same moment another half a dozen appeared in the lane behind us and it was a case of "Put your hands up." We put our hands up.

The patrol, which had captured us, was led by an unteroffizier. We were marched maybe a quarter of a mile and down a drive through some trees to a fair sized house, evidently a Company HQ. Here we had our equipment removed and one of our chaps was allowed to put a shell dressing on my arm, after which I was tied up with a piece of rope. There was a good deal of banging and crashing going on and the Germans were in a state of some agitation."

We had in fact crashed in a small meadow amongst orchards on the ridge along which the D27 road runs, about 6km from the coast, less than 250m from the farmhouse and 500m from Grangues Chateau. An air photo taken on 20 June 1944 shows that we approached from the northeast - not due north as might have been expected - lost the tail on impact and then ploughed on for a further 100m through the corner of an orchard and across the meadow, leaving wreckage on the way so that only the wing centre section and a relatively short length of the fuselage were left by the time we came to rest. The inference must be that after being hit and losing one or both port engines the aircraft veered left (eastward) and went into a gentle decent and was then brought round on to a southwest course in an effort to correct for deviation.

So much for the several lurid stories I have heard, including one that we were seen flying no more than ten feet above the roof of the Chateau minus the tails. The aircraft carried six crew and seventeen parachutists, four of whom managed to jump as the fire took hold. Of those who remained on board, four aircrew and four parachutists were killed in the crash. Two of the aircrew, the rear gunner and wireless operator, had miraculous escapes when the tail broke off. The remaining nine parachutists survived, some of them injured, the Germans shot seven of these survivors later that night.

A second aircraft crashed less than 400m from ours, it is probable that this happened shortly before we came down and accounts for the flames that I saw nearby. It is known that this aircraft carried a complement of twenty-five. The parachutists were from the 7th Battalion, the Parachute Regiment and 6th Airborne Reconnaissance Regiment. There were no survivors.

Between the two crash sites the air photographs shows a line of four very large bomb craters, evidently dropped by a bomber off course, and possibly mistaking our fires for his target. The building to which we had been taken was a stable block in the grounds of Grangues Chateau.

After what I judged to be about half an hour, an officer arrived in a car. He immediately ordered me to be untied and I was separated from the others, put into the back of a car with him, and we drove away. We travelled about

four miles, twice running through roadblocks and narrowly avoiding a dead German lying in the road. Our destination was a fairly large (probably Brigade) headquarters. I was taken into a small room where a senior officer in mess kit (red stripes on trousers etc.) was sitting with a phone in each hand. He was furious at the intrusion - I was filthy and dripping blood on his carpet - and I was hastily removed and taken to an office where there was an intelligence officer. He was totally reasonable and correct. He first produced a British paratrooper medical orderly who dressed my arm as best he could. The IO gave me a superficial search after which he asked me my number, rank and name. He also asked for further details with the offer that, if I helped, news of my capture would be sent to England quickly, I refused, and he didn't press the point, going as far as to say "you are quite right." I was then taken to a stable and locked in with about eight other prisoners.

I believe that the headquarters to which I was removed was la Briboudiere just to the west of Dozule. It is interesting that, although the Germans were very much awake and about in large numbers quite early on in the proceedings they did not - at least in my case - exploit their advantage. My search was so superficial that the code list for the day, which I was carrying, was not found and I was able to dispose of it next day. Nor did this, and subsequent searches, reveal my wristwatch which I wore under bandages and ultimately brought back to England. My interrogation was almost non-existent.

The crashes of the two aircraft were only the start of a night of terrible and sinister events around the Chateau, the full details of which are unlikely ever to be unravelled.

After my removal, there was probably little action until about 0320hrs when the first glider came in. Two gliders crashed in the Chateau grounds; another landed a short distance away. Of those close to the Chateau one crashed into a dense copse and there were no survivors. Little is known of the others, but undoubtedly there were both casualties and prisoners taken.

At some time during the night, after the arrival of the gliders, the Germans, including others from my aircraft, shot eight British Soldiers. The Germans claimed that there had been an attempted breakout, but all the evidence points to their having been shot out of hand.

There is a bizarre and touching conclusion to the story. Apparently the old Irish woman living with the family, deeply religious, was outraged at the way the bodies were being treated. Being a neutral subject she was in no fear of the Germans; she harnessed up a donkey and cart, commandeered a working party, and ensured that they all had decent burials. Now they lie in Ranville cemetery.

Today all is quiet and peaceful at Grangues. The small girl from the Chateau married and she and her husband, as well as her brother and his family, divide their time between their Paris homes and their country retreat at the Chateau. The farmer's daughter married after the war and lives with her husband in Houlgate.

A memorial to the fifty-two men who died at Grangues has been erected in the village and was unveiled in June 1994.

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## A Cautionary Tale

Maj Sid Rooth

At some time in 1958, the Squadron were on a Parachute exercise at Thetford. The controllers ended the exercise a day early (we must have performed well!). I left Thetford in the evening as advance party back to Aldershot; the main party were to follow the next day.

At about midnight, the driver said we need petrol; luckily we were on the London North Circular and found a petrol station open, a rarity in 1958. We filled up and I asked for a receipt and then continued the journey back to Aldershot. Some days later I asked the 2IC if I could be reimbursed for the petrol from the Imprest Account. He told me to write a note to the OC and attach the bill. I did saying "May this be put down to Imprest?" - back it came saying "No - put it down to experience."

This really was adding insult to injury as when I asked for the receipt at the petrol station and went to the kiosk, the attendant shouted 'watch the dog.' Too late, it had shot out and bitten me on the ankle.

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## Journal Material

Got a story to tell? Done something exciting? Been to some exotic part of this planet? This is your opportunity to get it published. We need a constant supply of interesting material for your Journal. There must be hundreds of budding authors out there. Why not submit an article for inclusion in a future issue of our Journal. You can e-mail it, type and post it, or as a last resort, hand write your story. We also require photographs, with, if possible, the names of the individuals. All photos will be returned once they have been copied or scanned. Send your material direct to the **'Editor'** - the address is printed on page 1 of this publication.

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## The Kota Mama Expedition 1999

### Jim Masters

*Jim Masters service days began at the age of 14 as a Chepstow boy. He later joined 9 AB Fd Coy, 6 AB Div in Palestine in 1947. On return to the UK the amalgamation of 6th Div sappers took place, thus was born 9 Indep AB Sqn. At that time 9 Sqn proved to be the best unit Jim had served in in his 32 years in the Corps. At Jim and his dear wife Joan's wedding, they were supported by the company of Mick Downey (best man), Paddy Neilly, Tom Sherwood and other mates from the Squadron.*

*Having proved his worth as RSM 3 Div Engrs, Jim was later commissioned. His interest in world expeditions was aroused and has gone on to this present day. At the time of going to press; Jim is somewhere in the Amazon. We look forward to his next article.*



On the 7th October 1999 the boats of the Kota Mama expedition successfully completed their 1000 mile journey over the Andes and 1800 mile voyage by river from Bolivia to Buenos Aires. The fleet of two traditionally built reed boats, a remarkably tough Avon inflatable and a Bolivian Navy support ship reached Buenos Aires in fine form.

The reed boats were designed and constructed by the famous Catari family, Aymara boat builders on Lake Titicaca in Bolivia. Flying the British Red Ensign and the flags of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil and Paraguay, they were the first reed built craft to do this journey for many centuries.

The aim of the voyage was to show that the ancient people of South America to navigate to the Atlantic and also to study the area for future scientific exploration could have used boats of this type. Using the current and sails whenever the wind permitted, the boats were on the river for 70 days. They encountered several violent squalls with force 6 wind and white-topped waves up to 4 feet high.

Contrary to prediction, the wind was often from the South, bringing bitterly cold temperatures as low as 3° from Patagonia. This necessitated the Avon tender fitted with a Suzuki outboard being used to push the boats so that the schedule of scientific work and community aid could be maintained. A small Mariner outboard was fitted to the 13.5 metre flagship "Kota Mama II" for steering in emergencies when avoiding the large barges that frequent the waterway. The use of modern propulsion did not worry the organizers, as the really important matter was to test the construction and fabric of the hulls.

"The reed boats have performed remarkably well and proved to be extremely robust," commented veteran explorer, Captain Jim Masters. However, they did suffer some damage. Severe winds split the sails on two occasions and the steering oar transom was broken when "Kota Mama II" was flung against the Bolivian Navy support vessel by the wake of a passing ship. In the final week, heavy waves swept away part of the outer layer of reeds from the bow. Lesser damage has been caused to the 6 metre "Viracocha Spirit of the Bahamas". Both craft are still in good order although they did absorb water. The flagship's weight rose from 8 to 21 tonnes in four months afloat.

In the Pantanal swamps of Brazil, snakes tried to climb aboard and cows tried to eat the boats. Mosquitoes plagued the crews in the early days when the temperature soared to 108°F but towards the end of the voyage it was too cold for insects. To keep intruders (and cows) away from the fleet the team had a mascot - 'Rocket,' a hairy, ginger, Paraguayan piglet, who became much loved and was given to a good home in Asuncion. Amazingly he is reported to be alive and well and surrounded by admiring lady pigs!

All along the route, scientific and community aid projects have been carried out. Archaeological sites have been examined, and an ancient fortress dating back 2,500 years was found and partially excavated in the Bolivian

Andes foothills. Petroglyphs, thought by some to be of Scandinavian origin were examined in Eastern Paraguay, but although they are mysterious, the expedition's archaeologist, Andrew Millar, did not consider them the work of Vikings as local people claimed. The life and culture of some extremely interesting tribes were recorded by the anthropological team and throughout the expedition a biologist catalogued the fauna and directed a survey of the wildlife. In the swamps of NE Argentina, 57 endangered marsh deer were located using micro light aircraft. Lieutenant Carlos Cespedes of the Bolivian Navy, who is producing the first navigation guide to this great waterway, carried out a hydrographical project. The Community Aid programme has been much appreciated. Working in a temperature down to  $-20^{\circ}$  at an altitude of 13000 feet, Royal Engineer officers designed flood prevention measures for a remote village in the Bolivian Altiplano. Throughout the project two British Armed Forces dentists extracted over 1400 teeth from poor people in need of help, whilst the Doctor gave medical assistance to hundreds of patients in Bolivia and Paraguay and took DNA samples as part of a programme to study origins.

The expedition's website <http://kota-mama.awc.co.uk> has proved most popular worldwide. Pictures taken with an Olympus digital camera have been a vital aid. Some 17,000 visits per day have been recorded and over 3 million people have seen the site. School children in South America have been linked to pupils at schools in Europe via the BT Mobique satellite phones used by the expedition for external communication. The laptop computers kindly provided by Sight and Sound performed faultlessly and provided the vital email facility. Thanks to Motorola and London Communications the expedition also had excellent short-range communications.



The 50-team members included 9 women, came from Argentina, Australia, the Bahamas, Bolivia, Britain, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Gibraltar and Paraguay. The project was strongly supported by the Argentinean Prefectura Naval, the Bolivian and Paraguayan Navies and the Scientific Exploration Society. Many companies backed the venture, including American Airlines and JP Knight Towage and Marine Transportation, who kindly sponsored the flagship. The vessels used are now in Museums. "Viracocha-Spirit of the Bahamas" rests in the Prefectura Naval Museum at Tigre, Buenos Aires, whilst "Koto Mama II" is at the ISCA Maritime Museum at Lowestoft, England.

This year's expedition follows an equally successful, but shorter voyage in Bolivia last year during which four important ancient settlements were located. One of them is believed to be a Tiwanaku city dating back to 1000 BC. Encouraged by the results of the two

expeditions, the Bolivian National Academy of Science and the Bolivian Navy Hydrographical Department; have suggested a series of new expeditions which will be undertaken in the coming 5 years. The next, in 2001 will probably attempt a 3000-mile voyage from the Andes to the Atlantic via the Rio Grande, Rio Mamore and the Amazon. As there are at least 300 miles containing over 20 rapids on this route, reed boats capable of navigating white water are being designed.

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## Spring Fling!

Tony Murphy - son of John

As the first cold winds sweep down from the North, our minds turn back to the spring. To be precise, the Blue Ridge All Airborne Chapter Spring Fling in Virginia USA. My father and I took the opportunity to travel out to America together with a number of members of the Parachute Regiment Association to visit the Blue Ridge All Airborne Chapters' annual 'Spring Fling.'

The Chairman of the Blue Ridge, Ray Gilbert met us at Washington Dulles airport, along with a number of his fellow Chapter members. After we waited for various other fellow travellers including a contingent of 'sweaties' from Scotland, we set off for Lynchburg, Virginia the home of the Blue Ridge Chapter. The journey took us through some of the most 'English style' countryside of America, and what was also 'Civil War' country. The main highway south is the '29'; it is called the 29th Infantry Division Memorial Highway, which evokes memories of recent history. This was the Division that landed on Omaha.

After a drive of about 4 hours, we arrived in Lynchburg; well America is a big country! Once we were all booked in at the hotel we were given a warm Southern welcome by some of the Chapter committee members and their wives. Food and drink was laid on for us in the hospitality suite, new friends were made; old friends reunited; more drink consumed, and this was only the first day!

Morning dawned, for some it was later that day.... We registered and were given our envelopes, which contained various items of information about Lynchburg and the surrounding area. It was at registration that we met 'Big' John 'Williams, he is one of those guys who leaves a lasting impression. No problem was too big, very helpful and he has a good sense of humour.

By the time Friday arrived, many more ex paratroopers from across America, Canada and Mexico had made their way to Blue Ridge, it was an international event. The Friday evening was an informal affair, with a running buffet, drinks and live music. The main event was the \$10,000 raffle; tickets for this were \$100, most people clubbed together to buy one. The winning ticket was to be the last number drawn. If your ticket was drawn early you were out. However, there were a number of \$50 prizes and when the draw was down to the few numbers, those people who had them were asked if they wanted to sell them or keep them, bearing in mind if your number was called you were out! Eventually, when there were just five the ticket holders left, they decided to share the money between themselves.

Saturday was the fun day, big prizes to be won, international pride at stake, UK v USA in darts, beer drinking and joke telling! The latter, involved an American speaking with an English accent, telling a joke and us telling a joke with an American accent.

Saturday evening was the formal event. Blazers, and for those with medals, were worn. Ray Gilbert opened the proceedings by calling upon the colour guard to present the Blue Ridge Colours and the American flag.

Following the dinner meal, the guest of honour, General Alan Farrell, Commandant of the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) was invited to light the first of a series of candles that were set up in front of the dais. These candles represented those paratroopers who did not return from wars passed and those members of the Chapter who had passed away in recent memory. There was also a separate table set for a meal with a black candle on it, waiting for paratroopers to return. This represented the thousands of American servicemen who are still classified as 'Missing in Action' (MIA). The 82nd Airborne Chorus, who were very good, entertained us after the meal along with the pipes and drums of the cadets of the VMI.

Sunday morning was a free period, in the afternoon it was off to the Marine Corps League for a party. What a welcome! Marines and Paratroopers in peaceful harmony, we could do no wrong. Another good time lots of

friendly banter and a few beers.

Monday after breakfast, we drove down to Smith Mountain Lake to spend a day on the, paddleboat, The Virginia Dare. On the way through we stopped off at the D-Day memorial in Bedford, Virginia. It is still under construction and they are hoping to finish it in 2001. It is being built mostly by public subscription this is the reason for the slow progress. So, on to the lake, 500 sq. miles of a man-made lake, we went round only a very small bit, even that was impressive. Lunch was provided so was an evening meal, it was a good day out.

From Tuesday until we left, visits were arranged to various sites in and around Virginia, which finished with a tour round the Virginia Military Institute. The highlight of this was the passing out parade by the cadets.

Finally, there was a final get together at the home of Ray Gilbert, on the Saturday prior to leaving on the Sunday, The party was in his garage, called the Doghouse. It was the size of a small hall, as I mentioned earlier, America is a big place! Again food and drink was laid on for us. A good time was had by all.

Everyone had a great time, and I would thoroughly commend that you pay a visit over there.



Spring Fling 16 – 30 May 2001

The program for Spring Fling 2001 has been finalised. If you are interested in making the trip, or would like further information, please contact one of the organisers listed below:

Norman McKay 01959 575097, (for those living in the South, East Anglia and the West)

Gordon Sillito 0247 668 9553, (for those living in the Midlands and Wales)

Paul Love 01772 719882, (for those living in the North of England)

Bill Whyte 01324 716144, (for those who live in Scotland or Northern Ireland)

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## Airborne Engineers Association Membership

Membership to our Association is available to all Sapper personnel, who have served with, or who are serving on the strength of a unit establishment, which has a parachuting role as part of its military duties, i.e. SAS, EOD or Commando units, and has passed an Army Parachute Course. The cost for life membership is £20-00. A further annual subscription of £5-00, will entitle you to receive three issues of our "Journal" (April, August and December). We currently have Branches located in Aldershot, Birmingham Chatham, the Southwest, Northwest, Yorkshire, Edinburgh and Northern Ireland. For further details please contact our Membership Secretary: Chris Chambers - 24, Longfield Road, Ash, Aldershot, GU12 6NA or telephone 01252 316579

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## Message from the Happy Couple

David & Christine Grimbley

"May we take this opportunity to thank everyone who attended our wedding reception at the Norbreck Castle hotel, and for the beautiful gifts that we received. It was a most memorable occasion. **"Thank you all."**

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## Libya – April '68

Wadi Mansura



Pete Guerin, Mick Marshall, Ken Mason & John Fleet.  
They were all much slimmer then

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## Mountain Rescue- Our Hero

(Fleet News April 1975)

An army climber scaled the 'North Face' of the tallest pine tree in Fleet yesterday to rescue a cat that had been stuck there for five days. Sapper Phil Chatterley climbed the tree in William's Way, Fleet to rescue 18 months old Zsa-Zsa, perched 50' up. Sapper Chatterley is more used to climbing in the Alps!

Using tape slings and metal runners he was held on a rope by Sapper Dave Chamberlain. Both men were members of 9 Indep Para Sqn RE at Rhine Barracks Aldershot. Zsa-Zsa had climbed the tree on Sunday morning, and all attempts to rescue her since had failed. RSPCA inspector, Allan Brown spent three days trying to lure her down, and on Wednesday, the Hampshire Fire Service also had to admit defeat.

Zsa-Zsa's owner is Mrs Susan Hogg of William's Way.

Those of you that know Phil, will probably believe that he actually talked the cat down!

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## The Denison Smock

Bob Seaman (1st & 9th Indep AB Sqns RE)

I read with great interest the piece about the term “Red Devils” on page eight of the August 2000 issue of the journal. I had never previously heard about the red soil but I did hear of the German “tag” before I joined up as a boy in ‘42.

The theory I heard for the name was based on the original pattern Denison smock. I thought the “Red” part was due to the beret colour, but even those hairy warriors of the North African campaign would have worn helmets when in action.

This theory regarding the smock was reinforced for me when I joined airborne forces in ‘46 and I was issued with a very old well-worn smock of the old style and it differed from the later pattern in several ways. Apart from being paler in its colours (it would have soaked up the red mud beautifully), and having ribbed wool cuffs to the sleeves, there were no press studs at the back of the smock to support the jock strap when it was not worn between the legs. Because of this lack of press-studs, it was simply left to dangle when a bit more freedom of movement was wanted. I used to let mine hang, much to the disgust of my companions who wore theirs neatly supported. The result of this was that when running from one place to another, the strap flew out at the rear like a devils tail. What with the lads being covered in red mud and a devils tail, the term “Red Devils “ seems appropriate even without the fact that they were a tough bunch.

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## Dedication of the “Standards”

Bob Prosser

The Dedication of both the Old and the New Association Standards, together with the blessing of the Union Flag was held on Saturday 9th September in the Garrison church at Brompton.

The Rev Bernard Foulger, conducted the Service, with Standard Bearers Roy King, Ray Coleman and Tom Brinkman, very ably escorted by Charlie Dunk and Ron Gibson. The turnout and decorum by the Standard bearers and escorts was most impressive with comments afterwards on how it looked so professional.



**L to R: Charlie Dunk, Bob Prosser, Tom Brinkman, Rev Foulger, Ray Coleman, Roy King, Brig. Garth Hewish MBE, & Ron Gibson**

Bernard Foulger captured the mood of the moment with a very poignant address bringing thoughts of friends and comrades from the past. With phrases such as “By your glorious honours and achievements of the past, most of you by your service have written it in the history books of our nation.” He concluded “We must look upon today’s dedication of these Standards to be something for the future generations to see and know, for it has a true and rightful place in our nation. It belongs to our branches and our Association because it symbolises our grateful thanks for the past, our

hopes for the future, for peace in this world in which we live”

Our President, Brig Garth Hewish MBE read the lesson Romans, Chapter 8 verses 31-39 in immaculate style, having rehearsed for a month Philistines Only, to be told as he entered the Church that the lesson had been changed; it was ‘mag off new mag on and carry on firing’. Approx. 50 people attended the Service with representatives from all branches

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## Can You Help?

A colleague of Eric Robinson, Mr David Brancher, is trying to locate John Philip Richards. John was commissioned in December 1950 and later served with 9 Indep Para Sqn. After leaving the Corps John joined the consulting engineers Bechtel in California. There is a remote chance that John kept in touch with members of our Association. If you are able to throw any light as to his present location, please give David Brancher a call on 01873 857959 or drop him a line: "Ashfield", Albany Road, Abergavenny NP7 7BD.

Do you know the where John Fleet is residing? John served with the Sqn (1 troop) from 1963 - 1975. Please give the editor a call if you can help (01252 326140)

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## Where are they?- We'd like to know



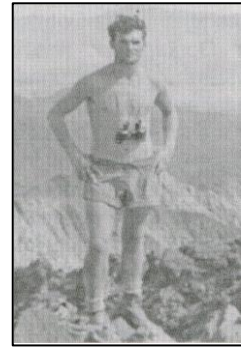
Brian Lee



Keith (Canada) Frost with Colin Campbell (it's Frosty we're after)



Harry Huggins



Fred Robson suggests that we contact Interpol for info on the gentleman above

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## Looking back over the years

Paul Dunkley, currently residing in Cyprus, would like to know who the mystery person is behind the beret - Photo taken at Haig Lines 1968



L to R: standing.

Tom Cleary, Bruce Bissett, Tom Rhodes, Ian Cook, Dave Rutter, Bill Thompson, Dave Norminton, Chris Read, 'Blackie' Brian, Jeff Dyer, Ken Mason, Danny Daniels, Paul Dunkley, George Murphy, Phil Poulton

Front row:

Fred Gray, Alan Peak, mystery man, Taff Vickery, Brendan Snoddy, Colin Parker, Derek Sowden, Derek Arnold, Henry Morgan and Billy Belshaw



Action Man

I bet he hasn't got his ID card in his top left breast pocket! Willie Wiltshire - Cyprus 1964

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Mount Olympus 1962

**Can you help?**

We can recognise, Ian Wilson, 'Jessie' Owens, Bud Grocock, Dave Rance, Benny Benson & Stan Marley

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Albert Sweetlove - Egypt 1952

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## 1st Parachute Squadron Reunion, Memorial and Dedication

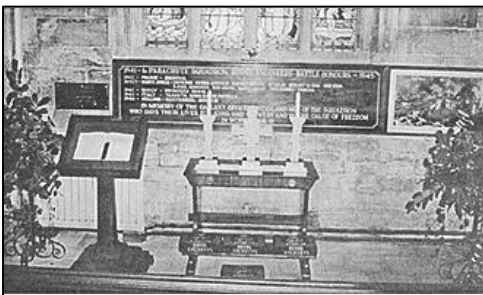
The Annual Dinner and Reunion was held on the 23rd September at the Comfort Friendly Inn at Bicker - not far from Donington, - the Lincolnshire village where the Squadron was stationed before leaving for Arnhem in 1944 - and was attended by members of the Squadron and their relatives, deceased members relatives, friends and guests totalling 60 in all.

After an excellent meal, George Cosadinos, as MC, asked Jack Hobbs to propose "The Loyal Toast" and Bob Jones to propose "The Squadron" and "Absent Friends." Arthur Hendy then welcomed the guests who included the guest of honour, Colonel Chris Davies MBE, who was in the "9th", and his wife, Jenny. We are all very glad to see that Chris is now able to partake in normal activities once more. Arthur also welcomed The Rev. John and June Moon, and the many other relatives and friends of members of the Squadron.

Eric Booth read out correspondence and items of Squadron News. These included a letter of greetings from Her Majesty the Queen, and letters from Squadron members, who, owing to illness, could not be present.

Bouquets of flowers were presented to Mrs Peter Stainforth, Mrs Jenny Davies, Mrs Betty Gray and Cissie Albans. After the meal, we "adjourned to the bar," and had a very pleasant time until the early hours, reminiscing and renewing old acquaintances. A successful raffle was held, the prizes having been donated by the members and friends, which included a gallon of whisky brought down from Aberdeen by Tam Hepburn.

In spite of the late "Lights Out," everyone was on parade at the "Red Cow" at Donington on the Sunday morning for the march to the Parish Church. Members of the Spalding PRA Branch, took part, together with Cadets from the local units, one affiliated to the Royal Engineers, and the other to the Parachute Regiment. The Arnhem Standard was borne by Kevin Lambert and the Standards of the Peterborough RE Association, Skegness PRA and the Spalding PRA branches was also on parade.



The Rev. John Moon conducted the Memorial Service, with the lessons being read by Peter Stainforth and George Cosadinos. Tom Hicks read out the names of the Fallen, and Harold Padfield, on behalf of the Squadron, laid wreaths together with others from the Airborne Engineers Association and Spalding PRA. Norman Swift gave the Homage. After The Last Post, the Silence and Reveille, the piper played the Squadron lament.

The Venerable Arthur Hawes, Archdeacon of Lincoln, then conducted the dedication of the Memorial Lectern, Prayer Altar and Kneeler, Candlesticks and Plaque, showing the Battle Honours of the Squadron. Members of the Squadron, the Arnhem Veterans Association, and a very grateful contribution from the Airborne Engineers Association and other donations funded these items. Our special thanks must go to Betty and Fred Gray for preparing the Book of Remembrance. Our sincere thanks must go to Eric Booth for all the hard work undertaken by him in bringing this project to a successful conclusion.

After the Service, photographs were taken of the Squadron members in the churchyard under the "Arnhem Oak."



Eric Booth, Tam Hepburn, Arthur Hendy, Gus Woods, George Cosadinos, Norman Swift, Tony Jones, Tom Carpenter (9 Coy AB) Tom Hicks, Gordon Christie, Bob Jones, Dick Robb, Harold Padfield, Jack Hobbs, John Simpkins, Bob Clark, Peter Stainforth.

Instead of retiring to Cissie's for a cup of tea/coffee and a biscuit, we proceeded to the church hall where a midday buffet of sandwiches, cakes, trifles and other goodies had been laid on.

A very enjoyable weekend was had by all, and our sincere thanks must go to Eric and Nina Booth for organising things for us, and Cissie Albans and all the ladies involved in preparing the most welcome repast laid on after the service.

#### **Historian**

The Association now has a good number of Squadron and Company histories written shortly after the war based on individual experiences. To embellish these accounts we also need many more personal stories. We have a very varied and colourful history and it needs to be recorded now before it disappears, along with those that were there at the time. This not only applies to the Second World War but to every incident of interest, be it at Squadron or Company level and also Troop, Section and individual level. It all helps to ensure that our history will not fade away. If you have anything that you consider will fit this category, then please, do not hesitate to send it to me. Colonel Chris Davies and myself are to spend some time together looking at ways in which we can preserve and present all the information we already have. There is also a need for someone to take up the job as Historian from 1975 onwards. This should preferably be someone who has served in the Squadron during the last twenty-five years. The task is much easier if they know those who have served in the Squadron and are familiar with its history.

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## Arnhem Commemoration- 2000

Tom Carpenter

The number of veterans visiting Arnhem and Oosterbeek for the year 2000 commemoration was estimated to be in excess of 240. All of the services and wreath laying ceremonies were well attended and blessed with fine weather.

I had previously arranged to meet up with two, possibly four, members of 9 Parachute Squadron, near the Grote Kerk in Arnhem at 1700 hours on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> September. I was both surprised and delighted to be met by no fewer than ten representatives (Lt John Clark, SSgt Tim Barnard etc ) They were to face a busy schedule attending commemorative services and wreath laying duties on the behalf of the Corps of Royal Engineers, 9 Parachute Squadron and the Airborne Engineers Association. Our first duty was to attend the service and wreath laying at the Airborne Square in Arnhem. As this was to commence in 2 hours' time it was a matter for them to get booked into the accommodation in Oosterbeek and a quick wash and change. This was achieved with time to spare, and the duty was carried out with due reverence



### **The Engineers Memorial**

L to R: LCpls Mugger Mills, Ken Barlow, Steve Powley, Cpl Dudds (hidden in the rear), Sprs LV Leavold, Galloway, Tom Carpenter, Cpl Gez Todd, SSgt Tim Barnard , Spr Rolf Campbell and Lt Clark

Saturday proved quite a busy program, first we attended an official event on Ginkel Heath at 1000 hours before moving on to the Engineers Memorial on the South bank of the lower Rhine near Driel. The Engineer memorial as erected to the memory of the British and Canadian Sappers of 30 Corps, who manned the fragile boats during the storm lashed nights of 25/26 September 1944. It was to their credit that some 1,800 men of the 1st Airborne Division were withdrawn from the Oosterbeek perimeter. Having completed our duties, we arranged to meet at 1000 hours on Sunday for the service of remembrance in the Oosterbeek War cemetery.

The Oosterbeek service, although slightly changed in its format from previous years, was none the less just as moving. The appearance of the school children carrying their floral tributes never fails to stir the emotions, no matter how many times you've witnessed the occasion. At the conclusion of the service and wreath laying, a low fly past brought the day's proceedings to an end.

Taking a quick look through the sea of faces as the congregation departed from the cemetery, I was delighted to meet up with Butch Thorne, Frank Paine and Cyril Williams. They were all former members of 9th Field Company. Another chance meeting was with Carol Hodson, who was at the tender age of 13 months, when her father, Cpl 'Taffy' Evans, died of his wounds at the Arnhem Bridge. Carol now resides in Australia, and was currently on a 3-month visit to the UK.

After a last 'photo call, it was time to say our farewells, and for the 9 Squadron representatives to make a quick change into 'civvies' and make a dash for the ferry. It had been a rather hectic and busy 43 hours!

Throughout this busy weekend, the Sqn representatives are to be congratulated on their turnout and bearing, which at all times was immaculate. Their decorations reminded me that they have recently been at the 'sharp end,' and indeed; still are.

Gentlemen, it was a pleasure and privilege to meet you all at Arnhem 2000.

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## 9 Parachute Squadron- Web Site

If you haven't already checked it out, then do pay a visit to the "Squadron" web site.

**[www.a256.freeserve.co.uk/9ParaSqnRE/](http://www.a256.freeserve.co.uk/9ParaSqnRE/)**

There is an address book, so don't forget to sign in, and leave an appropriate message. You may discover some old acquaintances that have previously signed in.

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## More Sappers Wanted

SSAFA Forces Help need more volunteers from Royal Engineers. We need caseworkers to offer practical help, advice and friendship to both serving and ex-serving men, women and their families. We need supporters to be administrators, treasurers, fundraisers and visitors. We often need team leaders to be responsible for our 102 branches and 700 divisions.

SSAFA Forces Help offer training, all out-of-pocket expenses and guarantee JOB SATISFACTION. More than 80,000 people call on our dedicated volunteers every year. We cover every village, town and city in the UK.

Please spare a little time to help a service or ex-service family. Contact: Ann Needle, Branch Recruitment Officer, SSAFA Forces Help, 19 Queen Elizabeth Street, London, SE1 2LP. Tel: (020) 7403 8783, who can send you information and put you in touch with your nearest SSAFA Forces Help team.

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## Blackpool 2000

Blackpool 2000 can simply be described as a truly great and memorable weekend. From arrival until departure, it proved to be one of the best organised, and certainly the most well attended Association AGM/Reunions ever held. The Norbreck Castle hotel was ideal for the occasion, not only in facilities, customer service, but most importantly, price. Hearty congratulations are extended to the organisers, Tom Thornton, Bill Rudd, our chairman Bob Prosser and their committee of helpers. Special thanks are extended to Sheila Prosser, Bobby Thornton, Phil Taverner and Ray Coleman, who's devoted efforts ensured a smooth running for the occasion.

Most of the members and their ladies booked in on Friday afternoon, and the men in particular; soon took advantage of the 'happy hour' prices, when the pints from behind the bar were reduced to 99p. It was really intriguing to watch the facial expression of the members as they reunited with friends and colleagues, which in some cases, was the first time in 35 years. Little time was lost sleeping on Friday night, as many of members and the partners chatted and drank into the early hours - and in some cases, all night!

Saturday proved a rather hectic day, the AGM/OGM which commenced in the morning continued until early afternoon. For one member it proved to be a rather special day, Dave Grimbley and Christine were married during a morning service and returned to the Norbreck for their wedding reception. Many members and their partners from the mid-60s and early 70s era; joined them in the celebration. To the happy couple, we extend our most sincere congratulations.

During the period of the AGM, many of the ladies went shopping to the covered market in nearby Fleetwood. Returning with sticks of traditional Blackpool rock and the usual seaside knickknacks. The gala dinner was graced with the presence of the Engineer in Chief Brigadier Albert Whitley CBE ADC and His Worshipful the Mayor of Blackpool, who, accompanied by our President, were piped into dinner by the 'Association Piper,' Frank Menzies-Hearn. We were particularly delighted to welcome Maj. Rob Rider OC 9 Para Sqn RE and WOII (SSM) Adam Frame MBE, SSgt (SQMS) Kev Blacow and Sprs Noel Hickman and Richard Powles. They had all travelled over from Northern Ireland to join us on this special occasion. The evening followed a traditional format with end of dinner speeches from the Mayor, the EinC, and most fittingly, in the absence of our President, Brig Garth Hewish (unavoidably detained on business in the USA) from our Vice President, Bill Rudd. Pulling a hefty pack of prompt cards from his pocket, we quickly realised that Bill was going to make the most of this opportunity. He didn't let us down! The audience were soon in fits of laughter, as Bill related incidents taken from his long period of service with Corps. One notable duty performed by Bill; was the presentation of certificates to the Association Life Vice Presidents. These were presented to, Fred Gray, Bob Ferguson, and much to the delight of the assembled audience, Bob Jones (batman to the then Capt Ian KcKay, during the battle of Arnhem). For some, the night's entertainment continued right through until breakfast - but not before a quick swim in the hotel pool! Following breakfast, a steadfast group took up the challenge and headed off to 'Pleasure Beach' where they accepted the 'gauntlet' thrown down by Bill Rudd, and joined him in riding the world's second highest roller coaster.

Following an evening coach excursion to see "the lights" of Blackpool, a 40's theme night concert and dance was held in the hotel. It proved to be an excellent evening, and provided an ideal opportunity in which to gradually wind down. Breakfast on Monday morning was a sad affair as it was time to say our final farewells, with unanimous choruses of, "See you next October in Bristol." **(Mark it down in your diaries)**

If for whatever reason, you missed the Blackpool 2000 festivities, all we can say, "You missed a super weekend."

Photographic evidence over the page!

## Blackpool 2000 – The Evidence



L to R: Ted Ellis, Bob Wardle, Tony Manley, Bill Rudd, Danny Daniels & Dave Davis



Mick Fisher & Mick Tunney



Pete Bates shows Ginge Goodfellow his party tricks watched over by Alan Lindsay



Barnie Rooney & Snowy Adams



L to R: Foxy Quinlan, Charlie Edwards & Danny Daniels  
(If the Lord could cast his net!)



Paddy Denning, Phil Chatterley & Phil Poulton



Tom Tuddenham & Brian Jones



L to R: Don Doherty, Maj Rob Rider, Mary & husband Capt Dick Brown



Colin Bond & Mick Marshall



L to R: Fred Gray, Derek Taylor, Phil Taverner, Barney Barnwell & Dave Norminton

## Blackpool 2000 – Further Evidence



**Phil Poulton, Mick & Shiela Willis,  
Alan Lindsay & Chris O'Donovan**



**Bof Harrap, Mick Fisher, Derek Taylor, Ken Turk, Linda (Bof's sister)  
Brenda Davies, Ken Hart, Dave Davis, Yorkie Davies, Paddy Smythe, Keith King  
and Bob Clow**

**Photographic evidence that they rode  
the 'Big' one. These are 6 of the 24  
that accepted Bill's challenge.**



**Colin Campbell, John & Flo Lawson, Beth & Alex Cockburn  
& Marie Campbell**



**Front to Rear - L to R: Ron & Nick  
Gibson, Ken Teeley, Phil Taverner, Bob  
Wardle & Ted Ellis. They exited to a  
round of applause and a rendering of  
the "Dam Busters" from the crowd of  
teenagers waiting in the queue. Well  
done lads!**



**Bill & Dot Rudd**



**Harry Lockwood & John Aldridge**



**Smiles of approval for the after dinner speech of the E in C  
Brigadier Albert Whitley CBE, ADC**



**Bill and the Mayor enjoying the sight  
of Charlie Edwards 'boobs' birthday  
cake**



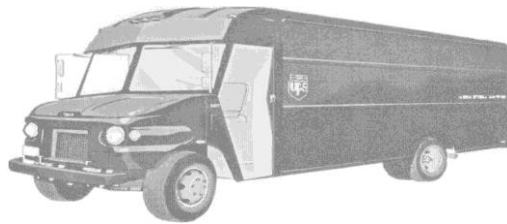
**Frank Menzies-Hearn,  
The Association Piper**

## The “Airborne Engineer” - Subscription (Last Call!)

Subscribers to the “Airborne Engineer” Journal, whose subscription renewal for the issues December 2000, April and August 2001 have not yet been received, are reminded that the annual payment (£5-00) was due by 1<sup>st</sup> November 2000. Due to the escalating costs, cancellation of your order will be assumed if your subscription renewal is not received by 1<sup>st</sup> February 2001. Despite being a registered charity, I’m afraid in this case, charity begins at home - your home!

Dave Rutter “Fermain” Hazel Road, Ash Green, Aldershot, Hants GU12 6HR

Cheques/Postal Order payment should be made in sterling to: **“Airborne Engineers Association.”** Members may opt to pay several years in advance; this method does save considerably in our administration. A further option is to pay by standing order; details of this will be forwarded on request. Should you have any queries, please contact me on 01252 326140 or e-mail [dave@drutter.freeseve.co.uk](mailto:dave@drutter.freeseve.co.uk) Your prompt response and co-operation will be appreciated.



Moving? Don't forget to inform us of your new address

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## Improvisation/Airborne Initiative

Capt Robert Burgess MC ARIBA APAGB I.O. 2nd Para Sqn RE

Engineer photographers may be interested in my own photo exploits between 1942 and 1945. I landed in North Africa at the end of 1942 with the 2nd Para Sqn a part of the 2nd Indep Para Bde, about the time the British and American Forces joined up with the Eighth Army in Tunisia. I landed with a small folding Kodak camera taking 16, 12 or 8 exposures on 120 film. I also had only one film, but after 3 years I had taken over 1,500 photographs using that same backing paper around 130 times. We found a train near Algiers, which contained a truckload of aerial photographic material and equipment. My unit had very little transport, having to rely on the Americans, so I was limited in the amount I could retrieve from the truck. I took a tin of airofilm and a packet of printing papers, Agfa contrast 3, 100 sheets 20/16. So that was a start. The film was 300 mm wide and 200m long, contrasty panchromatic. The next stage was to cut the film up into sizes that would go in my camera. I made a very accurate template the size of a 120 film form a piece of hardwood pinched from a bombed house. We were parked in a concentration camp built by the Americans but never used, and were issued with small pup" tents made in two sections and buttoned together. With these I made a dark room big enough to take my camp bed, but only 5 feet high. I got a flat door to put on the camp bed to act as a cutting surface and cut the film into sections the length of a 120 film. With the template I cut strips 214 inches wide wrapping them in black paper ready to use. The film was very sensitive and could only be opened up in complete darkness, so I had to wait till after midnight when there was no moon, no wind, no sand storms and no bombing and of course no "Sapping" to do. Sand dust was my chief enemy.

I now had films for my camera but no way to process them. I visited an American Hospital and befriended the nurses and radiographers who gave me a gin bottle of developer and fixer from their x-ray machines in exchange for a pint of blood! Other people got a cup of coffee and a doughnut! I was advised by the technicians to dilute the developer 50/50 and be ready for the image to appear in a few seconds, as I would have to use it warm. This limited me to process only three films at a time before the stuff went "off" rendering it useless. I realised that I would soon run out of blood at this rate so had to resort to bribery when restocking my gin bottles. The developing dishes were easy. 5 pint enamelled army mugs. The first was water to wet the film, the second diluted developer. The third was water for rinsing; the fourth filled with hypo for fixing and the fifth was for rinsing before the films were dropped into my issued canvas bucket for washing. I processed the films puffing at a cigarette in order to rapture the first sign of an image on the emulsion when I knew it was ready for fixing. This quick processing was in hot North Africa, but was quite normal in Italy, South France and Greece. I dried the films by hanging them on a coat hanger, then spent three or four nights printing contact shots of the Sappers to send home in their air letters.

Over the next three years I also took many pictures of Sappers in training and action and ended up with four albums of contact prints. Three years ago I put my prints onto Agfa positive film and made up a lecture on the "War time history of the 2nd Para Sqn RE" (black and white, of course).

I would confirm that the middle name of a Sapper is "Improvise"

### **Editor's Note.**

Robert has produced a slide presentation, and he is willing to give a lecture to any organisation of his exploits in capturing on film; Sappers at work and play during the period 1942-1945.

The one proviso is that at a young age of 83 years, Robert would not wish to drive further than a 40-mile radius from his home in Esher, Surrey. The presentation is free, but Robert would appreciate the cost of his petrol for any journey undertaken. The contact number is 01372 464947.

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## What are you doing now?

Mike Ellery - 9 Indep Para Sqn RE (1970 - 1973)

I was recently asked by the Editor to write an article for the AEA magazine, which in my haste I agreed to do. The subject being, "Life after the Forces." I am sure many of the membership are leading very interesting and varied careers. There is life after the Army; although it does take some adjustment to daily life.

On leaving the Army in 1975 there were several ambitions I wanted to fulfil. One was to drive a steam engine, which I did, down at Marchwood during a training visit. The Engineers still had trades, which serviced the Docks, and Railways back in the 60's. Happy days! Another was to drive a Fire Engine so I joined the Kent Fire Service. I was able to drive all types of appliances during my nine years in the service, bending a few wayward drivers en route to emergency calls. There is nothing like responding to an Emergency call, speeding through congested traffic, jumping red lights with blue lights flashing and horns sounding. It certainly gives you a buzz, brings out the boys in all of us!

One notable memory of my service was the 1976 Fireman's strike in which the Famous Green Goddesses were brought out of mothballs to be manned by members of Her Majesties Forces. The strike lasted for nine weeks and I think it is safe to say that a good rapport was established between Fire service personnel and the Armed forces. They had no choice in the matter as they were just doing as they were told and a good job they did, albeit with limited training and resources.

One tradition that has been lost due to the closure of the Chatham Naval Base is the annual whaler race. An event which comprised of eight teams from the Army (Brompton Barracks), Navy, Police, Fire Service and Auxiliary personnel from the dockyard, although hard work it usually resulted in sinking quite a few pints during the evening in one of the social clubs!

On leaving the Service in 1983 I moved to Scotland to train offshore workers in Firefighting, probably the best career move I made, as it gave me unlimited access to the Scottish hills, which are no more than three hours away. Munro bagging became an obsession and still is. Hopefully I will complete them all in the not too distant future.

Working at the Fire School in Montrose gave me ample opportunity to make new contacts in the oil industry, which led me to my present position as a Safety coordinator working for Texaco, West Africa (Angola). Although still a war zone there is little evidence in the Northwest corner that there is a war going on. I hope to write an article on the war situation in Angola for a future edition of the magazine.



Anyone looking for work overseas and does not know where to start, the following website may be of interest to you, although an annual subscription is required (£66-00) to gain access to the job register. It is worth a look.

**[www.expatnetwork.co.uk](http://www.expatnetwork.co.uk)**

My contract in Angola has a year to run. By then all the ex-pats will be replaced by Nationals. Who knows where the next contract will come from? Retirement sounds a wonderful option, as it will give me a chance to bag a few more Munros. I was pleased to read in the last magazine that the Welsh 3000 organised by NI Branch was a resounding success (pity about the weather). Long may the event continue. Perhaps the organisers would consider it taking place in Scotland on alternate years. Food for thought?

Hopefully this article will inspire a few more members to put pen to paper, and give us an insight as to what they have been up to since leaving the Forces.

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## Rufus

John Dickson

The desert camps alongside the Suez Canal were a magnet for the packs of pariah dogs, which roamed outside the perimeter wire looking for something to eat. Occasionally an individual dog could be enticed through the wire with an extra titbit and adopted as a pet. Corporal Tom Thornton, our section commander and a gentle giant of a man, found a puppy outside his tent. After bathing it and feeding it he decided to keep it as a section mascot. Because of its colouring we called the pup 'Rufus' and very soon it became a favourite, not only with us but with the rest of the squadron. Rufus was unidentifiable as a particular breed, but with short, rather bandy, front legs and wide shoulders, he did resemble a Welsh corgi. Nevertheless he grew into a handsome dog who stood guard over our tents when we were away and was prone to give a nasty nip to anyone he did not know.

One day Rufus was not well, off his food, shivering and vomiting. Over the next few days he deteriorated quickly, spending most of his time under Tom's bed. He then started having fits and finally we took him to the RASC Mule Transport Company at Moascar Garrison, who had its own veterinary clinic. The Vet Sergeant told us that Rufus had distemper, and there was very little hope of a cure, and advised us to have him put down. The Veterinary Surgeon would do the deed when he returned from Cyprus leave the following week. We took Rufus back to camp where he seemed to perk up for a while. Then he started to have fits every hour, barking and snapping at everyone until exhausted, it was agonising to have to watch him in this state. We couldn't wait for the vet's return so we decided to do the job ourselves, but how? Shooting was out of the question since all ammunition had to be accounted for. Stabbing would be messy and nobody fancied being the stabber. Then Tom had a brain wave. We had recently been issued with a new piece of equipment called an exploder dynamo condenser, used to fire electrical detonation circuits. We were assured that this Bakelite box was capable of firing through a resistance of 300 ohms, enough to kill a man. This was the solution; it would be a quick and silent way of putting Rufus out of his misery. We carried Rufus out of the back of the camp into the desert, and laid him down on the sand. We all watched as Tom attached a length of cable to each of the dog's ears with insulating tape, the other ends were connected to the exploder. The priming handle was wound up the required twenty-five turns and we all said goodbye to Rufus and gave him a pat. Tom then pressed the firing button. Rufus let out an ear-splitting yell, leapt about four feet in the air with all four legs stiff and with his ears pricked up. Whilst In the air his legs started making galloping movements so that when he landed he was off like the clappers. All we could see was this reddish brown blur streaking across the desert and eventually disappearing over the horizon. We never saw Rufus again!

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## The Pegasus Bar

On the 9th September in the King Charles Hotel, Brompton, the Airborne Engineers Association, Chatham Branch, opened the Pegasus Bar.

In December 1999 the branch held its Christmas dinner in the King Charles Hotel. The manageress, Mrs Debbie Degeorgio, suggested that we might like to theme the room around the Association. The hotel was originally built as a showpiece NAAFI junior ranks club but with the continual reduction in size of the armed forces it was closed and fell into some disrepair before being sold as a civilian hotel as it is today. The management were keen to preserve the historical military and naval connection, and to that end had already themed the main function room, The Cavalier Suite, in reference to a WWII ship that was built and commissioned at the Dockyards nearby.

There are many reunions of the various ships companies held in the hotel, and they each contribute a plaque to be hung on the walls. After some deliberation the branch accepted the offer, and a committee consisting of Jon Stubbs, Jim McCartney and myself, were pressed into service. We resolved to present a series of frames, each dedicated to a particular character from the branch or episode from the history of Royal Engineers Airborne service. To this end we produced 9 biographies of branch members 7 historical pieces and a couple of humorous items. Jon contributed a pair of images of a Dakota and a glider, (which unfortunately weren't framed in time for the opening) and Jim persuaded the RSME workshops to come up with some stunning (and beer proof) signs displaying the Association name, and Belerophon, for all to see. In addition there was a splendid brass Pegasus statue, generously donated by Peter Ives, which will take pride of place behind the bar. The opening night was well attended and it is hoped that it will become the regular meeting point for members of the Association attending REA Veterans weekends.



Floral presentation to Mrs Debbie Degeorgio from Bob Prosser & Arthur Cheesman

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## Shiny Nine

Harry Stokes

The new Journal brought back many memories for me. I joined the 9th Field Company in 1940 on return from Dunkirk. At the time we were stationed at Bude in Cornwall, working on coastal defence laying beach mines. The sections were spread out between Braunton in the North and Wadebridge in the South.

Major Houghton was the OC, a regular no nonsense officer. Later all sections returned to Bude and intensive training began. Bayonet fighting and a 30-mile route march every Wednesday. If you dropped out; you went out every night for five, ten and fifteen mile marches, so that, by the following Wednesday, you could do 30 miles, must say, very few dropped out. It was at this time that they became known as the "SHINY NINE."

From Bude we moved to Wiveliscombe in Somerset, and it was here that the first Airborne R.E. Unit developed, and we became the 9th Field Squadron Royal Engineers.

Major Kyte, another very smart soldier, took over, with Captain Beazley as Second in Command, and it was under their direction that the squadron developed. We moved to Bighton, near Alresford and had the first taste of gliders, flying in a Hotspur towed by a biplane. They carried nine men and it was quite hair-raising. I stayed with the 9th Company until demobbed in 1945. I saw many changes of personnel over the years, and by 1945 there were only four of the company left from those that I had joined with.

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## A Question of Protocol

Maj Gen FWJ Cowtan CBE, MC

The following information is contained in a recent letter to our Association Chairman.

Many thanks for sending me a copy of the Journal in an excellent production, for which many congratulations to all concerned. Thank you also for 'phoning me about the lack of CBE, MC above my contribution. As I told you, this doesn't bother me in the least, so it need not give you any cause for concern. In fact, the only gong I received whilst in command of 9 Sqn was an MBE for the rescue of 6 people alive and the recovery of 91 dead, plus the clearance work done by the Sqn in July 1946 at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. It was more correctly not mine, but really a Squadron decoration, though I got the visible credit. Because of the peculiarities of the protocol of the Order of the British Empire, if someone is awarded a more senior appointment in the Order, e.g. OBE, CBE, KBE, you are meant to return the more junior insignia. I refused, as I valued it more than the CBE, and I still have it in my possession. The proper place for it is I think, in the RE Airborne part of the Museum, with a note by it saying by whom, what, when and where, and will thus be a visible record of some of the more unpleasant jobs that 9 Sqn ever had to do. I'll think about it anyway!



To enlighten readers of the tragic consequences following the terrorist bombing of the King David Hotel, this photograph gives an indication to the devastation.

Photograph supplied by Albert Sweetlove

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## Seat of Remembrance

Tom Brinkman

A dedication parade in memory to those that lost their lives in the glider crash at Double Hills, was held Weston cemetery on Sunday 23 July. As a lasting tribute to those that perished, a bench, suitably inscribed, has been installed within the churchyard of their final resting place. The event was a complete success, and was supported a number of Standard Bearers. The Standards on parade were, the AEA, REA, PRA (2), Glider Pilots Association, Royal British Legion and the Royal Signals (Airborne). There were approx. 16 on parade, plus a number of wives and partners. One gentleman on parade was the Chief Fire Officer of Bristol Fire Service, Mr. Fred Ponsford. Fred was a member of the Ox-Bucks, and served as a Sgt glider pilot at Arnhem.



**Brig John Hooper, Bert Gregory, Ray Richards, Terry Maxwell, Alan Mayfield, Tom Brickman and taking it easy, Mike Newton**



**Mike & Elaine Newton present a bouquet and a bottle of whisky to Tom & Yvonne Brinkman in recognition of their sterling work of installing the "bench."**

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## Cromwell Lock- Memorial

Jackie Bytheway - Falkirk Herald

A lone piper played a last lament at his comrades' memorial service on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> October.

The haunting Flowers of the Forest echoed around the lock side on the banks of the River Trent in Nottinghamshire as the piper led the service to ten young soldiers who drowned during an Army exercise on the river 25 years ago.

The dead men were brothers Stuart (22) and Peter Evenden (19) from Falkirk; fellow Falkirk soldiers Terry Smith (20) and Raymond Buchanan (20); Ian Mercer (17) and James Black (18), both from Grangemouth, Norman Bennet (29) from Bo'ness; and Clackmannanshire men Joseph Walker (21), Alexander O'Brien (18), and Ronald Temprell (26). They were all sappers.

Only one man survived. Lance Corporal Patrick Harkin (31), who lived in Sutherland Drive, Denny, was in charge of the boat that fateful night. He clung to the side of the vessel for nearly an hour before help arrived. The TA soldiers, all members of 300 troop, 131 Independent Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers were on an 80-mile night navigation exercise on the River Trent when the accident happened on September 28, 1975. The assault boat was swept over the weir, known locally as the Devil's Cauldron, in a force six gale with the river in flood. Electricity workmen repairing cables blown down in the gales heard Pat's cries for help and raised the alarm.



It is the largest single peacetime tragedy in the Squadrons history.

The scene is marked by a piece of granite which bears the names of those who died, and a memorial garden surrounded by a wrought iron fence, the latter was kindly funded by the Airborne Engineers Association.

The weekend's tribute was the first time such a large memorial service had been held. For some, it was the first time they had visited the site where their boys had died.

As the families walked towards the river, grief was etched on their faces the pain still raw after 25 years of mourning. Senior Army officers, family and friends of the dead men, civic leaders from Newark and Falkirk, and members of their squadron, which is now a commando unit, packed the lock side for the service.

Standard bearers representing many regimental associations stood in a silent tribute, some with black ribbons attached. Families comforted each other while others stood head bowed, lost in thought.



A guard of honour was formed by members from 131 Commando Squadron.

The Mayor of Newark, the chairman of Newark and Sherwood District Council, Maj Gen FJW Cowtan CBE, MC, the local vicar and Falkirk's Provost Dennis Goldie, conducted the service jointly.

Dennis Goldie told the mourners: "I was in the TA sharing the same base as these lads. I well remember the hour when the stories came through. Looking at the weir on a lovely sunny day, it's hard to imagine what it would have been like on that stormy night."

For some, the emotion was too much when he quoted Bums: "When Death's dark stream I ferry o'er, a time that surely shall come, in Heav'n itself I'll ask no more, than just a Highland welcome."

He added: "We believe a Highland welcome went to these laddies 25 years ago. When next we meet, I'm sure these laddies will give us a Highland Welcome."

**Hearty congratulations are extended to Mike Holdsworth who organised this ceremony.**

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## News From Around the Branches

### Aldershot Branch

Mrs Betty Gray (Secretary)

After a reasonably quiet first half of the year, the second half has proved very busy for most of the branch members. In addition to our own meetings, which are normally followed by Sunday lunch in a local restaurant, most of the activities have been on an individual basis where members have attended other branch reunions and activities. The Cromwell Lock Memorial Service, the dedication of the new bench at Weston Super Mare in memory of those killed at Double Hills, Chatham Weekend, the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron reunion and dedication of their memorial at Donington and, most recently the Association reunion at Blackpool, are amongst the many activities attended by the Aldershot Branch. Fifty-seven members of the branch made the long trip to Blackpool for what turned out to be a most memorable weekend. Even more so for those of us who braved the "Big Dipper" the second highest in the world.



Our own BBQ was held in Fleet this year and as is the norm, Tony Manley excelled himself with the food and the cooking. It was also good to see our most welcome guest, Mrs Sally Wilson, who also made the trip up to Blackpool.

John Smith is looking very well after his heart scare thanks to having a pacemaker fitted. He is being carefully monitored by Glenda and getting plenty of TLC.

Tom Tuddenham is also looking very well and it was great to see him enjoying himself so much at Blackpool.

We are always looking to increase our membership, so if you live anywhere within a reasonable distance of Aldershot come and join us. You will be made most welcome.

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## Birmingham Branch

Bunny Brown.

"Greetings from the Birmingham Branch." We are now into the debriefs etc. for the Cromwell Lock Memorial service. It was good to see so much support from the other branches. Many thanks to Chairman Bob Prosser for bringing the Standards down from Yorkshire, and also to Chris Chambers for standing in at the last minute to carry our Union Flag. There are too many names to mention so from Mike Holdsworth and the Birmingham Branch Committee, we extend sincere thanks to all that helped organise and run a most successful event.

We also offer hearty thanks and congratulations to the Yorkshire Branch for running a very successful AGM in Blackpool. If those, (396) are the numbers for future events it will be hard to find hotels to match the accommodation and service for the price. Well-done Yorkshire.



In recognition of the Queen Mother's 100th birthday, Roger and Kay Howells staged a celebration garden party at their country cottage. By midday on Sunday 6th August, branch members and their wives/partners had arrived for pre-lunch drinks. Quite surprisingly the day was blessed with warm summer sunshine - that must have been our summer! With a few lagers and glasses of wine to loosen the tongues and clear the dust from our throats, we were then invited into the buffet marquee for lunch. The tables were groaning with a varied selection of food. Following a few more drinks, Roger introduced us to the game of croquet. We were quickly divided into two teams - for what was intended to be a friendly game. The competitive spirit soon took over, and cries of, "Foul stroke," as he or she moved the hoops to their advantage. The game continued into the late afternoon, at which point Roger, acting as the presiding judge, declared two of the ladies as winners. This led to celebration drinks for the winners, and commiseration drinks for the losers. In the early evening everyone retired into the pergola to tuck into a roast venison dinner with all the trimmings.



Being a warm and balmy evening conversations and drinking continued into the early hours. It was with reluctance that everyone finally said their goodbyes and thanks to Roger and Kay.



Kevin Lambeth & Barry Aitken

That's enough from Birmingham for now there are much better things to read about in this fantastic new "Journal." Well done to Dave Rutter on becoming the new "Editor in Chief" and publishing such a brilliant newsletter.

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## Chatham Branch

Ron (Smokey) Gibson

We are still keeping our attendance numbers 16 18 on a regular bases despite some members having a distance to travel. Since our last letter, the branch has had two Sunday lunch venues. The 10th July at King Charles hotel Chatham, which was well attended by members and their ladies. Some other A.E.A. branch members travelled long distance to be with us. From Aldershot area, John and Glenda Smith , Ron and Daphne Day, and from way up in them thar hills Bob and Sheila Prosser and Tom and Bobby Thornton. The branch were very pleased to see them. Thank you, do come again. At our next Sunday lunch on 10<sup>th</sup> August was organised by Bert and Dee Fordham at the "Five Bells" in Sussex. Following the lunch we were all invited to their cottage for afternoon tea. Members wives helped with cakes and goodies; a raffle was run for the prizes donated by members. A total of £58 raised for charity, the Gurkha Pandaha Trust.

What a lovely couple Bert and Dee are to invite members and their wives and friends, some 36 people in all. Bert's model railway layout and town, dock's, airport etc. is something to see, which included a room with wall to wall model cars, lorries, military vehicles. It has to be seen to realise the time and work it took. A big Thank you to Bert and Dee from all. Some other old comrades also came to lunch Phil Tavener ex 9 Sqn, Gordon F Spiers, Jack Hobbs, Norman Swift, all ex 1 Sqn, and Laurie Readington ex 301 Sqn. It was a marvellous day

On the Vets weekend at Brompton Barracks our branch members together with other AEA members, officially opened the "Pegasus" bar in the King Charles Hotel. The name is over the door as you enter, and there is a plate on the wall which reads," Dedicated to the Airborne Engineers Association, Chatham Branch." The commemorative plate was made by Sgt Jim Me Cartney in the RSME, and the walls decorated by Nick Gibson and Jon Stubbs and includes various pictures. There is also a model of "Pegasus" in brass, to stand on the bar, and was presented by Peter Ives of Chatham branch. An address by our Chairman Arthur Cheesman, with a presentation of flowers to Debbie Digeorgio, manageress at K.C.H., and a few words from the A.E.A. Chairman Bob Prosser. Then it was drink time. If you find yourself this way anytime; it is worth a visit for one drink, 'cos they ain't cheap.

It's all happening down here mates! On the Saturday of that weekend, a service of dedication for the new and old standard, and blessing of the Union flag was held in the garrison church. A full account of the ceremony is published elsewhere in this Journal.

One Final note of regret, Friday 29th of September saw the funeral of a dear friend and comrade, Mike Farrow, who passed away on 19<sup>th</sup> September. A great loss to the branch and the Association. The funeral service, was held at Vintners Crematorium, Maidstone, was conducted by the Association padre, Rev Bernard Foulger, and was well attended by branch and Association members. The Association Standard was paraded, together with the Union Flag and Sittingbourne PRA Standard.

That's about all the news from Chatham for now. Looking forward to new ventures in year 2001.

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## Edinburgh Branch

The Story So Far - Mike Walker

Various technical and communication difficulties have prevented the activities of the Branch being reported until now, so this is a short potted history. Regular updates will follow.

The branch was formed in 1998 mainly due to the efforts of Dick Barton, Jock Donaldson and Brian McKean with help and encouragement from office-bearers at "HQ". Our first year was to some extent mainly spent in establishing ourselves and getting in touch with former comrades and persuading them to sign up. Tom Turner came home from Australia on holiday in our first year and Jock, Brian and Kim Panton accompanied him on a pilgrimage to Arnhem.



The Branch held their first AGM in October 1999 at the Royal British Legion in Rodney Street, Edinburgh. Those who attended are pictured left:

**Standing (L to R) Ronnie Drummond, Mick Walker, Charlie Imrie, Dougie Archibald and Dick Barton. Seated are Ian Thomson, Kim Panton, Brian McKean, Jock Donaldson, Jimmy Lowder and Mike Ellery.**

The turnout was not as large as had been hoped but since we had only 27 members and 2 live in Australia. 2 work abroad and another 2 live in England perhaps 11 of us getting together was not so bad. Another factor might have been a breakdown in communications over the date. Only the intervention of the

Treasurer (who gained fleeting fame as a prop forward) stopped the incoming Chairman (who in post-Airborne life became a major in the BMP) putting the Secretary on a charge!

Jock Donaldson's health was not good at that time and he stepped down as Chairman; Brian McKean was unanimously elected to succeed him. Dick Barton and Mick Walker were re-elected as Secretary and Treasurer respectively and Dougie Archibald was appointed as Auditor. There was considerable discussion on a focus for the Branch and the attraction of new members. Subsequent to our AGM it was decided that the focus would be sending as large a contingent as possible to the main AGM in Blackpool. Various means of bringing ex comrades into the fold were agreed, including contacting the Glasgow Branch of the PRA to see if they have any AEA eligible members.

Although we are keen to widen it, the basis of the Branch is former members of 2 Troop. 300 Sqn., 131 Indep Para Regt RE (TA). 300 Sqn was the first TA unit to be in action since the Second World War when we were attacked at Al Milah in Aden in 1965 and our SSM, John Lonnergan, was killed. He was buried in Aden and there had been discussions about raising funds to send someone out there to lay a wreath at his grave. It was agreed that this be left on the backburner as conflicting advice had been received from the Yemeni and UK governments as to the security situation.

Nine of us accepted the local PRA's invitation to their Xmas dance and, with partners, had a really good time. We still, though, harbour suspicions about the raffle!

Our second full year has seen us be more active as a Branch. We were represented at the 1999 Armistice Service at Roslin and at the PRA Millennium Church Service in Glasgow in February this year. We also took part in the 60th Anniversary Airborne Forces Day in Princes Street, Edinburgh.

More recently, six of us - Dougie Archibald, Jock Donaldson, Ronnie Drummond, Brian McKean, Ian Thomson and Mick Walker - attended the memorial service at Cromwell Lock for the 10 members of 300 Troop who drowned there 25 years ago. All of us are ex 300 Sqn - the forerunner to 300 Troop- and although we had all left by the time those who perished joined the Unit it was a particularly moving experience. Our thanks go to Mike

Holdsworth and his cohorts for their organisation and to the Stirlingshire Branch of the PRA and Falkirk Council for the transport. While this was a serious and moving event, particularly with the relatives of some of those who died being present, it also provided the opportunity to meet with long lost comrades and put faces to some of the AEA names.

Seven of us, accompanied by wives, attended the AGM in Blackpool which provided another opportunity to put faces to the names frequently mentioned as well as the more serious business of the AGM! The second bonus was that immediately after the AGM I was paying my dues to Dave Rutter and fell into conversation with Ian Muirhead. He put me in touch with Jim O'Hagan, Jim Simpson and Tom Robertson. All are living in Scotland, so being a good Treasurer I promptly relieved them of £5 as their 2000/01 Branch subscription. This helps widen the base of the Branch. On that front a particular mention should go to Mick Porter who joined us on recently leaving 9 Sqn. His attendance at meetings serves to bring the average age down considerably!

At the time of writing we are preparing for our second AGM. One item will be the date of meetings. Last year we fixed them to suit Mike Ellery who works abroad on a month on, month off basis. Needless to say, no sooner had we done that than his shift rota changed and we haven't seen him since. Once the dates for the future are fixed we will publicise them and anybody visiting Edinburgh will be more than welcome to come along.

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## Final News from the North West Branch

Brian Jones

First of all may I say congratulations to all the team who made Blackpool such a success, well done. It was really great to meet up with so many people, one could get emotional about it! however, on the down side, and I must get it off my chest. I regret that I had to suffer the hurt, as the Founder member of the NW Branch, of hearing the Chairman announce the closure of the Branch. I would have much rather told the meeting myself.

On a lighter note I was very happy to have won the 'Blackthorn,' thanks to Phil for donating it. I would like to know a bit about it some time.

Now the reason why the NW failed. Despite efforts to generate interest there seems to be a distinct lack of interest in the NW, despite its geographical size and numbers. One can only hope that someone else will rise to the challenge and have a go. at this point I must let you know that the funds have been transferred to the Association account, to be returned should the Branch, and I sincerely hope it does, start up again.

My final word on the matter is to thank all those who supported the committee and in particular my Secretary, Ian Strettle, and Treasurer, Ken Cole. Keep in touch lads.

I am now closing down the "net" as this is my last transmission as Chairman NW.

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## Yorkshire Branch News

Hi everyone from a very wet Yorkshire. I have not been informed that any of our members have been flooded out, but nonetheless just getting around has been very difficult.

We were very proud to be able to host the Blackpool 2000 AGM, and from the tributes received the weekend was a huge success. I regret that I was unable to be there to share it with you. However I have been lead to believe that Bill Rudd decided that he would take a swim with his hearing aid still in! Also while he was swimming someone stole all his clothes from the changing room - can you just imagine what the next few minutes must have been like!

As already mentioned I was unable to get to Blackpool. I am however very aware, as I am sure you all are, as to how much work has to go into setting up a function such as Blackpool 2000. I know that the following members put in many hours of effort to ensure the weekend was such a success. So on behalf of the Yorkshire Branch I would like to particularly thank Tom Thornton, Bob Prosser and Bill Rudd for their hard work and commitment in staging such a great event. **Thank you Gentlemen.** We continue to hold our meetings in Pontefract and have a regular attendance of around 20 or so, although we send out minutes to around 90 members. Should anyone visiting the area wish to join one of our meetings please phone a member of the committee and we will let you know if a meeting is arranged during your visit.

As some of you may be aware I have now started my own company as a chauffeur - I have even managed to get myself on the Government Car Service list and have carried a few ministers and high ranking civil servants. My main news though is that I have managed to get the contract to supply all the executive cars for the Commonwealth Games at Manchester in 2002 - can't be bad?

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## Memories

2137028 John Iddenden

I served with the 9th Company from Bulford on to Norway, and from Norway to Palestine and then on to Egypt, with the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Squadron.

Now that I have reached four score years, I find I can remember things that happened during the war. yet forget things that happened last week! I was very interested to read the article that Maj Gen FWJ Cowtan CBE MC. wrote in the pervious Airborne Engineers journal regarding Norway and Palestine.

Although only a driver, I had a gang of German pioneers mine lifting, and as the General mentioned in his article, they were very efficient. For disposal purposes they used to place some of the mines in caves and detonate them and burn others. It was during the burning process that we had casualties. Perhaps the detonators were never taken out! As for the Geneva Convention, I was not dreaming when German Air force ground crew kindly walked shoulder to shoulder across the field afterwards. I think they were from Mandel where the Artillery boys were screening them prior to sending them home. One thing I shall always remember is that I got a rollicking (severe reprimand! for letting the Germans go fishing with explosives, where upon they collected the fish as they came to the surface. We sailed from Bergen to come home, when we landed there was huge panic and we were taken into a large building to empty all our kit out, but it was not our "toot" they wanted, but Luger pistols etc.

We became members of the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Squadron in the 6th Division, there was a lot of the old 9th in the unit, so it seemed they had just changed the name.

We went onto Gaza in Palestine, and although the camp was surrounded with barbed wire and booby traps, the Arabs still managed to get in! We used to go on stag in pairs, and always carried our rifles by the trigger guard. I had the misfortune once to be on stag when the side curtains of a large tent were stolen and on another occasion, the Arabs got in and stole the wheels off a jeep, they even kindly left the wheel nuts nicely lined up.

We then went to Beit Nabala, I think Major Montgomery was the OC.



I had a lot of good mates in the unit, one who everyone knew was Paddy Quigley, we even went to Ringway together on our Para course. We sat on the left side of the coach so we could flash our wings!

**L to R: John & Paddy Quigley**

Several years ago I was at the Double Hills memorial service in Paulton, Somerset, where I saw Harry Stokes, who reminded me of the half a crown (12<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>p) that I had borrowed 50 years earlier! (Harry was always good for a sub midweek!)

The following year I managed to get an old half a crown, and in learning that my mates Bill Barber and Len Raggett were attending the service I gave it to them to pass on my payment! They reported that Harry did not require interest!

I still see a few of the lads, but there are a lot I shall never see again.

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## York Minster- A Millennium Service to Rededicate the Parachute Regiment & Airborne Forces

Dave Mellors

Members and their families from Branches across the country met at York Minster on Sunday 24 September 2000 for the Rededication Service to celebrate the Millennium. Many coach loads of red bereted men and their families mingled outside the great west doors; with large numbers of bemused tourists who were prevented from entering the Minster for the next two hours. The weather, although Autumnal, was kind to us and stayed fine for the service and March Past.

A congregation of over 1,000 listened to music played by the Waterloo Band of the Kings Division which included The Imperial March by Elgar, the Spitfire Prelude by Walton and the Airborne Forces Millennium March "Every Man an Emperor" specially composed for the Millennium by the Director of Music of the Parachute Regiment Band Capt McElligot. To the slow March of the Parachute Regiment the Colours of 4th Parachute Bn (V) were 'Marched In' and presented; followed by 33 PRA Standards and the National Standard of the Airborne Engineers Association.

The Service began with the Preceptor of the Minster the Reverend Canon Paul Ferguson MA giving the Welcome and the Bidding. The first lesson was read by The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor of the City of York Councillor Shan Braund and Brigadier James Hill DSO\*\* MC read the second lesson. The Rev Dom Alberic Stacpoole MC, MA Dphil OSB former officer of 2 Para Bn gave the sermon on the role of the Airborne Forces. Maureen Belt, soprano, singing, "Let there be peace on earth" followed this. The prayers were led by the PRA Branch Chaplains, which included the Airborne Forces Collect and The Airborne Millennium Prayer. Following the Blessing and the National Anthem the Colours and Standards were marched out, and the congregation filed out to line the streets for the March Past.

The Parade formed up in Deans Court for the short march; past the South Doors of the Minster for the Salute to be taken by Brigadier James Hill and the Lord Mayor of York. Also on the Minster steps were many VIP guests. Leading the Parade was the Standard of the Airborne Engineers carried by Roy King of the Yorkshire Branch, flanked by two PRA Standards of the Yorkshire Region, followed by over 500 ex-paras and contingents from 4 Para Bn (V), ITC Para Training Company and students from the Foundation College Harrogate.

The whole event then moved to the Yorkshire Air Museum Elvington for a magnificent reception held in the Halifax Hanger with the backdrop of the Halifax, Mosquito and Spitfire. The catering staff of the museum provided an excellent buffet and liquid refreshments, and background music was provided by the Kings Division Band.



Among the many guests invited were the Lord Lt of East Yorkshire, The High Sheriff of Yorkshire, Lt Gen Sir Michael Gray, Maj Gen Mike Walsh (Para). Lord and Lady St Oswald, Group Captain Cornfield RAF Linton on the Ouse, Brigadier Anne Fields, The Master Warden and Wardens from Trinity House and Lt Col Handford CO 4 Para Bn (V).

The parade photograph is published by kind permission of the Yorkshire Post

## Membership Secretary

Chris Chambers

Since the August Journal, a further 20 members have joined our Association. Gentlemen, Welcome to the "Airborne Engineers Association"

### **Membership**

The Association is now in its eleventh year and is going from strength to strength. The Branches are healthy, and the many meetings and functions are very well supported. Sadly, the Northwest Branch through no fault of their Chairman and Committee has gone into limbo. They had worked very hard to keep things going, but alas, it all seems to have been in vain. This is a great pity because even if a branch is not strong enough in numbers to meet on a regular basis; it is worth considering even having a twice a year function or even a Christmas dinner together, just to keep in touch.

Remember gentlemen, the Association is just like a tree, which needs its branches to flourish and be something of substance. I would take this opportunity to thank all of the Branch Committees who put in a lot of personal time and effort to keep the Association alive and kicking.

### **629 (9th) Field Sqn RE O.C.A.**

Tom Ormiston and I attended the final reunion at the Victory Services Club, London, on 7th October.

The meal and wine were first class and although it was a little sad that this was to be the last official meeting of these very brave and modest Sappers, who were first onto the beaches of Normandy to clear the way for the main task force, I am sure that they will still have little 'get togethers' and keep in close touch with each other for the future. I felt honoured and privileged to be in the presence these men who were part of a Squadron of which very little is known, and in fact, was considered to be "written off" because of the suicidal task they were given to remove mines and obstacles under very heavy sustained machine gun and shell fire from the enemy.

The Squadron was not airborne, but they carried out many special operations and in the great Royal Engineers tradition they were, "First in and last out"

### **Blackpool 2000**

Our Chairman has covered all that needs to be said about this fabulous weekend. On a personal level, Jan and I would like to say a big thank you to everyone involved in the organisation of such an enjoyable event.

Jan would also like to say a special thank you to Jean and Jeanette who were on hand to offer their time on the Saturday afternoon helping the Shop run smoothly.

**Happy landings, Chris**

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