



# THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS JOURNAL



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# The Airborne Engineer



April 2006, Issue No. 18

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**Publication Deadline - August 2006 Edition**

Members submitting material for publication in the August 2006 edition of the Journal are advised that the closing date will be **Friday 7th July**. (Branch Secretaries please NOTE!) Kindly ensure that you forward your articles direct to the editor - address as shown above.  
Please - don't leave it until the last minute

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## Association Chairman's Report

Mick Humphries

Well it seems like a very long time since I was writing notes for the last edition. We have of course had Christmas since then and it was pleasing to meet many of you at some very jovial parties. Thank you all for the many cards and best wishes sent to Chris and myself, they are really appreciated.

I have had an interesting time since the New Year discussing many topics with the committee members, branch chairman, and our president, Bill. The post has been arriving on my doormat in large quantities; it is refreshing to see many of you have not diminished in passion and enthusiasm, as you have got older. I have received many letters from members on the very difficult subject of membership criteria, and it is clear that getting any sort of consensus would be difficult as we all have varying opinions. At the committee meeting we discussed the matter in length. Although some of the committee were not happy with the current wording, it was felt that it would be difficult to please everybody with a change. It was also recognised by everyone present that this subject had the potential to run and run and cause rifts. It was therefore decided that the best option was to remain as we are. We all know who should be members of the Association and so nothing has changed.

The committee meeting also discussed Brigadier John Hooper's portrait initiative, again a subject that has stirred emotions. I personally feel that it is a good initiative and one that I would urge you all individually to support, however as I have been asked this question many times, I can confirm that we have not used any association funds for the project. We do have an obligation; in fact it is part of the objectives we set ourselves when we registered as a charity in 1992, to preserve the traditions of the Airborne Sapper. We agreed at the last AGM to maintain a ring fenced "Museum Fund " and we will continue to support that fund with a World Cup Draw. Ray Coleman has kindly agreed to run this Draw and if you have not already received tickets, they are on their way. This is a very worthwhile cause and I would encourage you all to support it. Ray has promised that if Germany wins he will keep the name of the winner a secret.

The booking form for the reunion in October is enclosed with this journal. Joe Stoddard and his team from Aldershot are working flat out to get this organised, please help them all you can by getting the booking forms back to them ASAP. I have had promises of 1st time reunion attendees from many corners of the globe, if 20% of them materialise I will be very pleased. I have asked our President Bill Rudd in his capacity as Chairman of Yorkshire Branch to consider hosting the 2007 reunion. Yorkshire are very keen to do this and we hope to be able to confirm a 2007 venue by the 2006 AGM. For those of you with 5 year diaries, Chatham branch are researching 2008, before we go back to The Midlands in 2009.

As you are all by now aware, 23 Air Assault Regiment will soon be all-together in new barracks at Woodbridge. A big blow for Aldershot branch as they will lose the local support of 9 Sqn, however they have gained John Ferry, an association member as GSM, so I am sure they will still have some influence in "The Shot The RSM informs me that he is proposing to have a big "opening do" at Woodbridge this summer. He would like to have as many old and bold there as possible. Please keep your ear to the ground for dates, which will probably depend on who is in station and what the politicians have lined up for the Brigade.

The Association is still in desperate need of a new secretary. Fergie and Doc are keen to hand over to a replacement after the AGM. If anybody out there wishes to know a little more about the post before putting their name forward please feel free to call either myself or Bob Ferguson for a chat. It is a very important role for the Association, however anybody that survived any amount of time as an Airborne Sapper should be able to cope with it in their sleep. If anyone would like to volunteer a particularly shy person, please feel free to call me in confidence, I will not tell anybody who "grassed them up."

I am looking forward to a very busy summer and meeting many of you around the branches. Unfortunately I cannot make the Normandy Trip with Aldershot Branch but I am sure you will all have a good time. Please also do not forget to support the North Wales trip for those of you that are still able to walk without a limp. Have a good summer.

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## AGM/Reunion – 2006

Joe Stoddard

The 2006 AGM/Reunion will be held in Southampton, not because it was our first choice but simply due to the fact that it was the only location in Hampshire with all the facilities required by us. Our first option was Aldershot but the one place capable of hosting us. was. according to our researchers, prohibitive due to the cost. So we widened our search and came up with Southampton. So what does Southampton have to offer? It is a vibrant and multicultural city steeped in its own maritime history and this year it celebrates 70 years of the construction of the first Spitfire. It may well be the South's leading destinations for sport and going out, but is also one of the greenest cities in the area having blue flag beaches and the New Forest (England's latest National Park) on its doorstep.

On the scale of things, Southampton is a safe city and has an enviable low rate of crime and antisocial behaviour as well as having a large multicultural population. It does in fact relate to tourists very well; due largely to the large international cruise ship trade, and therefore tends to cater for everyone. Transport around the city is easy. From where you will be accommodated one can walk to most of the city centre and for those wishing to venture further afield there is a Unilink bus service. The city is served by British Rail, road (M27), air (Southampton Airport) and sea. Southampton is a great location with something for everyone and I would ask all members to support this AGM/Reunion venue.

I look forward to seeing you all there. Detailed directions to the venue will be published in the August edition of our Journal.

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## Rogues Gallery



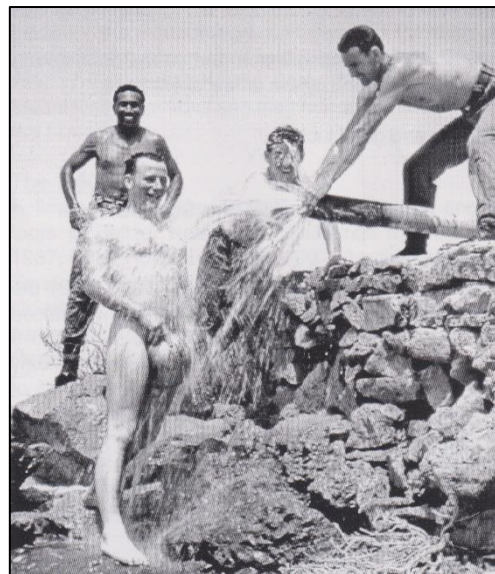
Sgt Jase Wheeler cornered by our membership secretary Billy Morris and Reg Grantham during their recruiting drive at the Remembrance Service parade



Ned Parker, Eric Blenkinsop & Bill Powell - Birmingham AGM 1999



Bahrain 1966- Gordon Small, Dave Weaver, John Barrie & Bob Jenkins



'Buster Crabb takes a shower in Aden 1965 watched on by Atu and assisted by Robin Scott



LCpl George Bell in 1955 packing his 'chute following a successful descent and much later in his role as Master BBQ Chef at his home in New Zealand in February 2005



## World Cup Football Draw

Ray Coleman (Promoter)

Dear Colleagues,

The Committee have decided that we run a World Cup Football Draw to raise funds for new Airborne Engineer Association projects. We wish to improve and maintain our exceptional memorials and museum exhibitions such as the memorials at Donington Church, Cromwell Lock and Weston-Super-Mare for the Double Hills personnel. Also our impressive exhibitions at the RE Museum at Chatham and the Yorkshire Air Museum at Elvington. All of these projects have been achieved through your generous support.

We have increased the prizes again and appeal for you to sell or purchase as many as you are able of the Draw Tickets which will fall through your letter box soon. Your efforts will be greatly appreciated and thus enable us to fund these and other deserving projects which will illustrate the outstanding service of the Airborne Engineer worldwide.

Please support your Association and your Committee in this venture and hopefully win an excellent prize.

Best wishes and good luck.

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## Brief History of 9 Para Sqn RE

### The Early Years

The Squadron's history goes back to 1787, when the Chatham Company of "Royal Military Artificers" was raised at Chatham. In 1806, "The Company" was numbered 9 Field Company in Gibraltar and took part in the widely varied engineering tasks, which formed the fortification of Gibraltar including the still existing tunnel system.

The next hundred years of the Squadron's history is rather scant; however the Company was known to have served in the Kaffir Wars, the Crimea, Bermuda, Halifax Nova Scotia and Hong Kong. It was also under command of the 7th Division during the Boer Wars. During WWI, the Company served with the 4th Infantry Division. During this time as the BEF withdrew under fire, they bridged the River Marne, a 200ft gap using barrels, barges, planking and pontoons. Almost as soon as the division had crossed, the Company was ordered to dismantle the bridge and use the materials to bridge the River Aisne. Lt Martel then designed a timber bridge to cross a 90ft gap which was so good that it stayed in place until the end of the war and was named 'Pont des Anglais' by the French. The Company were also heavily involved in the Somme Offensives. WWII 1939 saw 9th Field Company RE back in France and still part of the 4th Division. It took part in the evacuation of the BEF from Dunkirk and a sadly depleted Company returned to the UK where, in May 1942, it was reorganised as 9 Field Company (Airborne). They became the Engineer support for the newly formed 1st Air Landing Brigade. Interestingly, about one third of the Company were trained in the parachute role and the remainder were trained as glider borne troops. Their first Airborne Operation was in Norway in 1942 where they were tasked to destroy a heavy water plant. This Operation turned out to be a disaster, both gliders crash-landed, and the few survivors were executed by the Gestapo. The Company took part in Airborne Operations in North Africa, Sicily and Italy in 1943.

On 9th July 1943 the Company, as part of the 1st Airlanding Brigade, assisted in the capture of the Ponte Grande Bridge at Syracuse in Sicily. This was a particularly successful Operation for the Company fighting alongside the 1st Border Regiment and 2nd South Staffordshire Regiment. Both Infantry Battalions received the battle honour "Ponte Grande Bridge" which they wear on their colours. The Company was honoured by the presentation of the Velum Scroll by his late Majesty King George VI to commemorate their part in the battle.

The Company returned to the UK in November 1943 to prepare for D Day. In September 1944 the Company, under command of Major J C Winchester RE and a part of the 1st Airborne Division, took part in Operation Market Garden.



The Company emplaned on the morning of 17th September 1944 and, except for two gliders that crashed, landed safely at Arnhem. A platoon of about 60 strong under the command of Capt Eric O' Callaghan, took up positions in the Schoolhouse close to the bridge. With all their ammunition intact, they played a significant role in the defence of the bridge, one sapper knocking out six or seven armoured vehicles with a Piat anti-tank gun.

The platoon was used as the counter-attack force by Lt Col John Frost, CO 2 PARA, and fought magnificently in the infantry role. Unfortunately they took heavy casualties. Of the original complement of 215 All Ranks, only 57 men returned to the UK the remainder were captured or killed.

## Palestine & 16 Indep Para Bde

The Squadron (as it would now be known), had a strenuous time in Palestine and their efforts included the clearance of the King David Hotel after a particularly horrific bomb attack. The Squadron losses in Palestine were two officers and one OR killed in action.

The Squadron accompanied the 6th Airborne Division to Germany and when it was reduced to a single Brigade (16 Independent Parachute Brigade), the Squadron was chosen as the Sapper unit. Elements from the disbanded 1st Parachute Squadron RE, 3rd Parachute Squadron RE and 147 Airborne Field Park Squadron RE was posted into Squadron.

## Cyprus and Egypt 1952

The renamed 9 Independent Airborne Squadron returned to the UK in 1950. In late spring 1951 the Squadron left England for Cyprus to carry out Squadron and troop level engineering tasks in addition to acclimatising to the Middle Eastern environment due to the increasing political tensions. Later that year the Squadron deployed to Egypt. As tensions increased the Squadron found itself conducting infantry tasks to step up security mainly around key infrastructure sites in the area.

## Cyprus 1956

In 1956 the Squadron deployed to Cyprus again working on field fortifications and camp improvement. At the end of October however, reservists were called back from civilian jobs to bolster numbers as the Squadron again prepared to jump into action with 3 PARA.

## Suez 1956



In 1955 the Squadron was renamed 9 Independent Parachute Field Squadron. The following year it was involved in the seizure of the Suez Canal with 3 PARA on Op MUSKETEER. The parachute insertion onto the narrow airstrip at El GAMIL was carried out from a height of 350 to 400ft (below the minimum recommended dropping height!) and with 100lbs of kit. As a result of this, reserve parachutes were left behind, as there would not be time to operate them in the event of a malfunction. 3 Troop's target, a bridge demolition, was destroyed by the RAF and so they met up with the remainder of 3 PARA and continued as infantry soldiers as they were not required for minefield clearance and other Sapper tasks.

## Cyprus, Jordan 1957 & Beyond



As tensions rose between Jordan, Syria and Egypt, the Squadron were again pulled into theatre from Cyprus to carry out defensive works around Amman airfield in Jordan. This included defensive positions, weapons pits and fuel dumps in and around the area of the airfield to support 16 Independent Parachute Brigade. Over subsequent years the Squadron completed deployments to Bahrain, Aden, Radfan, Borneo, Rhodesia, four full tours and two spearhead tours of Northern Ireland.

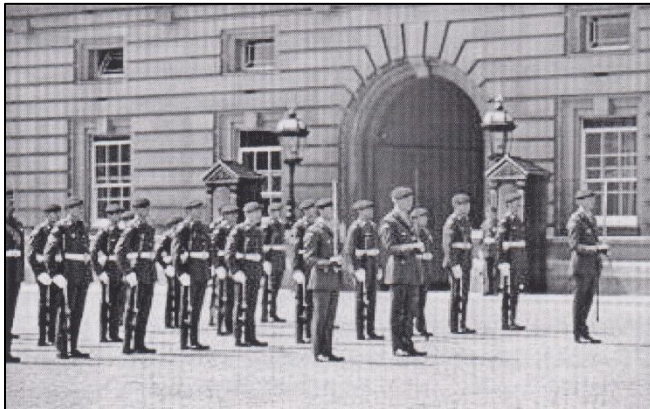
## Loss of Independence

In 1976, 16 Independent Parachute Brigade disbanded and 9 Independent Parachute Squadron RE lost its independence becoming part of 36 Engineer Regiment, based at Maidstone. 9 Parachute Squadron RE, as it was now called, was to remain in Aldershot to support the 3 Parachute Regiment Battalions.

## The Falklands War 1982

In April 1982, the Squadron embarked for the Falkland Islands as part of 5 Infantry Brigade. In true Sapper tradition, the Squadron was involved in the thick of the action from clearing minefields to repairing bridges. Sgt Ron Wrega and Cpl John Foran both won the Military Medal for their actions and maintained the fine traditions of the Squadron.

## The 1980s



Following the Falklands War, the Squadron completed tours in Belize, Kenya, the Falklands and Canada. In 1987, in the Royal Engineers 200th Anniversary Year, the Squadron was selected to provide the Royal Guard. After six weeks of intense training, the Squadron provided the ceremonial guard for Buckingham Palace, St James' Palace and the Tower of London.

## Rwanda 1994

Between July and November 1994, the Squadron served in Rwanda as part of the UNAMIR mission, for which it was jointly awarded the Wilkinson Sword of Peace. Whilst in Rwanda, the Squadron contributed greatly to stabilising the situation and to the rebuilding of the country's infrastructure. This was achieved by providing sterilised water, constructing roads and bridges (including the longest operationally constructed Bailey Bridge since the Second World War), providing support to medical and dental facilities, general artisan trade work and mine clearance.

## Northern Ireland 1995/6

Between September 1995 and March 1996, the Squadron again deployed to Northern Ireland on a six month Op DESCANT tour, where tasks included the high profile decommissioning of military locations in Londonderry.

May 1996 began with Exercise PURPLE STAR, a combined UK/USA exercise held in the eastern USA. In January 1997, the Squadron deployed to Kenya on Exercise OAKAPPLE, which tasked the Squadron in the full field of artisan skills.

## The Balkans 1998/9

September 1998 saw the first deployment to the Balkans based in Gornji Vakuf in Bosnia and covering the full British sector. In June 1999, 100 soldiers from the Squadron under command of 5 Airborne Brigade were involved in Operation AGRICOLA, the initial theatre entry operation into Kosovo.

The Squadron was tasked with clearing and securing the mountain corridor to Kacanik to enable the forward passage of lines of 4th Armoured Brigade to Pristina. It spent the remainder of the deployment responsible for the security in its own area of operations, centred on Lipjan, Kosovo's second city.

## Northern Ireland 2000

Between April and October 2000, the Squadron deployed on another Operation DESCANT tour to Northern Ireland, carrying out various tasks across the province and dismantling the towers in South Armagh.

## The Balkans 2001

In August 2001, the Squadron deployed to Macedonia as part of the Multi National Force on Operation BESSEMER. The Squadron's main task was the weapons collection operation, but it also provided the vital infrastructure required to sustain such an operation, as well as constructing extensive force protection measures. During the operation, Recce Troop, on their debut deployment, carried out vital route reconnaissance and with the assistance of geo technicians, produced mapping of routes throughout the country. Afghanistan 2001 December 2001 saw a very quick deployment to Afghanistan, having only just returned from Macedonia, as part of the International Security Assistance Force on Operation FINGAL. The Squadron, based in Kabul, provided vital infrastructure and force protection in support of 2 PARA as part of the Multi-National Engineer Group.

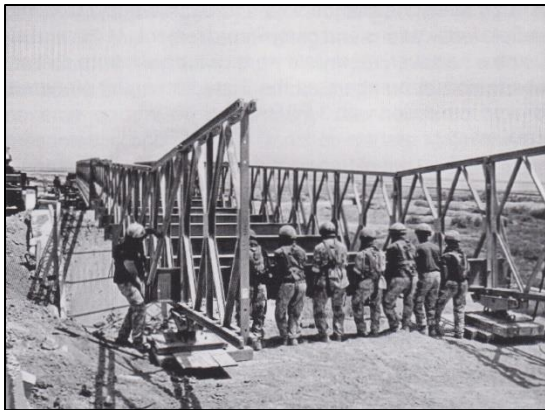
## Formation of 23 Engr Regt 2003

Since 1976 the Squadron had been under command of 36 Engineer Regiment, However, January 2003 saw the formation of 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Assault) and with it the command change of 9 Parachute Squadron to the new RHQ. Although this reformation occurred six months ahead of schedule, this did not deter the Regiment from its successful deployment to Iraq on Operation TELIC from January to July 2003.

## Iraq 2003

For the first time since the Falklands in 1982, the Squadron deployed in a war fighting role in support of 16 Air Assault Brigade. During the operation the Squadron supported both 1 PARA and 3 PARA, the main effort switching as the plan changed. In April of that year the Squadron quickly adopted a humanitarian stance providing infrastructure and force protection to the two battle groups.

## Iraq 2005



A troop was deployed half way through Op TELIC 5 in support of 21 Engineer Regiment with the remainder of the Squadron joining them in May supporting 26 Engineer Regiment for TELIC 6. The Squadron was involved in a huge variety of tasks covering the whole range of close and general support engineering. This included construction of a Forward Operating Base in the Al Faw peninsula by 3 Troop, the de-launching and de-construction of a Logistic Support Bridge (a Joint, Combined and Combined Arms Operation led by the Squadron). The Squadron was also tasked with providing a CIMIC Water Sector Co-ordination Team, which had the unenviable job of improving the civil

water quality and supply throughout the Basrah region. This proved to be a particularly demanding yet rewarding task, especially during the summer period. The team was kept extremely busy and managed to instigate a number of long-term projects aimed at maintaining the Basrah water supply as well as completing a number of quick fix smaller tasks aimed at helping local communities.

## Perception of the Squadron

The Squadron prides itself on its resourcefulness and adaptability and it is probably one of the best-known field units in the military with an enviable ability to "work hard and play hard." The ever-changing face of the Army may move, merge or disband units, but it will never break or alter the spirit of the Airborne Sapper, specifically those past and present members of 9 Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers. The Squadron serves as part of 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Assault) and provides close engineer support to 16 Air Assault Brigade.

"The Squadron remains the longest continually serving in-role fighting unit in Britain's Airborne Forces."

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## Demolitions- The Biggies' Way

P.H. Brazier (Lt Col)

In my father's book "XD Operations" among the operations he mentions is the demolition of a bridge in Syria but he does not enlarge on it, as at the time he only knew of it second hand. After the book was published one of the participants contacted me and recounted the story. After the Kent Fortress Royal Engineers had completed the destruction of all the oil stocks in Holland, Belgium and France they were ordered to send a detachment to Greece to deny oil to the Germans if they invaded. After the withdrawal from Greece and Crete the remnants of this detachment were given seven day' leave in Egypt.

At that time we were fighting the Vichy French in Syria. In the north of the country there was a railway bridge, which was of the strategic importance to the French Forces. The bridge was in an isolated position with flat desert on one bank of the river so the Planners at GHQ in consultation with the RAF considered that it should be possible to land an aircraft close to the bridge. As a result an officer, L/Sgt and six sappers were recalled from leave for a special operation. The next day they arrived at Helwan airfield outside Cairo with a quantity of explosive. The RAF at that time had a number of old Vickers Valencia bi-plane bombers, which had been long withdrawn from operational service but were used as load carriers in this theatre. The party plus their explosives were loaded onto one of these aircraft.

In due course they took off only to find that the starboard engine had caught fire. They returned to base and took off again after it had been repaired. They flew to Habbaniyah in Iraq to spend the night. This was at the time of Rashi All's rebellion and in the evening, when having a drink in the canteen, the Air Raid siren sounded. All the occupants quite properly went to the air raid shelters. Not the Sappers however who were quite undeterred having been in Amsterdam and Rotterdam during the bombing in 1940 as well as in Greece and Crete. My informant recalls they had a wonderful time supping the local brew before the "All Clear" went and the bar staff unfortunately returned!

The next day they flew up to Northern Syria and the old bi-plane bomber landed and rumbled to a halt near the bridge. They started preparing it for demolition immediately. As a precaution they cut the telephone wires however this proved to be an error as it apparently alerted the French. Shortly a group of Arab horsemen galloped up and appeared friendly. This was hardly surprising, as the locals hated their masters the French. Fortunately the Sappers were well endowed with the infamous "Victory" cigarettes which the troops swore were rolled from camel dung and bus tickets but the Arabs were delighted to accept! In return the Arabs helped the sappers dig chambers in the abutments. Eventually, just as they were completing their preparations a motorised inspection trolley came down the track and started firing bursts from a machine gun. They lit the fuse, ran over to the aircraft, which had already started its engines, and took off in a cloud of dust. The demolition was successful and nobody was injured but when they landed back at Habbaniyah there were some bullet holes in the fuselage and wings of the old Valencia.

My informant was Wally Paige, a pre-war milkman and Territorial sapper. There is a picture of him in XD Operations in Amsterdam in 1940 with a backdrop of burning oil tanks. At the time of this operation he was the L/Sgt in the party. He finished the war as a Sgt Major with a BEM and was Mentioned in Despatches.

This operation is historically interesting as it took place after the abortive attack on the Apulian aqueduct in Southern Italy but before the Bruneval raid. So it could be claimed to be the first successful British airborne operation and was an entirely sapper show to boot!

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## Veteran's Badge- Are You Eligible?

John Mason

Did you serve with HM Armed Forces at any time between September 1939 and the end of 1954? If so you may be eligible for a Veterans Badge.

Launched in May 2004 to recognise service in WWII the qualifying period has now been extended to include post-war service up to and including 31 December 1954. National Service included.

For details Veterans Helpline - 0800 169 2277 or write to - Veterans Badge, Veterans Agency, Room 6108, Norcross, Blackpool FY5 3WP.

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## What Makes a Veteran

Harry Barnsley

A recent announcement in the daily papers informing us that there is to be an official day on the calendar earmarked for "Veterans" sanctioned by the M.O.D., and supported by the Queen and Chancellor Gordon Brown and the day is to be called 'The National Veterans' Day' and a medal is to be struck and ten veterans are to be presented with this medal by the Queen.

I suppose some would say that it is wonderful news, but wait! First of all we must ascertain what qualifies a person to be called a "Veteran," according to the dictionary a veteran is "a person with long experience in a particular activity, especially military service." If that definition is correct, whom are these medals intended for? Are they to be presented to persons who sat behind a desk in Whitehall or some other military establishment anywhere in the world, if the answer is yes then what about all the civilians who served throughout the war and long after, Ministers of Religion, the fire service, ex members of the 'Pioneer Corps' and last, but by no means least, the Home Guard, they would all qualify under the heading "long experience in a particular activity," then an awful lot of medals would have to be made.

The distribution of the 'Veterans' Lapel Badge has caused quite a controversy already as to who should wear it, so God help us when the medal is awarded, as for educating school children, I and many other ex-service men have long been giving talks to school children and I am surprised at how little their parents know about wars. Gordon Brown wants to have a go at selling poppies, he would be appalled at how little the general public know about the 1939-45 war, what in hell is the good in teaching our children about ancient wars if they don't know what's happening in their lifetime.

Criticism is easy I know but why don't they consult organisations like ours for suggestions and ideas, we have good men in control and we certainly have the best journal, so come on boys, put pen to paper with your ideas. I'll start off by suggesting that Gordon Brown puts it on the back burner till he knows more about it and maybe X9 will give us a bucketful of his particular brand of verbal diarrhoea.

Apart from the Queen for whom it would be a physical impossibility I think the M.O.D. and Gordon Brown have dropped a king sized genital bouncer.

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## Normandy- Les Turnell

Bob Sullivan

In early August 1944 after about two months of static warfare in the area North East of Caen, the 6th Airborne Division 'broke out' of the bridgehead they had held since "D" Day and advanced eastwards following the retreating Germans. 3rd Parachute Squadron RE, as part of 3 Parachute Brigade, took an active part in the advance and carried out the construction of several small bridges across water obstacles. The distance in the advance covered about 50 miles and took about ten days. On reaching a line roughly between Honfleur and Port Audener, the Airborne Division was taken out of battle. 3 Para Sqn rested in a small village called Ablon near Honfleur before returning to the UK via Arramaches at the beginning of September. Whilst in Ablon some members of 3 Troop became friendly with the locals and very popular with the village children, who were very sorry when time came for us to depart.

In 1994 while visiting Normandy for the 50th "D" Day anniversary, I was approached by a Frenchman carrying a 'red beret' complete with a R.E. cap badge. The gentleman enquired if I knew the whereabouts of Andy Devine, the original owner of the beret, I told him that Andy had passed away. He then asked if I knew Les Turnell. He explained that Andy had given his beret to one of his relatives in Ablon who was a child back in 1944 and had remembered both Les and Andy and was hoping to meet up with them again. I was able to give him Les's home address and they later started corresponding. The outcome was that Les made his first visit back to Normandy in 1997 and then returned every year for the "D" Day anniversary with the exception of 2005 when he was too unwell to travel. He had previously returned to Ablon and met some of the children who were now parents and grandparents. One of them produced a photograph taken in 1944 showing Les and Andy with a small group of the children of Ablon.

At his funeral service, the priest read out several tributes to Les including the following from Normandy :

Dear Les,

We deeply regret not to be there today to tell you a last goodbye. But from France, from Normandy our thoughts are going to you, and to your family and friends who are in the pain. When you came for the first time in Normandy, 61 years ago, on 6 June 1944 you dropped with your stick from a Dakota plane in the darkness among the burst of the German Ack-Ack shells. You fought during two months and half against the Nazi troops and you gave your contribution with for the liberation of our land. At the end of August 1944, when your task ended in Normandy, you and your unit took some rest in the small village of Ablon near Honfleur, and there you had your first contact with the French people since the D-Day. Before you came back to England you met several times the Petit family at their home, and you assisted the office at Ablon's church the last Sunday of August. Some months after one's again you were dropped on the 24 March 1945 over Germany to strike a fatal blow to Hitler and the Nazi madness. The Petit family has never forgotten you, and in 1997 we could renew a contact with you which since never failed. You came several times in Normandy at the commemorations to remember your old fellows who stay in Normandy for eternity. Each time you went to visit us with your family and each time it was a fine moment. We will miss you Leslie, and we will never forget you.

Goodbye Leslie and with the help of God we hope to meet you in a better world.

All your friends from Normandy:

Jean-Francois and Yves Le Cuziat families. Rocher family. Pierre Petit & Mr and Mrs de Langavant.

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## What it means to be British

Derik Latham

One of the British national daily newspapers is asking readers "What it means to be British?" Some of the e-mails are hilarious but this is one from a chap in Switzerland...

"Being British is about driving in a German car to an Irish pub for a Belgian beer, then travelling home, grabbing an Indian curry or a Turkish kebab on the way, to sit on Swedish furniture and watch American shows on a Japanese TV. And the most British thing of all?

Suspicion of anything foreign."

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## Computer Jargon

Memory was something you lost with age.

An application was for employment.

A program was a TV show.

A cursor used profanity.

A keyboard was a piano A web was a spider's home A virus was the flu A CD was a bank account

A hard drive was a long trip on the road A mouse pad was where a mouse lived

And if you had a 3 inch floppy ....

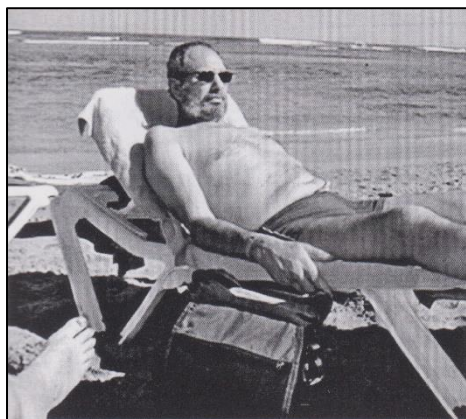
... you just hoped nobody ever found out!

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## A Winter's Tale

Fennymore Fleck

It began one warm summer's day, one of the few we had last summer, a thought came into my head, wouldn't it be great if all days were like this, and suddenly it was there, me laying on a sun kissed beach on a distant Caribbean island.



That was the vision, the reality was a winter holiday with my partner Ruth in the Dominican Republic, over Xmas and the New Year.

Being a good squaddie, planning as always; was the key element to any successful exercise. The guide book told me that apart from the glorious beaches, sunshine and the Brugal rum factory, the Dominican Republic had the highest mountain in the Antilles, Pico Duarte is 10,094ft or 3,087m - now that was something not to be ignored. This was the motivation I needed to get this project off the ground and into my rucksack. Planning a trip like this on the other side the world needed a lot of research, how do I get from A to B and back in one piece and achieve the objective. There was a

reasonable amount of information in my Lonely Planet guide book, but the real information came from the 'net,' from people who had first-hand knowledge of the climb. I now had enough data to get me thinking that this was achievable with the minimum of support. Don't you just love a challenge?

I decided to combine the trip to Pico Duarte with the typical package holiday which would also take in those Caribbean beaches, one additional bonus only associated with the Dominican Republic is that from mid-January through to March 10,000 humpbacked whales gather on the North of the island and take part in an orgy, it's their mating season, and that would be a sight to behold - not that I'm a voyeur or anything.

Holiday dates were confirmed from 26 December 2005 - 10 January 2006. After a week of acclimatisation and getting over the Xmas and New Year celebrations I would attempt the trek/climb in early January. I had planned to carry out the trip in 4 days, 1 day to get to there, 2 days to complete the ascent and 1 day to return to the beach.

would be travelling light, carrying only the essentials, food dried rations), shelter, maggots (sleeping bag), FAK, warm clothing, yes it gets cold at that height - and all the other paraphernalia that one needs when you are completely isolated from the outside world.

We arrived in the Dominican Republic on 27 December. It was everything we expected, sun, sand, rum, oh and the music, Meringue, Bachata and Salsa were the traditional sounds and the beaches were everything the brochures promised and more.

New Year celebrations were outstanding, being 5 hours behind the UK, we watched the firework display in and around the London Eye which was broadcast on BBC World, needless to say we took up the challenge and partied into the early hours.

Pico Duarte is located in the centre of a mountain range called Cordillera Central which is also part of the Parque Nacional Armando Bermudez national park. The mountain is covered with pine forest, with tropical rain forest in the lower regions. To get there I had to first get to a small village called La Cienaga which is located on the edge of the mountain range, and also where the park control is located. Access into the Park is controlled by the Government and as well as paying a 100 pesos (£2) you have to employ a guide 600 pesos/day and his mule - no I didn't ride up the mountain! The mule is obviously a safety measure in case of an accident, there are no communications in the area, unless of course you have the luxury of a satellite phone, otherwise you are completely isolated, so a mule makes good sense.

I planned to travel light, my rucksack weighed around 15kgs with enough equipment to last 4 days, this included camping out if required. There are huts at Los Tablones and La Compartition at the only two organised camp sites, but the word was that they attract rats and it is safer to sleep out. I took with me dried rations which kept my weight down, water was going to be one of the heaviest items although there were watering holes on route.

The route commencing 2 January was planned as follows:

Day 1 - Hotel Playa Dorada > Jarabacoa (Bus) Jarabacoa > La Cienaga (Gua Gua) La Cienaga > Los Tablones (4.5kms)

Day 2 - Los Tablones > La Compartition (15kms)

Day 3 - La Compartition > Summit of Pico Duarte (5kms) Pico Duarte > La Cienaga

La Cienaga > Jarabacoa > La Vega

Day 4 - La Vega > Puerto Plata

Puerto Plata > Playa Dorada

**Day 1** - This began with a 3 hour bus trip from the hotel. This was to be one of the most comfortable parts of the whole trip and was pretty uneventful. Arriving at Jarabacoa I was instantly set upon by potential guides and my rucksack attracting the unwanted attention which I wasn't interested in as I had planned to pick up a guide in La Cienaga, which was a small village at the edge of the Park.



To get to La Cienaga, according to my guide book I had to find a street corner (Calle Odulio Jimenez) where a gua gua which is basically a pickup truck leaves once a day. After checking my street map, I found it right on queue, there it was fully loaded with about 10 people, complete with all sorts of belongings. Things were looking good. A tall person dressed in military garb was standing next to the truck, he looked if was associated with the truck so I checked him out. To my amazement he was on his way to Pico Duarte with 3 others, David pointed out the driver who confirmed that he was indeed going to La Cienaga and the cost was (100 pesos). I ended up sitting on the back on top of a

couple of gas cylinders. The route to La Cienaga was 42 kms of dirt track, perilous to say the least! On one occasion we were on an improvised bridge over a river this consisted of a few logs and was no wider than the vehicle. I'm glad I didn't see it coming, I might have decided to carry out the river crossing on foot.



After an hour or so of rough road and a sore behind we arrived a La Cienaga outside the local store, La C was a small village which consisted of wooden shacks, a small store which was also the bar. It was a poor community, several of the local people act as guides which can be a tough life, imagine trekking up a 10,000 ft mountain every week for living. But it is a living and in this community survival is the name of the game, the remainder just live off the land.

David and I walked down the track to the Park Ranger station where we had to check in, but first I had to find a guide. Initially David invited me to join him and his group, stating that it would be significantly cheaper, this I rejected when he told me that he was planning the trip over 5 days, I was planning to complete the climb in 2. He thought this was crazy, he began to comment of my lack of preparation, not enough kit, my fitness, no food - little did he know, he probably thought I was just another tourist. I told him I would be fine and with his help we found a guide and mule. Hari was just a young kid trying to scrape a living, he spoke no English, so it was down to the Spanish phrase book and good old sign language. The government have fixed rates for guides and mules, unless you book the trip through a travel agency who will charge you the earth. The government rates are very reasonable and once I had agreed the cost for his services, we visited the local store, as it was my responsibility to feed the guide - but not the mule!



After purchasing enough rations for the guide, we went off to his home, which was a hut where his mother, father, two brothers and sister lived, life was tough in this community, but they were still very hospitable.

Hari's mother offered me a meal, it was basic but very welcome - I left there feeling pretty good.

We collected Hari's mule it looked pretty scrawny, but I am sure it had made the trip up the mountain on many occasions. We made our way to the park rangers office paid our fees and signed in.



We were off - our first check point would be Los Tablones where there was a hut and outdoor toilet (thunderbox). It was a 4 km hike, along a reasonably flat trail which was used frequently by the few locals who reside in the area. The trail was covered by a high canopy of broad-leaved trees, we passed someone picking coffee beans, the trail followed the fast flowing Los Tablones river.



Apart from the noise of the river there was absolute silence, and suddenly we crossed a log bridge over the river and we were at Los Tablones, we would stay here overnight and get organised for the hard graft tomorrow.

Los T was empty, I was prepared to build a basher as a result of the stories of rats, but checking out the hut, I found no evidence of rat droppings. There was a room with an old metal double bunk and a wooden chest to secure the food. I thought this would be fine and started preparations for tomorrow.

The toilet was as I expected - absolutely filthy, so it looked like the nearest tree was to be the best option!



We were located next to the river which was surprisingly warm, certainly warm enough to bath in. It would be the last for a few days, so I made the most of it.

Hari started a fire to cook his dinner while I got out my hexamine cooker and boiled up some water to add to my dried beef, potatoes and veg, lovely! It really amused Hari who refused to try it. Later that afternoon and during the early evening three other teams joined us, one team of 6 from La Romana a town on the East Coast of the Dominican Republic.

That evening everyone sat around the campfire, a guitar was brought out and songs were sung. This brought back a few memories and things started to liven up when the rum started flowing. I was thinking about the next morning and I think everyone else was thinking the same because it didn't progress into a p\*\*\* up and thankfully it fizzled out and before long everyone was hitting the sack. The sky was full of bright stars, indicating that it would probably be a great day tomorrow.

**Day 2** - After a restless night thinking I was about to be overrun by rats I finally awoke to early morning sounds of the camps guides at around 4am. It was still dark and everyone was wandering around by torch light. Thankfully I had prepared everything before turning in for the night.

Breakfast - Mars bar and a hot brew and I was ready for the day!

Everyone gathered outside in the darkness, and slowly the groups started themselves out. A trail of lights started to snake upwards along the trail. I was the last to leave, my guide motioned for me to go, he would catch up later with the other guides. So with my torch checking out the trail, I joined the caravan to La Comparticion.

This stage would take us 15kms through some unforgiving mountain trails, rising from:

1207m at Los Tablones

1720m La Contorra

1980m La Laguna

2180m El Cruce

2650m Aguita Fria

2450m La Comparticion

Our objective was to set up base camp at La Comparticion and tackle the summit early next morning. The route rises considerably after Los T and follows the ridge all the way to Aquita Fria where there was good water, the source of the River Yaque.

I found the pace at the back of the group really slow and felt that I was capable of raising the tempo, so after passing two of the other three groups, I came up to the 6 guys from La Romana. At least 3 of them spoke passable English, certainly better than my Spanish, so started a relationship that would last throughout the whole trip.

The La Romana group were experienced mountaineers and certainly we were at the same level of fitness which they found surprising as I was considerably older than they were. They frequently called out "Mucho Hombre," which embarrassed me slightly, but I took it as a compliment and let it pass.



The route along the ridge was interesting, with the River Yaque below it passed through dense tropical rain forest (and progressed into pine forest the further we got up the mountain. The views were outstanding, as expected the weather was fine with clear blue skies, the day started off cool, got steadily warmer, and layers came off, but as we got higher it cooled. It was certainly tough; I was glad I had put in a lot of training prior to the trip. Although the trail was reasonably defined it was steep and required a lot of mental focus to keep going, it certainly made a difference having someone with you and I had teamed up with Carlos the group leader. We were of similar build and stamina and pushed on

together allowing the others to catch up at the various checkpoints.

The further up the mountain we went, the views become more and more spectacular. We reached Aquita Fria mid-afternoon. This was the highest point of the day's climb. It was all downhill to La Comparticion, this was a steep drop of 200m and I was thinking on the way down that this would be hell on the way back.

La Comparticion was obviously a popular staging point as they was a number of tents pitched around the 2 huts and a camp fire was burning steadily.

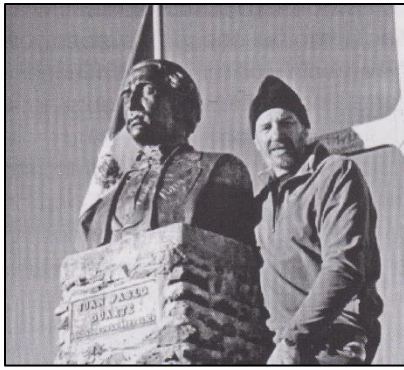
It had taking us about 9 hours of hard graft to get to La C, it was certainly a relief to know that there would be no more tabbing today.

There was a spare room in one of the huts, so we grabbed it before any of the other groups arrived, and as previous, got ourselves organised for an early morning start.

I had been snacking most of the day, so it was time to have a good meal before night fell. The dried rations were a god send, no fuss and very filling, although the Dominicans didn't think so! They waited until the mules arrived with everything including the kitchen sink, their menu was typical Caribbean, meat, yam, plantain and rice, they certainly were not going to starve.

It was going to be a cold night, it turned out be around 5 degrees, but I was wrapped up in my maggot.

**Day 3** - Early morning found a lot of activity in the camp, with everyone planning to reach the summit before dawn breaks. After a hot brew, we started out for the summit, it was approx. 4kms, it was still dark, but the trail was pretty well defined. This stage was relatively steep but with the summit so close, we levelled out onto an open meadow at Vallecano de Lillis, the sun was coming up and we enjoyed the view of La Pelota the second highest peak in the Caribbean at 3070m. We made good time and before long there we were there, a large sign indicating that you were now at 3087m at the summit of Pico Duarte. I reached there with Carlos; we congratulated each other. It was an achievement.



After a scramble we were on the top, next to the bronze bust of Juan Duarte, a cross and the Dominican Republic flag flying from the flagpole. amazing. Clear skies gave us a spectacular view of the mountain range within the Armando Bermudez National Park.

The remainder of the team started to drift in, and before long we were all on the summit taking the mandatory pictures for each other, some had messages professing their love for someone far away.



After about half an hour, we decided to make the trek back to La Cienaga, this would be a fast tab back, I was in no immediate hurry as I would probably have to spend the night in La C. The team from La Romana had a long trip ahead of them, so they wanted to reach La Cienaga ASAP, they didn't want to have to travel the road to Jarabacoa in the dark. We made our way down from the summit, passing other teams on the way up. After a short stop at La Comparticion to pick up our gear, we hit the trail and started on the section up to Aguita Fria which I knew was going to be the toughest of the trip.

It was head down and get into that rhythm, ignore the pain and focus on the top. Thankfully it was cool, it was everything I expected it to be, the definition of hell is "state of eternal punishment" this section took no prisoners, so no surprises there.

We took a few moments at the top to gather ourselves and top up our water bottles, we had used most of our water on the way up. This was to be another hike down a steep track, so Carlos and I took everybody's bottles and filled them.

The way back to La Cienaga was fast, although it was downhill, it put pressure of a different kind on your body, ankles and knees. We hit La Cienaga around 1630, which was about 6 hours, that was some going.

The team got themselves organised, they had driven here in a beat up old jeep, held together with bits of string and wire. I was prepared to stay the night, but they offered me a ride to Jarabacoa, which I accepted gratefully.

After paying our guides, we squeezed into the jeep, all 7 of us with all our gear. The trip was as expected, bumpy , but we made Jarabacoa before nightfall, but unfortunately I missed the last bus, so we carried on to La Vega which is a large industrial town located North of Santo Domingo.

Most buses pass through here heading West, but we were out of luck, there were no buses until the morning, so I had no choice but to check in to a hotel, the Hotel Americas which from the outside looked acceptable, at 100 pesos it was certainly cheap. I said my farewells to all the team with promises to keep touch. The room turned out to be less than 1 star, the paint was peaking from the walls, it had a bed, a bucket for a toilet, and a standpipe supplied me water. I was given a clean sheet - what the hell - it had been a long day and I was tired and hungry. The hotel had no food, but I noticed a street vendor across the road, and after some fried chicken and a cold beer, I was in heaven.

**Day 4** - Next morning, after a cold wash, I made my way to the bus terminal to catch the Caribe tours from La Vega to Puerto Plata. I was on the last leg, it was about 3 hours to PP, my hotel was in the resort of Playa Dorada about 10kms away. I stepped off the bus picked up my rucksack and was approached by a young guy calling "Taxi"



- that's what I needed. I thought 50 pesos was really cheap, anyway I agreed and followed the driver outside the terminal and there it was a Motoconcho, a moped taxi. I had been warned that the single biggest danger to tourists in DR is the Motoconcho. I was desperate to get to the hotel, so I promised to pay the driver double if he took it easy (Mas despacio por favour) - I don't think he understood my Scottish dialect. I hung on for grim death, I had visions of aggravated tarmac, but before long the sign for Playa Dorada was upon us and I gratefully dismounted this death trap.

And so ended my trip to Pico Duarte. It was a memorable, challenging adventure from start to finish.

Anyone heard of Mount Kinabalu in Borneo, 13,432ft, now that's a challenge!

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## 4th Parachute Squadron RE (1942-1944) 1st Airborne Division

Eric Richards

We wish to thank the following remaining squadron members who most gratefully donated to the 'Wooden Bench' placed near the Glaston village Church Nr Uppingham, Rutland in memory of the squadron who were billeted in the village after coming back from Italy and prior to leaving for the Battle of Arnhem in September 1944.

This bench has a memorial plate fixed naming the squadron. The Rev Terence Treanor blessed it and the seat is now fixed under the West window of the church and I've been told the villagers and visitors to the church use it. We also wish our thank the following for their donations: Mrs J H Brown, Mr & Mrs N. Brown, Mr & Mrs B E. Holden, Mr. E. Richards, Mr & Mrs G. Stone, Mr & Mrs M. Weymouth, Mr A. Idcroft, Mr & Mrs A. Gauntlett, Mr & Mrs K. Coley, Mr. S. Warrilow, Mr J Phillips, Mr W Coleman, Capt R Boyle of "Bisbrook Hall" and Major H. Faulkner Brown, OBE, MC.

On a sadder note, Spr Bill (Jock) McKenna ex 3 Troop died 1st May 2005 and Spr. W. (Bill) Coleman ex 3 Troop died 2nd February 2006.

A son of one of the squadron members during his trip to Italy last year, visited the graves of two squadron members, Spr Cook and Spr Milligan who were killed clearing mines on an airfield; which is to-day a busy NATO airbase.

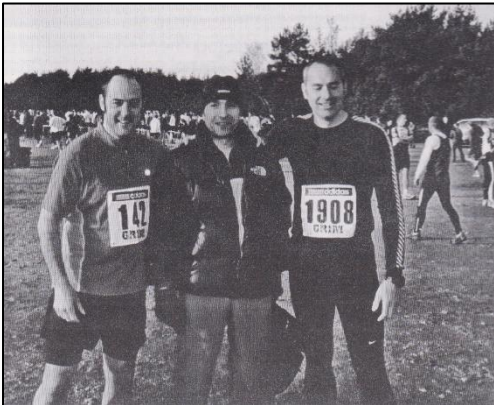
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## The 'Grim'

Billy Morris - AEA Sports Club

The Grim, held on the 5th December 2005, is an 8 mile race around the Aldershot training area, to be precise, the Long Valley tank vehicle test circuit. The race attracts about 2000 runners and walkers from around the UK and challenges them to cover the distance travelling through water obstacles, sand traps and the best ground conditions found around the area!

It was this race back in 2004 that a group of fellow Airborne warriors got together for a laugh and a run out. This saw the start of the AEA Sports Club; with what we hoped was going to be a good recruiting medium to get the younger members out and about doing races around the country. This however has been a very slow start and it is now down to a small handful of dedicated members who get out and have a go most months.



Last years 'Grim' was to see Bob Chatterton and myself running the race, one of our fellow members Reg Grantham had a sore back! So he had to sit this one out all wrapped up in a warm North Face jacket.

### **Billy, Reg & Bob before the start**

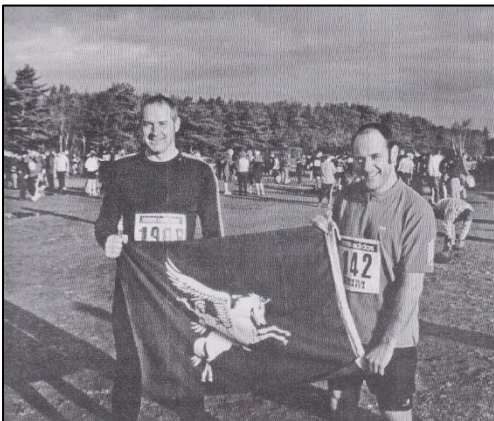
To also give moral support Mick Hale turned up also dressed for the conditions. This particular morning although bright with sunshine was bitterly cold with a cross wind for good measure.

We lined up and the gun went off, we both kept together for about 1 mile, and I thought to myself why is everyone trying to miss these little puddles of water along this track, in 500m you will be up to your waist in freezing cold water.



### **Billy splashes through the last 'puddle'**

I must have pulled away from Bob after that first water hole and got into a rhythm, I felt quite good, and the distance started to be eaten up. At about 5 miles a bloke in a loud shirt and wearing an Elvis wig ran past me, "What's happening here", I can't let that thing beat me, so that was now the challenge to get in front of the 'King'. After running down this hill a couple of friendly faces shouted out airborne words of encouragement, to the fact that I should run faster and not let that 'crap hat' Elvis beat you. Cheers Reg and Mick.



I had to get in front and managed this with about 1 mile to go, I had to dig deep but pulled through the last big water obstacle and onto the finish. My finish time was 68 minutes. I can only tell you my race, but Bob said that he had me in his sights all the way.

### **It pays to advertise! Bob & Billy Until the next race.**

Fancy taking part in future AEA Sports Club events? They say you're never too old - Billy or Bob would be only too pleased to add you to their events entry list! Now don't all rush at once!

## Surprise Presentation

Harry Barnsley

Owing to the fact that most of our members have now joined the great majority in the sky and have formed a new branch on cloud nine, the Neath branch is consequently reduced to about four active members and although we still retain our identity we have now amalgamated with Swansea PRA who have welcomed us in out of the cold.

We have been attending their Christmas party for quite a few years and last year was no different except that the guzzling was suddenly halted by an announcement that a presentation was to take place. At first, owing to my age, I thought they were going to give me indefinite leave and a free travel warrant up to the pearly gates but my fears were unfounded.



Names were called, including mine, and we were presented with a beautiful solid silver medal and clasp which in my case was engraved with the word 'Neath.' The obverse side bears the Para Wings and the reverse is engraved with "Presented to Harry K. Barnsley for long service," the ribbon is maroon with two blue stripes.

I was told later that they had stopped the drinking while we could still stand!



**Ralph Brooks, 131 Para Regt RE,  
Ron Doig, Para Regt, Lt Col (retired),  
John Humphreys, popular and well respected  
President of Swansea branch ex 1st Para Sqn RE,  
Harry Barnsley, 3 Para Sqn RE**

We were all delighted to receive the award and promptly pinned the medals on our lapels but I am still one up on them because I have been awarded with a Life Membership of the "Corps of Engineers"! I am so delighted that I could even forgive X9 for his blasphemy of our beloved Welsh Dragon. Incidentally, it's no good his trying to wish me a Merry Christmas in Welsh to

get in my good books. Any more nonsense from him and I'll take a Jihad out on him. However I'll pray for him next time I go to the Mosque that's if I can get my prayer mat out from under the dog!

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## This is a public service message for women to better understand men

Because I'm a man, when I lock my keys in the car, I will fiddle with a coat hanger long after hypothermia has set in. Calling the AA is not an option. I will win.

Because I'm a man, when the car isn't running very well, I will pop the bonnet and stare at the engine as if I know what I'm looking at. If another man shows up, one of us will say to the other, "I used to be able to fix these things, but now with all these computers and everything, I wouldn't know where to start." We will then drink a couple of beers, as a form of holy communion.

Because I'm a man, when I catch a cold, I need someone to bring me soup and take care of me while I lie in bed and moan. You're a woman. You never get as sick as I do, so for you, this is no problem.

Because I'm a man, I can be relied upon to purchase basic groceries at the store, like milk or bread. I cannot be expected to find exotic items like "cumin" or "tofu." For all I know, these are the same thing.

Because I'm a man, when one of our appliances stops working, I will insist on taking it apart, despite evidence that this will just cost me twice as much once the repair person gets here and has to put it back together.

Because I'm a man, I must hold the television remote control in my hand while I watch TV. If the thing has been misplaced, I may miss a whole show looking for it...though one time I was able to survive by holding a calculator...(applies to engineers mainly).

Because I'm a man, you don't have to ask me if I liked the movie. Chances are, if you're crying at the end of it, I didn't...and if you are feeling amorous afterwards...then I will certainly at least remember the name and recommend it to others.

Because I'm a man, I think what you're wearing is fine. I thought what you were wearing five minutes ago was fine, too. Either pair of shoes is fine. With the belt or without it, looks fine. Your hair is fine. You look fine. Can we just go now?

Because I'm a man, and this is, after all, the year 2006, I will share equally in the housework. You just do the laundry, the cooking, the cleaning, the vacuuming, and the dishes, and I'll do the rest like wandering around in the garden with a beer wondering what to do.

The author requested to remain anonymous!

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## Major Douglas Murray MC

Ron (Pinky) White

Major Murray was commanding officer of the 1st Parachute Squadron for the period from late November 1942 until the destruction of the Squadron at Arnhem in September 1944. This period covered Tunisia, Sicily, Italy and Arnhem.

Douglas Murray was the son of a ship's Captain based at Fleetwood, Lancs. He joined the Territorial Army in 1938 and served with the 253rd Field Company as a Section Commander under Major Mark Henniker who later became CRE of the 1st Airborne Division.

In June 1940 the 253rd Fd Coy was engaged in Montgomery's 3rd Division withdrawal from Lille to Dunkirk - demolishing bridges etc. as they fell back. They also took part in a successful infantry counter attack, which had penetrated the Division's left flank.

Finally arriving a Bray, 5 miles east of Dunkirk, most of 253 Company were embarked on a ship, but (Honkers) Henniker, Murray and one other officer plus 25 other ranks were left behind. These intrepid souls managed to find and launch two large rowing boats (shades of Upton and Wyke Regis) with which they proposed to row to England - a journey of some 40 miles plus. They hoped the westerly tide would help and when the tide flow changed; they proposed to anchor awaiting the next change and they resume the journey. When far out to sea, they came across an abandoned Royal Navy pinnace. They repaired the craft's steering, coached the engine to start and got underway at 10 knots towards England. They were eventually spotted by HMS Locust, a China station gunboat, and taken to Dover.

When forming the 1st Airborne Divisional Engineers in November 1941, Honkers induced Douglas Murray, who was still serving a Lieutenant in 253rd Fd Coy to join Stephen Dorman's embryonic Air Troop as 2nd in Command. This unit was eventually changed to 1st Parachute Squadron RE.

In November 1942 Major Dorman and his batman were killed whilst on a long-range recce in the mountains of Tunisia (their bodies were never found). Douglas Murray was subsequently promoted to replace Major Dorman; he was also awarded the Military Cross in 1943.

Honker Henniker always admired Douglas, whom he described as a dour Scot and one who remained very cool when under fire - and there was plenty of that in Tunisia with Stukas, dive bombers, shell fire etc.

Some pundits believed that Henniker would have preferred a regular officer to raise the 1st Parachute Squadron and by the same reasoning it was thought he would have liked to convert a regular sapper unit into a parachute squadron as he did with the 9th Field Company (later the 9th Parachute Squadron). However he thought very highly of the way Doug Murray turned a bunch of enthusiastic amateurs into a highly trained, cohesive unit.

Employed as Engineer infantry reinforcing the battalions, (Tunisia/Sicily/Arnhem) infantry Colonels thought that the sappers were superb. Colonel Frost said on many occasions that "his" sappers were the best "infantry" soldiers he had ever commanded - with that accolade; we should include all Airborne sappers!

To finish on a humorous note (which Douglas would enjoy), a few anecdotes from my comrades who contributed to this article:

Many of our readers will have known Reggie Orton (DCM Korea). After a run/walk Captain Mackay was delivering his spiel watched by Douglas, when a young lady tapped Douglas's shoulder and enquired, "Will you be long, because Reggie's dinner is getting cold!"

Approaching the end of a long route march with the Major leading at the front closely followed by "wee Mac" Captain Mackay playing his not too tuneful bagpipes, a sapper (nameless) in A Troop signalled one of the youngsters running alongside, gave him a (old) penny to give to the man playing the pipes and was to say it was from his mum to leave the street! The youngster got wee Mac's attention and the pipes stopped with a groan. The Major, like us, could hardly contain his mirth. You can bet A Troop paid for that.

In Tunisia one beautiful spring morning I was detailed to escort the Major to a brigade conference held behind the 2nd battalion line. Whilst walking over the hills, keeping my eyes open, I was amazed to see him examining wild flowers and passing comments to me regarding their growth!

After his capture at Arnhem Bridge, a group of officers including Major Murray were loaded onto a truck. Whilst en-route, two officers bailed out trying to escape and a German sentry opened fire with his automatic into the back of the truck, killing some, wounding others. Douglas was unhurt.

Major Murray returned home to Reading after his release and resumed his post as Chief Borough Surveyor. After retiring he devoted his time to caring for his ailing wife and the upkeep of his garden.

There was no side to this gentleman and any squadron member who banged on his door was made very welcome - I can attest to that.

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## 9 Parachute Squadron- 'Reunion'

A reunion is to be held in the Sqn bar located in Buller barracks, Aldershot during the weekend Friday 3 June - Sunday 5 June.

Friday evening will primarily be a 'boys' night out while the Saturday evening a mixed function (buffet/dance) will be a more formal affair - dress: jacket & Sqn tie.

There will be an entrance fee for the Saturday evening function, tickets will be available at the door. Please note that for security purposes AEA members must be in possession of their association membership card or a means of positive identification. Further details will be forwarded to branches and via personal e-mail addresses.

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## Actual letter sent by the Inland Revenue

First published in a 'broadsheet' newspaper

Dear Mr Addison,

I am writing to you to express our thanks for your more than prompt reply to our latest communication, and also to answer some of the points you raise. I will address them, as ever, in order. Firstly, I must take issue with your description of our last as a "begging letter." It might perhaps more properly be referred to as a "tax demand." This is how we, at the Inland Revenue have always, for reasons of accuracy; traditionally referred to such documents.

Secondly, your frustration at our adding to the "endless stream of crapulent whining and panhandling vomited daily through the letterbox on to the doormat" has been noted. However, whilst I have naturally not seen the other letters to which you refer I would cautiously suggest that their being from "pauper councils, Lombardy pirate banking houses and pissant gas-mongers" might indicate that your decision to "file them next to the toilet in case of emergencies" is at best a little ill-advised. In common with my own organisation, it is unlikely that the senders of these letters do see you as a "lackwit bumpkin" or, come to that, a "sodding charity." More likely they see you as a citizen of Great Britain, with a responsibility to contribute to the upkeep of the nation as a whole.

Which brings me to my next point. Whilst there may be some spirit of truth in your assertion that the taxes you pay "go to shore up the canker-blighted, toppling folly that is the Public Services," a moment's rudimentary calculation ought to disabuse you of the notion that the government in any way expects you to "stump up for the whole damned party" yourself. The estimates you provide for the Chancellor's disbursement of the funds levied by taxation, whilst colourful, are, in fairness, a little off the mark. Less than you seem to imagine is spent on "junkets for Bunterish lickspittles" and "dancing whores" whilst far more than you have accounted for is allocated to, for example, "that box-ticking facade of a university system."

A couple of technical points arising from direct queries: 1. The reason we don't simply write "Muggins" on the envelope has to do with the vagaries of the postal system. 2. You can rest assured that "sucking the very marrows of those with nothing else to give" has never been considered as a practice because even if the Personal Allowance didn't render it irrelevant, the sheer medical logistics involved would make it financially inviable.

I trust this has helped. In the meantime, whilst I would not in any way wish to influence your decision one way or the other, I ought to point out that even if you did choose to "give the whole foul jamboree up and go and live in India" you would still owe us the money.

Please forward it by Friday.

Yours Sincerely, H J Lee

Customer Relations

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# First Impressions of a 9 Para Sqn Troop Commander

Lt R Wendover



Finally here. I have endured almost twelve months to the day of training since commissioning and am now standing at the Rhine Barracks Guard room to the legendary 9 Parachute Squadron RE. Only a few days until I pick up to full Lieutenant and this is the first time I have seen anything of the 'Field Army.' The Squadron has a huge reputation, particularly intimidating as a first posting but based around the fiercely guarded esprit-de-corps based on the history of the longest in role Parachute unit in the British Army.

The RE Troop Commanders Course lasts approximately 7 months, prolonged by The All Arms Pre Parachute Selection Course and instantly topped with the RE Battle Captains Course, culminating in almost 12 months of training (comparable to the Infantry Young Officers Course being a mere 3 months before meeting their unit!). I scraped through the fierce P-Company in January but missed The All Arms Basic Jumps Course through lack of aircraft. The process of joining a unit is long and depends upon your performance on the various courses; I was very pleased to have been offered a post within 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Assault) and particularly a post at 9 Para Squadron RE.

The barracks are typical of the 60's 'concrete era' with double storey rectangular buildings surrounding a broken up irregular concrete parade square. The place has a distinct air of a hard, old-school unit with endless photos of jumps, operational tours and memorabilia from around the world. As you wander through the dimly lit corridors one cannot help but be impressed by the depth, diversity and experience of exercises and operations the Squadron has been involved in.

My first day included an 8 mile (or so) tab on the awesome Aldershot training area followed by a much needed curry and 'fluid replen' in the Squadron Bar! On approaching the bar a large painting of the grim reaper wearing a maroon beret greets arrivals and hints at what awaits when entering the famous 9 Para Squadron bar.... obviously what happens in the Squadron bar, stays in the bar, suffice to say that it has seen some epic days and nights.

The outlook is very busy with the Squadron being on short notice to deploy as part of the Spearhead Land Element (SLE) and a troop deploying to Afghanistan on Op HERRICK. I have been given command of 1 Troop and look forward to a very busy year. The blokes have been surprisingly welcoming and have eased their new troop commander into the job. With a Basic Parachute Course booked, I will hopefully earn my parachute wings and graduate from 'Penguin' to Paratrooper - no doubt another reason for troop to get the beers in at the bar!

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## 9 Parachute Squadron- Since OP TELIC 6

Lt H M Roberts

The main body of 9 Parachute Squadron returned from Iraq at the beginning of November and enjoyed a long weekend before a mandatory week at work to “decompress” after the tour. Aldershot was a welcome sight after a long six months at Shaibah Logistics Base outside Basrah where daily life at the end of the tour had become somewhat monotonous with kit and equipment being boxed up and the highlight of the day being a DVD in our 6” x 20” refrigerated box or another session in the gym. Everyone soon reacquainted themselves with the Squadron bar and LCpl Lee Tilbury and the band “Ground Rush” put on an excellent performance midweek. All the wives and girlfriends were invited which probably helped ensure that the blokes were on best behaviour. Unfortunately SSgt Bruce Dickson and Sgt Andy Scott couldn’t attend after their afternoon of ‘just a few pints’ and subsequent siesta overran into the evening. The one major change everyone noticed on our return was the closure of the old Squadron haunt “THE PEGASUS” which had now been converted into a trendy wine bar and was now no longer on the Squadron approved list.

Leave came around soon enough and everyone disappeared to the Four Winds. Many had family life to catch up on but those without too many commitments managed to visit locations all around the world such as Borneo, Australia, Thailand and Morocco just to mention a few. A small contingency of officers namely Lt Rob “mini limbs” Gout and Capt Ashley “Oops” Laws attended the Royal Engineers Ski championships in Austria and put in very credible performances with Capt Lawes achieving 3rd place.

Work started again for everyone a few days into the New Year, except for LCpl “Mad Dog” Manning who was still owed a fair bit of time off after volunteering to spend the majority of 2005 in Iraq. Squadron life remains as hectic as ever with 3 Tp busy making preparations to deploy to Afghanistan on Op HERRICK while the remainder of the Squadron are filling the Spearhead Land Element commitment.

The Troops have still managed to find time to conduct a short “shake out” exercise to refine infantry skills and remind everyone how miserable a sentry duty is at night in January.



**Sapper Hughes on patrol**



**Searching the enemy**

Further exercises are planned including Exercise HERRICK EAGLE intended to prepare 3 Tp for their Afghanistan deployment and then Exercise PEGASUS SKILLS to refine our Combat Engineering skills.

Morale in the form of adventure training is planned for the future, however, for the time being we will have to be content with exercises and other random tasks around camp after a long time away. With troops taking part in Arctic training in Norway, sporting events, adventure training in Devon and a German Jumps course planned for February the pace of life in the Squadron remains high. All this will also have to fit around the Squadron move to Woodbridge in early July. Feelings remain mixed about the move with some already pining for the old haunts in Aldershot whilst others are looking forward to the excellent facilities available at Rock Barracks in Woodbridge. Yet again, a new chapter in the Squadron’s history beckons. As ever, whilst locations and faces might change, the spirit and ethos of the Squadron will remain!

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## My First Impressions of 9 Para Sqn RE

Lt P. Matthews

Following interviews and selection boards at the end of Sandhurst for a place on P Company, the Troop Commanders and Battle Captains courses, I was finally stood outside the gates of the infamous '9 Para Squadron' almost a year to the day after commissioning.

An interview with the 2IC informed me I would command Support Troop, which at the time raised some questions in my mind, which I decided to leave time to answer (which it quickly did!) My main thought was what exactly do they do? - All training on the troop commander's course is directed at being a field troop commander, with the exercises being in the armoured role; I was now to be Support Troop in a light role Para squadron.

Following a tour of Rhine Barracks, a dilapidated 1960's concrete jungle, I finally came into contact with some 'Squadron blokes'. I found them to be just as the 2IC had briefed me, acting out a 'relaxed but professional attitude' - nothing like the training regiment ethos at Chatham and Gibraltar Barracks! When questioned by curious Sappers which Troop I was going to, I received knowing looks and short stories told for effect when answering Support Troop. (These I have no doubt will be proven to me at some point in the Squadron bar!) The one other (anticipated) question I was repeatedly asked was 'when are you on your jumps course?' to which I could only reply 'as soon I can get a place!'

I am looking forward to spending two busy years with the squadron, especially at this time of change in its history, as I will be the last support troop commander in Aldershot and the first in Woodbridge when the regiment move together. I am sure this itself will present many challenges, however on a personal level my main aim during the posting is to be sent on an operational deployment at the earliest opportunity.

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## The Way I see it Observations on the December Issue

X9

Vice Presidents! Are you implying that our new Vice President is two faced!

I spotted the Editors deliberate mistake right away. Publication deadline is Monday 23 March! What year calendar are you using Dave? C'mon, get up to date!

Mick Humphries as our new Chairman suggests he may join Dad's Army in Wales this year. Mick, you and Louis would look great on a bicycle built for two!

Rogues Gallery - The two kneeling in the group picture, John Prince & George Brown, suggests to me that they are either asleep or very fond of each other!

LCpl Gardiner, I bet 10 minutes prior to that photo being taken you didn't have that broad grin on your face!

Don't know who the burdened down is but he reminds me of an American squirrel hunter!

2 Troop blast from the past: So that's what fairies grow up to look like!

Benny of Arabia: He may have worked in Plant Troop but he couldn't steer a camel and has to be led!

The wry look on Jimmy Simpsons face would suggest that it's his turn for the round!

Belize: 51 Field Sqn: Airborne troops having to be taught how to slaughter a chicken! You come over more like a bunch of Boy Scouts!

Great Reunion: Paddy Moorhouse hit the nail on the head when he called it "camaraderie." The dictionary defines it as "goodwill & light-hearted rapport between or among friends." Right on Paddy!

The Burma Campaign: Good reading sir! I agree with the historians who say Slim was the best General of WW2 but I've often wondered how he would have fared in the more conventional theatre of Europe?

Brigadier John Hooper is looking for portraits. How about one of X9 Brigadier! I would even commission it myself!

I must try and get to see the John Rock display. The problem is getting someone to take care of my roses plus I'm not too sure my Morris Minor can make it down that far!

Coventry Reunion: I bet the joke between Bill Baugh and Harold Padfield was a blue one!

Nev Collins & Col Hutchinson, Bless 'em all, the long and the short and the tall...

Another wry look, this time from Bernie Rooney suggests he missed the point of the joke!

Col Dennis Eagans silver locks reflecting strongly in John Parkers glasses!

Two pictures of Geordie McCarthy in the same issue and you know, he doesn't look a day older from the first to the second photo! Looks more like sixty years older! Good to see you joined us John.

Monty Wooley looking sheepish caught with his arm around Olive Holmes!

Charles Barker! Get a haircut! Jim, you don't need one!

Harry Mennie gets the issues Jabba The Hutt award!

John Smith looking fit and well, Joe Stoddart looking rather paunchy. I said PAUNCHY Joe. Dusty still with the rosy cheeks, and Fred as suave as ever!

Congratulations are in order for two of our members. First to Bob Chatterton for even entering the Snowdonia Marathon. A good advert for the AEA Sports Club. Secondly to Mike Ellery for his climbing of Mt Kilimanjaro. No mean feat for an old man! Well done Mike! You are both better men than I am Gunga Din!

Just a couple of points. The ? in the Aldershot 1961 photo immediately brought the name Crozier to mind. Don't know if that is right or not. One thing I do know is that in the same photo Keith Sillet happens to be Dave Millet!

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## How the Supplies Reached Arnhem

This article first appeared in the RASC Journal of November 1944. It is reprinted here by kind permission of Lt. Col. R.E. Wills, the Controller of the RASC & RCT Association.

I set out with the intention of writing up the story of how the supplies reached the 1st Airborne Division, but a visit to the men who did the job convinced me that the only way to catch the spirit of "the men of the air dispatch crews" was to let them tell their tales themselves.

Of necessity it is disjointed; but beneath it there is a consistent story of endeavour that the Corps will remember for a long while to come, and be proud of always.

First to introduce you to Airborne Dispatch, I'll get LCpl Grantham to tell you his tale just as he told it over the air on 25th September:

"My job is to pack and stow supplies of all kinds into their special containers and baskets and to discharge them from the aircraft over the dropping zone. This is a small area of ground marked out by the airborne troops.

"The RAF pilot selects the course and flies his aircraft at the lowest possible speed and at an agreed height. Without this we wouldn't be able to do our part. He then gives us the signal and we discharge our cargo. We have to get rid of about two tons of containers fitted with parachutes in such a way that they will fall in a cluster, and we've got to do this in less than eight seconds, so the work is pretty concentrated while it lasts. In fact, we can only do it by working as a team with the RAF crew.

"Now let me describe my last operation so as to show you what it can be like. The journey over was quite uneventful, but when we started to approach the dropping zone the flak started coming up. First they got one of the starboard engines. We got over the dropping zone and they then got our other starboard engine, just after we'd started pushing out the supplies. Then the flak tore holes in the floor of the aircraft. We were too low to bail out by now, so we just sat tight and waited for instructions from the skipper. The rear gunner then joined us. It was a good job he did, too, because an ack-ack shell went right through his seat in the turret. We took up crash-landing positions and a few seconds later we hit.

"A number of Dutch villagers ran towards us, and one of them who spoke good French told us there were Germans all round us. We found we'd landed right in the middle of the German lines.

The head of the local underground movement took us to his home, where he told us to hide, as German troops had already reached the wreck and were looking for us. Eventually the Dutch patriots captured those Germans, so that worry was removed. Just before dusk our Dutch friends took us by car to a nearby town, where we were given a tremendous welcome. We were the first British troops they had seen since 1940.

"After giving us a first-class meal, the underground leader took us in his car towards the Belgian frontier to another lawn. There we met the first British land forces we'd seen.

They were busy mopping up snipers. We slept there the night wrapped in parachutes, and the following morning the Dutch people produced a vegetable cart in which we travelled for the next leg of our journey. We were then transferred to a British lorry carrying German prisoners back to Belgium. I think those were the three most hair-raising days I've ever experienced."

## What the Men on the Ground Thought

Writing from Belgium, an officer just back from Arnhem paid the dispatch crews this tribute:

"It was with excited hopefulness and an almost painful admiration that those on the ground watched these aircraft day by day, and for some reason, always at the same hour, flying in to drop their loads. Through a continuous curtain of fire they flew on unwaveringly and very slowly, and so low that it seemed wonderful that more of them were not destroyed - to drop their loads, which floated down mostly behind the enemy lines. Many were hit and set on fire, but continued to dispatch their panniers until they fell from view, one unknown American aircraft was already on fire when it arrived over the target, but dropped half of its load, circled again, losing



height the while, and dropped the remainder on the second run until it went down in a sheet of flame. There were many acts of great gallantry in the air, and there were fairly heavy casualties amongst the R.A.S.C. dispatchers. But it is consoling to know that the small proportion of the many hundreds of tons dropped which did reach our lines enabled hungry men to have some sort of a meal on the fifth day, and also provided sufficient ammunition of all kinds to keep weapons firing and to keep the R.A.S.C. dump 'in issue' right up to the withdrawal."

And now here are the stories as they were told to me when I visited a very bleak camp somewhere in England:

### Evasive Action

There's a lot of Cpl Markham to start with, and with his Mae-west and harness on he looks pretty well developed. He had a very cheerful way of making his experience sound like a Bank Holiday trip. His crew consisted of LCpl Glover and Dvrs Davenport and Jordan.

Leaving the DZ, the plane was hit by flak behind the wings and Glover and Davenport were wounded. To add to their troubles, a Focke-Wulf 190 came along and, as he put it, "wanted to play." The pilot took evasive action, which he described as being rather like "having a rough house on a switch back." "The pilot was quite a gentleman, though," he added: "he apologised afterwards." Meanwhile a Spitfire came and joined in the fun. "He showed him a new game, sir, called See who hits the ground first and the Jerry picked up the idea in no time.

"When we crossed the English coast the pilot ordered us to stand by for a crash-landing in case the landing gear had been hit. But it was OK, and, oh, boy, was I glad!

### Wounded but Carried On

Dvr Tottle said fighters attacked their plane as they approached the dropping zone. Cpl Hutchinson was wounded; but it didn't stop him seeing the dispatching done. They were again attacked as they left the DZ.; two cannon shells went through the machine and a third exploded inside, wounding the Corporal more severely. The plane was so badly damaged that they lost height the whole way over the Channel and then crash-landed soon after crossing the coast.

### The Old Brigade

Cpl Cooper, aged 49, and Cpl Hibbert, 46, were both in charge of dispatch crews. They complained of the flak, but both agreed with reassuring insistence that it wasn't a patch on the gunfire on the Somme in 1918.

### Over the Dropping Zone

Lt E.J. Younghusband told me that just after he and his No.2, Cpl Levy, released the first panniers an AA shell exploded in the open doorway. "The blast was terrific," he said. "It seemed a miracle that the old Dakota remained in one piece." Cpl Levy was wounded, but No. 3, LCpl. Taylor, took his place and they got all the panniers out plumb on the DZ They made the wounded man as comfortable as possible, and then set off for home.

The plane was a bit damaged and the pilot told them to prepare for a crash-landing; but, despite a puncture, all was well. "I saw Cpl Levy in hospital yesterday," Lt Younghusband told me "His arms were all in plaster, but he's doing fine."

### Wheeled to the Hospital

LCpl Jones and the RAF navigator were the only two to escape after an enemy fighter had attacked their plane over the dropping zone. Jones was severely wounded and on reaching the ground his parachute caught up in some branches and he was thrown heavily against a tree. When he regained consciousness he found himself in a wheelbarrow pushed by a Dutchman, who was led to hospital by two American soldiers.

As a happy conclusion, LCpl Jones is now recuperating in England.

### Drinks on the General

Cpl Conquest and the rest of the dispatch crew, LCpl Hammond and Dvrs Fiskin, R. C. Jones and Robinson, certainly seem to have bailed out amongst friends. They were directed by Polish troops to a British headquarters



and accompanied on their way by Dutch girls, who anxiously inquired if they were married. The headquarters were a General's, who sent for the Corporal and asked him where he'd come from. On hearing it was the Air Dispatch Group in ---shire, he said he'd been there on a visit only a few weeks back and told him to bring the rest of the crew in for a drink. I asked him what they had; and he told me that they stayed for a supper of captured German rations, which they washed down with two bottles of champagne, a bottle of red wine and a bottle of rum.

I asked him then if it was right that the General sent them into Brussels in a staff car after their meal. "No," he replied, "We had to stay the night!"

### Spitfire to the Rescue

Cpl Drake's story was one of intense flak. The plane was literally tossed about in the air and it was all that he and Dvrs. Ward and Mackindlay could do to dispatch their load. LCpl Simonds was wounded and only just saved from being flung out of the plane. Nearing the dropping zone they- all lay on the floor when attacked by a Focke-Wulf 190 and when he returned for a second attack they thought it was all up. A Spitfire got him in time, and the Focke-Wulf went down in flames.

### Crash Landing in Belgium

Cpl Iliffe said he hadn't got a story at all. They had a spot of bother and made a crash-landing. That was all there was to it. Dvrs Lawson, Keith and Yardley were with him, and the Belgians gave them a good time. One of them who came from "over the Border" said the evening cost him 70 francs and he "thought it a wee bit expensive."

### Saved by the Pilot

Cpl Batty, with Dvrs Andrew, James and Welter, saw the port engine hit and set on fire. By switching off the engine, the pilot got the fire out and managed to get the plane across the Channel. It took him more than an hour before he could land.

### A Delayed Drop

Behind LCpl Harrabin's story, lightly as he told it to me, I sensed a bigger story that was remaining a confidence between him and his friends, LCpls Moorcroft and Pilson and Dvr Everett. The order had been given to abandon the aircraft. German fighters were still about and Harrabin, the last to jump, decided to try a delayed drop, as several men the day before were known to have been shot up after baling out. He'd never made a drop before and told me he waited till trees and hedges looked fairly distinct and then pulled the ripcord. I asked him, rather stupidly, how he felt when it was all over. "Oh, all right," he said, "though I can remember feeling in my pockets to see if I'd dropped any money."

### Down the Roller Conveyor

Dvr Backler told me that they were attacked by fighters and set on fire, and said that when his turn came to bail out "I tried to get to the door to jump, but I couldn't get near the opening because the rubber dinghies were burning in the doorway. I did the only thing left and rolled myself out on to the roller runway along which we usually push out the supplies. I went out headfirst and dropped several hundred feet before I pulled the ripcord. I landed all right - just a little dazed. A crowd of Belgians collected around me. They seemed rather frightened at first, but when they knew I was English they came forward and gave me a great welcome.'

### Hitch-Hiking to Brussels

Dvr Lane said, "We were attacked soon after leaving the dropping zone by a Focke-Wulf which came up from underneath us, and as we had nothing to hit back with it wasn't long before the plane was completely out of control and on fire. We received the order to bail out. It was my first parachute jump and, believe me, there's really nothing in it. Our only fear was that we would be shot at while gliding down. We knew this had happened to several other chaps. We also knew that there were Germans in the woods underneath us and we seemed to glide down far too slowly.

"We'd hardly touched the ground when two members of the Dutch underground movement rushed out of the

woods, unbuckled our parachutes and hurried us off to a Dutch monastery about three miles away. The priests there fed us, and showed us where we could spend the night in safety. They told us that the schoolroom attached to the monastery had been used by the Germans as a billet.

"A party of nine of us, RAF and RASC, set off in the morning for Brussels. We hitchhiked all the way, and we reached Brussels after about ten hours. I'm mighty thankful to say that we had no casualties in the crew; and it was good to realise that one can still survive being shot down in flames with comparatively little discomfort."

Well, these are some of the stories as I was told them, by as good a crowd of chaps as ever I met. Between the lines, I believe you may be able to read the spirit that is there.

And, as a humble tribute from myself, I hope that when in happier circumstances I have the luck to meet any of them again they will remind me of the day I spent amongst them for the pint's on me!

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## News from the Branches

### Aldershot

Don Doherty

How is the branch doing since our last entry? This is usually the quiet time of the year but, ever the ones to buck the trend, we have been quite busy.

At the AGM/OGM in Coventry 2005 the members elected both the new Chairman, Mick Humphries and the new Membership Secretary, Billy Morris, from the Aldershot Branch, which has of course meant that every time we meet ideas fly round as if they are going out of fashion! Billy has also taken on the running of the AEA sports club and only recently he and Bob Chatterton took part in the Aldershot "Grim." This is a 'gentle' run of 8.5 miles over the tank tracks in which 2000 runners took part. You will be pleased and proud to know that Billy came 154th and Bob came 300th. Any of you members out there that may still feel like doing a bit of running please contact Billy or Bob for further details. You could of course just keep on taking the tablets!

On top of that we have had John Smith, Bob Sullivan, John Mason and Major John Shave MC. organising not only the trip to Normandy, (for which, by the time you read this, they will have been over and done a "recce" on our proposed itinerary) but are also arranging for a briefing session in May in Buller Barracks for all members attending. Certainly "big John" and his team are making sure that the support for the Normandy Veterans will be well worthy of Airborne Forces.

Then of course we had the "big one," the Annual Xmas Dinner, this took place in the Falcon Hotel Farnborough and was very well attended, we had excellent food but the service was not, unfortunately, of the same standard, with the coffee eventually being served in the early hours of the morning! Mind you we were still there to drink it, (along with other stuff of nearly the same colour! Days of old?) Our "raffle master extraordinaire" Wally Clift, with the help of some of the younger guests once again ran a superb raffle, taking what little money we had left after Xmas for the branch funds. (Dave needed an escort to the bank!).

Joe Stoddard, Billy Morris & Mick Humphries

All in all the branch is doing well at the moment with membership but not having a lot of luck with finding a new venue location for when eventually the SON leaves for places new. (Now if the "Rat Pit" was still in place!).

Serious discussion, Don Doherty & Mick Humphries

Those members out there that remember the old "Shot" and have not been back for a few years will no doubt be surprised to learn that places like the Cambridge Military Hospital, Rhine barracks, Buller barracks and all points north, south, east and west will be making way for just a few thousands of houses, (4,000) Whatever happened to the "Home of the British Army" (replies on a postcard to John Prescott and not to me - thank you!)

We look backward to a superb AGM at Coventry and forward to an even better time at Southampton, make sure you submit your booking application in plenty of time.

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## Chatham

Eric Blenkinsop

Following on from September 2005, the branch was well represented at Coventry and although we understand that the attendance was down, it did not detract from the ambience of the occasion and the joy of meeting up with good friends from bye gone days. So thank you once again Bunny and the lads from "Brum" who put on such an excellent weekend.

Congratulations from Chatham to our new Chairman and all other committee appointees, just keep the wheels in motion!

Following another excellent December Journal we wish to thank the chairman and all branches for the accolades directed to us Following the John Rock Day at Chatham. Our branch Christmas lunch on 11th December was once again a resounding success thanks to Bob & Pam Seaman. It was as is tradition very much a family occasion with the Woolley's (11) just edging it over the O' Connors (9) and the Gibson's pushing close with (7). It was a joy to see Granddad (Smokey) Gibson looking so sprightly again. Once again a few new kids on the block in the form of Colin Walker with Tracey, Mark Cunliffe and inevitably Mick & Pam Fisher who always share this day with us. We do hope that we shall see a little more of all of them during the year.

Steve Collins is striving diligently to improve our branch membership from the many ex 9 Sqn personnel residing in our catchment area.

Nick Gibson is busy refining the Airborne Engineer display in the RE Museum having replaced the high gloss wallboards with a "matt" less reflective finish. The display is now effectively finished but the Curator has allowed him to install a small display of model gliders and tug aircraft when they become available. Also to add an Airborne Folding Trolley (Para Bara) whenever one can be obtained. Can anybody help!

Our Christmas lunch will be held at the King Charles Hotel on Sunday 1 CM December and Bob & Pam Seaman will make an advance booking.

The Portraits - At the February branch meeting it was unanimously agreed that if there is to be a third portrait then it must portray a 6th Airborne Div RE person. There is of course no finer representative than the late 'Fergie' Semple whose record speaks for itself, as follows,

591 Para Sqn RE	1943- 45.
131 Para Eng Regt (TA)	1948-50, 1964-66.
9 Indep Para Sqn RE	1950-52, 1958-59.
16 Para Bde Gp Bde Major Director Special Air Service	1956 ?

Now that we are at long last part of this wonderful display of Royal Engineer achievements some members may be interested to learn of the proposed new developments of the museum as follows.

The creation of an open display in one of the Covered Slipways at the Historic Dockyard Chatham for the storage and display of large vehicle exhibits. This alongside HMS Gannet will provide a spectacular venue for fund raising events and will act as a large advertisement for the Museum itself.

The clearing of block 39 to allow model bridging displays from 1850 to the present day. Then the transfer of the library from within the barracks to the first floor of the Ravelin building. There are many more improvements in planning too numerous to mention just now.

Finally the Chatham branch have a group membership of FOREM (Friends of the RE Museum) and we would recommend that all branches would do well to follow suit. There is also a family membership at £15.00 for those who feel that they would like to support this magnificent museum. Enquiries to Robin Lloyd Owen Tel: 01634 373393.

Remember that as more space is created in the Ravelin building we may wish to display Airborne Engineer achievements in the Falklands and other battle zones. In 2005 there were 23,944 visitors/enquiries for the Museum and Library.

We all look forward now to the AGM and Southampton.

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## Yorkshire

Bill Rudd

Since our last submission in the December Journal our winter period has been quiet to say the least. We continue to hold our meetings in Queen Elizabeth Barracks, Strensall, we consider ourselves very fortunate to have the use of the Sgts Mess and overnight accommodation. Lunch is served and I ask all those Ex 9 who live within shooting distance who don't normally attend to make a big effort - free beds, free food, a pound a pint and most important good fun with your Airborne friends. Please make the effort to support your Local Branch.

Our Xmas Dinner was a big success with over fifty members plus ladies sat down and enjoyed the Xmas Fayre with much wine, in fact those with the staying power continued well on into the evening - a most enjoyable weekend.

Our future calendar looks to be a busy one, we will be holding our AGM on the 4TH March and in May; several members and wives are booked for Chris O' Donovan's Wales Weekend, including myself. The rumour is that Yorkie Davies will be climbing the big mountain!. Our Normandy trip is now confirmed for ferry bookings and accommodation and will be meeting up with our Dutch friends at Calais. It is also planned to meet John Smith and the Aldershot Branch members, as we'll all be co-located in Caen. John Parker will be in attendance with the Association Standard and he will endeavour to be in two places at once.

By the time this goes to print we will have held our Annual Dinner, to date we have 102 booked in, our guests for the evening will be the OC 51 Para Sqn Major Chris Warhurst and SSM Andy Perks accompanied by their ladies. We also look forward to hosting our AEA Chairman Mick Humphries and his wife Christine.

Finally, we extend many congratulations to Bob and Shelia Prosser on their 50th Wedding anniversary.

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## General Sir Anthony Farrar-Hockley (April 1924-March 2006)

General Sir Anthony Farrar-Hockley died at the age of 81 years in March of this year. Those who served under his command affectionately referred to him as Farrar "The Para."

He provided inspiring leadership in Korea at the battle of the Imjin River. In June 1950 North Korean forces crossed the 38th Parallel and invaded South Korea; by October Chinese "volunteers" had joined them. The UN Security Council resolved to go South Korea's assistance and American ground forces were ordered in, followed by a force Hong Kong and two months later the British 29th Infantry Brigade. Britain's main Commonwealth partners also pledged their forces and these formed the 1st Commonwealth Division.

Farrar-Hockley went to Korea in 1950 as adjutant of the 1st Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment. In April the following year 29 Brigade was holding the line along the Imjin with the Glosters defending the main river crossing, an ancient invasion route to Seoul. The battle began on April 22 and during its final phase; the 1st Battalion was concentrated on Hill 235 with "A" Company holding a long spur towards the west. On 24 April, at about midnight, the Chinese attacked "A" Company in great strength, pressing home the offensive for more than 10 hours. During the night the only two platoon commanders became casualties and by dawn the forward platoons had been driven back. The company was then concentrated on a knoll about 50 yds from battalion headquarters. Had it been captured the battalion's situation would have become untenable. It rapidly became clear that the one officer remaining with the company would require assistance to maintain the defence of this vital point. Farrar-Hockley volunteered for this dangerous task, and his impact on the desperate position the company was immediate. Trenches in which the defenders became casualties were re-manned and fire superiority was regained. The enemy working around the left flank were caught by grenades and small arms fire and were forced to fall back with heavy losses. Establishing themselves about 40 yards away, they attacked again and again but, each time were beaten off.

Farrar-Hockley was in one of the forward trenches encouraging his men and taking a leading part in the fierce close-quarter fighting. At the height of the battle, his order to the Drum Major, to counter the nerve-wracking blare of the Chinese assault trumpets, was to play snatches of British Army bugle calls.

When orders were received to abandon the position, Farrar-Hockley covered the withdrawal with fire and a smokescreen and he was one of the last to fall back. However, when the Chinese eventually overran the battalion's position, he was taken prisoner. The citation for the DSC awarded to him for his part in the battle reads: "Throughout this desperate engagement on which the ability of the Battalion to hold its position entirely depended, Captain Farrar-Hockley was an inspiration to the defenders. His outstanding gallantry, fighting spirit and great powers leadership heartened his men and welded them into an indomitable team. His conduct could not have been surpassed."

During the 2-years that he spent in POW camps he frustrated efforts of brainwashing by vigorously debating with his gaolers. He made six attempts to escape and on one occasion reached the Korean coast before he was recaptured. On another occasion he crawled and swam for seven hours along a riverbed, feigning death when spotted by enemy soldiers and survived the intense cold by wrapping himself in a blanket 'borrowed' from a dead mule. Following his recapture he was often subjected to torture or brutal interrogation. Farrar-Hockley was released after the Armistice was signed in July 1953 and was 'mentioned in dispatches' for his conduct as a prisoner of war.

A journalist's son, Anthony Heritage Farrar-Hockley was born at Coventry on 8 April 1924 and was educated at Exeter school. At the outbreak of WWII at the age of 15 years, he ran away from school and enlisted in the Gloucestershire Regiment, but he was found out and discharged. He re-enlisted in 1941 and was posted to the 70th Young Soldiers' Battalion. In 1942, after volunteering for parachute training, he was granted an emergency commission in the Parachute Regiment. At the age of 20 he was in command of a rifle company of the 6th Battalion and he won an MG during the Communist rebellion in Athens. He said afterwards that getting food through to the starving people of Thebes was one of the best things he ever did.

After serving in Palestine, he returned to the Glosters and went with them to Korea. Following his release from prisoner-of-war camp, he attended Staff College before rejoining the Airborne Forces, serving as brigade major

of 16 Parachute Brigade. He saw active service during this period in the EOKA campaign in Cyprus, the landings at Port Said in 1956 and the British intervention in Jordan in 1958.

The following year he became chief instructor at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, before taking command of the 3rd Bn Para Regt in Bahrain in 1962. The greatest feat of arms of his career was perhaps his battalion's capture in 1964 of the Arab Nationalist stronghold at Wadi Dhubsan deep in the Radfan mountains north of Aden.

The Battalion was called upon to undertake a difficult 10-mile advance into mountainous enemy territory and then attack a highly inaccessible and strongly defended rebel base. Helicopters were not available in sufficient numbers to permit an assault from the air, so his men roped themselves down the sheer sides of the flanking ridges and achieved complete surprise over the rebels in the gorge below.

During the hard fought battle, Farrar-Hockley's Scout helicopter was shot down beyond his own lines. With some difficulty, he rejoined his battalion and finding it pinned down, he launched a well-executed attack, which drove the enemy from their position. This action led to the submission of the dissident Radfani tribes and to the award of a Bar to his DSO.

After relinquishing command of 3 Para Bn in 1965 he went to the Far East to be Chief of Staff to the Director of Operations in Borneo where he helped to organise secret operations inside Indonesian territory which brought about the end of President Sukarno's 'Confrontation' with Malaysia.

Farrar-Hockley took command of 16 Parachute Brigade in 1966, and in 1969 went to Exeter College, Oxford, on a Defence Fellowship. He carried out research into the effects of national service on British society; after a poll of 2,000, he reported that 84% said they would welcome a return to conscription. He admitted however, that there was a strong political bias against a compulsory call-up and that the Services did not want conscription.

After a 4-month tour as Director of Army Public Relations, he was promoted to Major General and posted to Belfast as Commander Land Forces. Urban rioting and terrorism were rising, and he was the first senior officer to acknowledge publicly that the IRA was behind the violence. Although he left Ulster well before "Bloody Sunday," his unremitting campaign against the IRA and his close association with the Parachute Regiment made him a prime target. In 1971 he took command of the 4th Armoured Division in BAOR before moving to the Ministry of Defence in 1974; his innovative thinking and operational experience were given full scope as Director of Combat Development (Army).

He was promoted to Lieutenant General in 1977 on his appointment as GOC South East District, and was knighted in the Birthday Honours of that year. In 1979 he moved to Oslo to take up his final military appointment as NATO's C-in-C Allied Forces Northern Europe.

After retiring from the Army in 1982 he acted as a defence consultant and spent much of his time writing. His publications included: 'The Edge of the Sword' (1954), an account of his experiences in the Korean War, 'The Somme' (1964), and 'Goughie' (1975), a well-reviewed biography of General Sir Hubert Gough, the commander of the ill-fated Fifth Army in 1918.

He joined the Cabinet Office's historical section to write the official history of the Korean War in two volumes, 'A Distant Obligation' (1990), and 'An Honourable Discharge' (1995). He also wrote many articles in newspapers, periodicals and journals.

Even in retirement to a village in Oxfordshire, the IRA remained a threat. In 1990 a bomb was attached to the reel of his garden hose, but was spotted by his gardener and defused. "I keep my eyes open," said Farrar-Hockley, "and I don't much care for people who place explosive devices in my garden."

Farrar-Hockley was a man of boundless energy with an infectious enthusiasm for soldiering. A lucid, forceful speaker his pugnacious face appeared regularly on television commenting on military events or terrorist incidents affecting the Army.



In response to new evidence that emerged in successive enquiries into “Bloody Sunday,” when 13 Catholics were shot dead during a civil rights’ march in Londonderry in 1972, he robustly defended the role of the Parachute Regiment: “It is all part of a long-running public relations exercise”, he told the BBC, “to persuade people that soldiers were all murderers and nothing wrong was done by the people on the other side”. He voiced strong concerns following the ruling by the judges sitting on the Saville Tribunal that the former Paras could not rely on being granted anonymity.

He was also an outspoken opponent of the European Court of Human Rights ruling that the British Armed Forces were obliged to permit avowed homosexuals to enlist. He maintained that the military was a unique institution which should be allowed to run its own affairs, and that the concession would damage moral and discipline.

Farrar-Hockley was ADC General to the Queen from 1981 to 1983, Colonel Commandant to the Prince of Wales Division (1974-1980) and the Parachute Regiment (1977-1983), and Colonel of the Gloucestershire Regiment from 1978 to 1984. He was appointed GBE in 1981.

Tony Farrar-Hockley married first, in 1945, Margaret Wells; she died in 1981. He married secondly, in 1983, Linda Wood, who survives him with two sons (one son predeceased him) of his first marriage; the eldest, Major-General Dair Farrar-Hockley, followed his father into the Parachute Regiment and was awarded the MC in the Falklands War.

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## Airborne Sapper Portrait Fund

Sitrep as at 16 March 2006

Brigadier (Retd) J. Hooper

Total income to date: £5,180      Target is: £7,500

Contributions ranging from £10 to £750 have been received from individuals and from the Birmingham and South West branches of the AEA.

The Corps - CO 23 Engr Regt (Air Assault) has put in a case for the Corps pound for pound match to our contribution.

Progress - The portrait of Johnny Humphrey is complete but Richard Wills is not entirely happy with the frame, which he will change. Richard is well advanced with the portrait of Eric Mackay, as there has been significant financial support for a portrait of Eric. There has been a lot of support for Fergie Semple. Fergie would fit the bill well as he was 6 AB Div (as opposed to Johnny and Eric who were 1 AB Div) and further he was well known to the younger generation of Airborne Sappers. Honker Henniker, who has also been suggested, was again, of course, 1 AB Div and probably not as well known to the younger members.

There has been one suggestion that there should be a portrait of a soldier as opposed to an officer although, of course, Johnny Humphrey started off in the ranks as, indeed, did many other officers. No name was suggested as to who it might be nor was there any cash to support such a view. I would appreciate any views on the portraits or a painting of an operation. It will be too late when brush has been applied to canvas so, as they say, "Let's be having you" Any suggestions will be welcomed. Preferably on the back of very large cheques! Money talks.

Acknowledgements - I am pretty sure I have written to acknowledge all contributions but if I have inadvertently failed to acknowledge a contribution, please let me know John Hooper [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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## Brigadier "Speedy" Hill

Outstanding commander of airborne forces on D-day was awarded an MC and three DSOs

Brigadier "Speedy" Hill MC, DSO\*\* died in March aged 95, won an MC and three DSOs as a commander of airborne forces during the Second World War.

In 1942 Hill took command of the 1st Battalion, Parachute Regiment, which was dropped at Souk El Arba, deep behind enemy lines in Tunisia. His orders were to secure the plain so that it could be used as a landing strip and then to take Beja, the road and rail centre 40 miles to the northeast, in order to persuade the French garrison to fight on the Allied side.

To impress the French commander with the size of his unit, Hill marched the battalion through the town twice, first wearing helmets and then changing to berets. The Germans, hearing reports that a considerable British force had occupied Beja, responded by bombing the town.

On learning that a mixed force of Germans and Italians, equipped with a few tanks, was located at a feature called Gue, Hill put in a night attack. But a grenade in a sapper's sandbag exploded, setting off others, and there were heavy casualties when the element of surprise was lost.

Two companies carried out an immediate assault while Hill, with a small group, approached three light tanks. He put the barrel of his revolver through the observation port of the first tank and fired a single round. The Italian crew surrendered at once. He banged his thumbstick on the turret of the second tank, with the same result.

But when he used the method on the third tank, the German crew emerged, firing their weapons and throwing grenades. They were dealt with in short order, though Hill took three bullets in the chest. He was rushed to Beja, where Captain Robb of the 16th Parachute Field Ambulance operated on him and saved his life.

The citation for Hill's first DSO paid tribute to the brilliant handling of his force and his complete disregard of personal danger. The French recognised his gallantry with the award of the Legion d'Honneur.

Stanley James Ledger Hill, the son of Major-General Walter Hill, was born at Bath

On 14. March 1911. Young James went to Marlborough where he was head of the OTC, and then won the Sword of Honour and became captain of athletics at Sandhurst.

Nicknamed "Speedy" because of the long strides he took as a tall man, he was commissioned in the Royal Fusiliers, with whom he served with the 2nd Battalion, and ran the regimental athletic and boxing teams.

In 1936 he left the Army to get married, and for the next 3 years worked in the family ferry company. On the outbreak of war he rejoined his regiment and left for France in command of 2RF's advance party. He led a platoon on the Maginot Line for two months before being posted to AHQ as a staff captain. In May 1940 he was a member of Field Marshal Viscount Gort's command post, playing a leading part in the civilian evacuation of Brussels and La Panne beach during the final phase of the withdrawal. He returned to Dover in the last destroyer to leave Dunkirk and was awarded an MC.

Following promotion to major and a posting to Northern Ireland as DAAG, Hill was dispatched to Dublin to plan the evacuation of British nationals in the event of enemy landings. He booked into the Gresham Hotel, where several Germans were staying at the time.

Hill was one of the first to join the Parachute Regiment and after being wounded in Tunisia in 1942, he was evacuated to England. Although forbidden to take exercise in hospital, he used to climb out of his window at night to stroll around the gardens. Seven weeks later, he declared himself fit and, in December, he converted the 10th Battalion, Essex Regiment, to the 9th Parachute Battalion. In April the following year, Hill took command of 3rd Parachute Brigade, consisting of the 8th and 9th Parachute Battalions and the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion, which he commanded on D-Day as part of the 6th Airborne Division.

Given the task of destroying the battery at Merville and blowing bridges over the River Dives to prevent the enemy bringing in reinforcements from the east, he completed the briefing of his officers with the warning, "Gentlemen, in spite of your excellent training and orders, do not be daunted if chaos reigns. It undoubtedly will."

Things began to go wrong straight away. Many of the beacons for marking the dropping zones were lost, and several of the aircraft were hit or experienced technical problems. Hill landed in the River Dives near Cabourg, some three miles from the dropping zone, and it took him several hours to reach dry land. The terrain was crisscrossed with deep irrigation ditches in which some of his men, weighed down by equipment, drowned.

Since he did not trust radio, he kept in touch by driving around on a motorcycle, periodically being found directing traffic at crossroads by his advancing men. Near Sallenelles, Hill and a group of men of the 9th Parachute Battalion were accidentally bombed by Allied aircraft; 17 men were killed. Hill was injured but, after giving morphine to the wounded, he reported to his divisional commander, who confirmed that the battery at Merville had been captured after a ferocious fight, and that Hill's brigade had achieved all its objectives.

Hill underwent surgery that afternoon, but refused to be evacuated and set up his headquarters at La Mesnil. Under his leadership, three weak parachute battalions held the key strategic ridge from Chateau St Come to the outskirts of Troarn against repeated attacks from the German 346th Division.

On June 10 the 5th Battalion, Black Watch, was put under Hill's command. Two days later, when the 9th Parachute Battalion called for urgent reinforcements, Hill led a company of Canadian parachutists in a daring counter-attack.

The 12th Parachute Battalion took Breville, the pivotal position from which 346th Division launched their attacks on the ridge, albeit at great cost. Hill said afterwards that the enemy had sustained considerable losses of men and equipment and a great defensive victory had been won.

He was awarded a Bar to his DSO.

The 3rd Parachute Brigade returned to England in September but three months later it was back on the front line, covering the crossings of the River Meuse. In the difficult conditions of the Ardennes and in organising offensive patrolling across the River Maas, Hill's enthusiasm was a constant inspiration to his men.

In March 1945 Hill commanded the brigade in Operation Varsity, the battle of the Rhine Crossing, before pushing on to Wismar on the Baltic, arriving on 2 May, hours before the Russians.

He was wounded in action three times. He was awarded a second Bar to his DSO, and the American Silver Star.

Hill was appointed military governor of Copenhagen in May and was awarded the King Haakon VII Liberty Cross for his services. He commanded and demobilised the 1st Parachute Brigade before retiring from the Army in July in the rank of brigadier.



He was closely involved in the formation of the Parachute Regiment Association and, in 1947; he raised and commanded the 4th Parachute Brigade (TA).

He was for many years a trustee of the Airborne Forces Security Fund and a member of the regimental council of the Parachute Regiment. In June 2004, he attended the 60th Anniversary of the Normandy landings. A life-size bronze statue of him with his thumbstick, sited at Le Mesnil crossroads, the central point of the 3rd Parachute Brigade's defensive position on D-Day, was unveiled by the Prince of Wales, Colonel-in-Chief of the Parachute Regiment.

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## The War & Peace Show

19th - 23rd July 2006 Beltring, Paddock Wood, Kent

The World's largest military vehicles and collectors fair. 3,500+ military vehicles on display, tanks, jeeps, ferrets, champs, weapons, explosions, living history reenactors, huge arena events, 1940s fashion, 1000+ stalls, world war two memorabilia, military models, 1940s history, fun and more!

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Entry Fee: Friday, Saturday or Sunday (21st, 22nd or 23rd July) £13-00 person or £11 -00 for senior citizens

For all queries and questions regarding the War and Peace Show, including booking in and payment queries, contact Barbara Dixon or Rex Cadman at the War and Peace Office:

The War and Peace Team, The Old Rectory, Sandwich Rd, Ash, Nr Canterbury, Kent CT3 2AF

Tel: +44 (0) 1304 813945 Fax: +44 (0) 1304 812422 E-mail: [rex@warandpeace.uk.com](mailto:rex@warandpeace.uk.com)

Or log on to: <http://www.thewarandpeaceshow.com>

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## My Early Life

by 4T2

I thought some of the readers would like to know why I grew to become a little strange which made me an ideal candidate for the Parachute Engineers, i.e. no one else would have me!! . I hope the following brief summary below will help you to understand some of my problems.

My family were in Iron and Steel, my mother ironed and my father stole. My siblings and I were born before our time - we were all premature. Our birth came as a surprise to our mother and everyone else in the 'Red Lion Pub.'

There were seven of us at birth and we were so ugly that the doctor slapped my mother's face. Shortly after our birth the midwife drowned my brothers and sisters. However I managed to crawl out the fire bucket and hid unnoticed in a shoe box.

The midwife was later awarded the MBE for services rendered to humanity. She was however, censured for not drowning me.

It was during the depression and life was tough and we lived in a cardboard box on the central reservation of the A1. We were evicted when they widened the road and I was abandoned on a doorstep. I wasn't found there, the door opened outwards. I ended up two somersaults into the road. There was a note pinned to my shawl, it read, 'don't forget to duck Peter, the door opens outwards, Love Mum.'

It was then I was introduced to my stepparents. I knew they were stepparents because every chance they got they stepped on my feet.

My first lesson in obedience came when I was just four years old. 'Mummy, Mummy, I cried, 'it's too hot in here.' 'Shut up,' she snarled. 'And get back in that Microwave.' I well-remembered being taught, 'Ring a Ring a Roses.'

'Mummy, Mummy' I said, I'm tired of running around in circles.' 'Shut up,' she snarled, 'Or I'll nail your other foot to the floor.'

I knew I was an ugly boy - I was the only one in the district given sweeties by dirty old men to get me out their car.

My Father was very keen on fitness training. (He Was Ex 9 Squadron) He insisted that I walk two miles every day. After a fortnight I was picked up by the Police twenty eight miles from home. After that my father used to take me all over the country but I always managed to find my way home. He used to get very angry I think he thought I was taking too long to get home. I think he thought my map reading was crap.

He taught to swim when he threw me off the end of Southend pier. The swimming part wasn't too bad. It was getting the chains off my feet and clawing my way out of the canvas bag that was difficult. Then it was fairly straight forward.

The teacher asked me why I was not at school last Tuesday I said I had to take the bull to service the cow. She said surely that's something your step father should do. I said no it had to be the bull.

I remembered being chastised at school, the Teacher said, 'If I have three apples in my left hand and four in my right hand what have I got? Quick as a flash I replied 'Please Miss - Bloody big hands.' I got the cane for that but I still think my answer was correct.

The following week the teacher came in and I immediately asked. 'Teacher is it fair to punish people for something they haven't done.' 'Certainly not!' She replied indignantly. 'Good!' I said smugly, 'because I haven't done my homework.' Another clip round the ear.

I think I was unpopular with the other children because I was teacher's pet - I was kept in a metal cage at the back of the classroom.

I remember asking my foster parents how my step mother knew the exact time and day she was going to die. 'The judge told her,' said my foster father.

I studied to join the Dartford Naval School and if I failed; I intended to try the RAF School at Holton and naturally ended up joining the Army Apprentice School.

Prior to being enlisted I had to sit a psychological profile test. This was given by a nice old lady. 'First question,' she smirked. 'What is it that men do standing up, ladies do sitting down and dogs do standing on three legs? I thought for a bit and said, 'shake hands. 'Well done! Quite correct,' she gushed. 'Next question;' 'What is it that dogs do in the garden and people hate treading in?'

I thought hard on this one and replied. 'They dig holes.'

'Well done - you've scored 100%' she acknowledges. 'Mind you, you'd never believe some of the strange answers we get off those Sappers joining 9 Para Squadron

During my three years in boy's service I learn many strange and wonderful things - all sorts of snippets were passed on to me. Prior to boy's service.

I thought a tooth fairy was a Gay dentist, that thought Joan of Arc was Noah's wife, a Penal Colony was an all-male nudist camp, a cross section of the public were taxpayers . I believed that a Brassiere was something you warmed your hands on. (After I had joined 9 Squadron I found that it was something you could warm your hands on). I thought an aperitif was a set of dentures, that polyunsaturated was Parrot in a rain coat. A Chou En-lai was Chinese for breakfast in bed. That a bigamist was Italian for a fog and that a Norwegian fjord was a Scandinavian car. I also thought that Polygon was a dead Parrot, that dilate was the opposite of die early. I thought a crowbar was where all the old women hang out and that a friend in need is a pest indeed. That a faucet was if you turned the tap off too hard, and I honestly thought that Fastidious was a girl who was fast and hideous.

The first time I walked into the 9 Squadron's Corporals Mess and asked the bar man whether they served women at the bar, he replied. 'No you've got to bring your own.' Knowing the habit within the Squadron to quaff any beer left unattended. I went to the toilet and left a note saying, 'please note; I have spat in this beer.' When I returned the beer was still there but with an addendum saying, 'so have I!'

I remember a dance at the Gym in 4 Regt I had this large torch in my pocket - I asked this girl to dance; after five minutes I suggested we go outside for a spell - she quickly agreed. We went outside and I took the torch out my pocket looking for a suitable nesting abode when she asked me if I'd been dancing with the torch in my pocket and I said yes. She turned round and gave me a funny look and said, 'Ah well - lets go back inside.' I was never able to work out why.

Just before we got married we bought a dog from the, 'Strays home' called Sex. I went down to the Town Hall to register him I said to the Clerk, 'I would like a licence for Sex.' He said, 'I wouldn't mind one myself.' When we were getting married I asked the vicar if we could have Sex at the wedding. He said okay so long as it didn't interrupt the ceremony for too long. When I booked the honeymoon hotel I said I needed a room big enough to accommodate Sex. The receptionist said they all were.

My wife and I were always fighting over Sex so we went to arbitration. I told the judge that I'd had Sex before the marriage. He replied, 'didn't we all.' The next week Sex slipped his lead and I went looking for him in the Park when a Policeman asked me what I was looking for and I replied, 'Sex.' He wheeled me up before the local court.

Just prior to the divorce I was driving home from a mess function when a cop car made us pull over. 'You were speeding in a restricted zone; we clocked you at 45mph'. Snarled the cop. 'No I wasn't,' I argued. 'Yes you were,' he replied.

The arguing went on for some time when my wife turned round to the Cop and said, 'Pay no attention to him officer he's always argumentative after he's been drinking.' Whilst being prosecuted the judge turned to me and said, 'have you ever been cross examined before?' I replied, 'yes your honour, I'm still a married man.'



After listening to the evidence the judge said, 'I can't understand how you could have done this? - It must have been the drink.' 'Not to worry judge - I'll come back when you're sober,' I replied.

One day whilst contemplating the world's burgeoning population, I said to my wife, 'Do you realise that every time I breathe out, somewhere in the world a person dies. Quick as a flash she replied. 'Have tried having a mouth wash?'

My mother-in-law considered me effeminate - I supposed to compared to her I was. Mind you after three years I finally formed an attachment for my Mother-in-law. It fitted over her mouth.

During the divorce preceding the Judge turned round to me and said. 'I have decided to award your wife one hundred pounds a month.' I nodded my head in agreement and said. 'That's real decent of you judge I'll throw in a couple of quid myself.'

When we visited Canada we watch an initiating ceremony for the North West Canadian Mounted Police. It consisted of the candidate drinking a whole bottle of whisky in ten minutes, then going out making love to an Indian Squaw and finally shooting a Grizzly Bear. Our young troop officer asked if he could have a go at the Initiation test. 'Yep' cried the Mountie Inspector. 'Here's your whisky - down it in ten minutes.' The young officer did this and off he went. He returned about one hour later. He was covered in slashes and bruises; blood dripping from numerous cuts; his clothes were shredded to ribbons. He stood up manfully and slurred, 'right! where's this Squaw I've got to shoot?'

I said to Paddy who shared a room with me. 'How many fags to you smoke a day?' He coughs. 'Any given amount.' 'But why smoke so many,' I queried, He shrugged his shoulders and said, 'apart from jumping to conclusions, and wrestling with my conscience, coughing is the only exercise I get.' I then showed him the notice which read. 'Cancer can cure smoking.'

We went to the Sergeants Mess of 3 Para and I remember reading a notice above the bar which read. 'The water in this Mess is fit for drinking. It's recently been passed by the RSM.' I still thought it tasted a bit queer. One of the girls asked the Mess Manager if he had any Talcum Powder. He beckoned her follow and said, 'please walk this way my dear.' She gave a depreciative shrug of her shoulders and replied. 'If I could walk that way I wouldn't need the talcum Powder.'

It was about this time I got a letter from my mother saying how disappointed she was that I was serving with the Parachute Engineers. She thought I was with an International Gang smuggling dope out of Bangkok. She was fair affronted.

During the Canal Zone period we had an ENSA show to entertain the troops. The spokesman said to the girls, 'after the show would you prefer to Mess with the Officers or the senior NCOs? One of the attractive blondes relied, 'it's all the same to us - but could we have something to eat and drink first. I managed to get one of the attractive blondes outside by herself and thought it wise to get a few drinks into her, and asked. 'Do you fancy a Harvey Wallbanger?' 'I'd love one,' She cooed. 'But could I have something to drink first?'

I remember a week after our return to the UK Jock storming into the Mess complaining that his wife was eight month pregnant. He told the Doctor that this was impossible as he'd been in the Canal Zone for the past three years. Apparently the doctor told him it was a, 'Grudge Pregnancy.' When he asked the Doctor' what that was he replied, 'someone on the rear party had had it in for you.'

By now my strange persona was making me somewhat unpopular with the rest of the Squadron. I turned round to my Troop Commander one day; (I think it was John Hooper) and asked. 'Sir - why does everyone take an instant dislike to me?' 'Because it saves time,' he smirked.

It was about this time that I had a windfall on the lottery and decided to have a Safari holiday mixed with business trying to capture young gorillas for Zoos. The big white hunter was not keen at first, (He had recently become a 'Tree Hugger'). He finally agreed but wanted no argument about the cost of the expedition. We finally set off; a strange procession; leading was the big white hunter, then me, followed by a strapping great Zulu, next came a dwarf with a shot gun leading a bloody great Pit Bull Terrier and then six porters.

The procedure was this: We corralled a young Gorilla up a tree; the strapping Zulu climbed up the tree and shook it until the young Gorilla could no longer hold on and fell out. Whereupon the Pit Bull Terrier rushed over and bit the Gorilla in the groin, the pain of having its 'nether regions' bitten by the Bull Terrier was so traumatic that it caused the gorilla to collapse into cationic shock. The Gorilla was quickly rolled up in a net and then shoved into a cage. This went on for three days but I was getting annoyed at what I considered unnecessary expense. 'Why do we need the Dwarf with the shot gun I complained? He doesn't do anything.' The big white hunter was not amused, 'it was agreed that there would be no arguing about expense and that's an end to the matter,' he snarled. The next day we corralled a much bigger Gorilla up a tree. The Zulu shook the tree with all his effort. The young Gorilla shook even harder. Suddenly the Zulu could no longer hold on and fell out the tree. As he was falling he screamed to the Dwarf, 'quick! shoot the dog!! - shoot the dog!!'

During my discharge medical the Doctor asked me. 'How often do you have sex?' I looked a little non-plus at first and then replied, 'infrequently.' He looked a little puzzled and then said. 'Is that one word or two?' 'Two,' I lied. 'Okay,' he continued. 'When did you last have sex?' I didn't have to think on that one for too long. '1950' I replied. 'My god!! That was a long time ago,' he croaked. I looked at my watch and replied. 'What do mean,' I said. 'It's only 2030hrs now' (Please note; that some husbands may have to explain the intricacy of the twenty four hour clock to their brides).

My last contact with a military Doctor was when I explained to him that I had the appetite of a horse and could he do something for me. He looked puzzled and said, 'It's not unusual for young men of your age to have a large appetite.'

'Ah - yes,' I replied, 'but I'm eating a bale of hay every night

for my supper. He gave me another queer look, pulled out a paper pad and started writing. 'Is that a prescription that will cure me?' I asked. 'No,' he replied. 'This is a licence that will allow you to defecate in the street.' He then sent me to a psychiatrist for examination. I knocked on the Doctors door, walked in and said to him. 'Doctor I think I'm going invisible.' 'Sorry,' he replied. 'I can't see you now'

So although I shall probably be at the next AGM, the chances are that you won't be able to see me.

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## Can you Help in my Search

My grandfather, Staff Sgt Len Pember (Glider Pilot Regt), took part in Operation 'Market,' as 1st pilot of a Horsa glider carrying men and equipment of 9th Airborne Field Coy RE. His glider took off at 1030hrs on Sunday 17th September 1944 from RAF Keevil. It carried a jeep, 2 trailers, 3 motorcycles, and 5 troops of 9th Fid Coy RE. In fact, it was the only glider to carry a jeep and two trailers for 9th Field Coy RE.

According to his 2nd pilot, Sgt Len Affolter:

"Our landing took place at 13h40 and the atmosphere was most peaceful, which was just as well as the tail of the glider took us much longer to detach, instead of the couple of minutes or so it took us around twenty. We travelled on the trailers until we saw some familiar faces and joined them. Our only passengers were from the Royal Engineers we saw them setting off for the bridge at Arnhem, but whether they made it or not we never knew."

I am now doing research on the service career of my grandfather and I would very much like to find out about the "5 troops" from 9th Field Coy RE carried by my grandfather's glider. To this end, I am going through a process of elimination to figure out who the troops were. By piecing together all available information, I hope to be able to narrow down the platoon from which the "5 troops" would have been and ultimately their names.

With this in mind, I would be most grateful if you could share with me:

Information about the load of your glider: Who travelled with you by glider and with what equipment?

Any information about the loads of other gliders: Do you know who travelled together in any of the other gliders and with what equipment?

Memories or photos of the preparations for Operation 'Market' at RAF Keevil (including briefing, loading gliders, etc.) and of the 1st lift itself.

Please contact me:

Douglas Reed, c/o [REDACTED] or e-mail [REDACTED], or phone Fred Gray in the UK at [REDACTED]

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NATO competition based in Pau, France 1964

L to R: Mick Turner, Capt Mike Little, Ron Bloome, Lt Hendy, Dave Rutter, Bob Vary, Chris Chambers,  
Fred Robson and French dispatcher

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## Membership Report

Steve "Billy" Morris MSM-Membership Secretary

It has been a positive start to my new appointment since taking the reins from Chris Chambers. New members are discovering our existence through the web site and by the ranches spreading the word on the grape vine. I know for a fact that there are former Royal Engineer Airborne warriors who are still not members of the AEA and they will be getting a call from me soon. I will be taking application forms to the Army v Navy rugby game this year, so if you spot any potential new members shove them my way.

We welcome to the "Airborne Engineers Association" the following new members: Please note change of e-mail address: [REDACTED]

Jim Neal	9 Para Sqn RE/ HDF	1990-95-Still Serving
Patrick (Pat) Neal	9 Para Sqn RE	1969-82/19 84-87
James Campbell	3 Para Sqn RE	1943-46
Michael John Burton Lt	9 Para Sqn RE	2003-Still Serving
Ross Stewart Wendover Lt	9 Para Sqn RE	2005-Still Serving
Huw Morris Roberts Lt	9 Para Sqn RE	2005-Still Serving
Adrian Thomas Campbell	9 Para Sqn RE/49 EOD	1989-96/200-04
Zak Needham	49 EOD/ 9 Para Sqn RE2	1994-97 / 98-Still Serving
James Lee Stacey	9 Para Sqn RE	1998-Still Serving
James Thomas	9 Para Sqn RE	2003 - Still Serving
Thomas Antony Austin	9 Para Sqn RE	1982-June 87
Carson Beattie	9 Indep Para Sqn RE	19 60-62
George Kirkwood Moreland	591 Para Sqn	1958-1961



Davy Jones, Jeff Strickleton & Ken Mason - May 2005



Baz Henderson, Yorkie Davies, Bof Harrop, Davy Jones, Ken Mason & Pete Guerin - May 2005 Typically located in the close proximity of a pub!



Snowy Adams, Louis Gallagher, Bof Harrop & Dave Grimbley - May 2005

## Association Shop

Ray Coleman

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

Would overseas members please send cheques in £ pounds sterling, with a little extra to cover postage, from your local bank or an international money order from the Post Office. Cheques should be made payable to:

"Airborne Engineers Association"

Please note that all shop orders should now be sent to:

Ray Coleman

Tel:

E-Mail:

