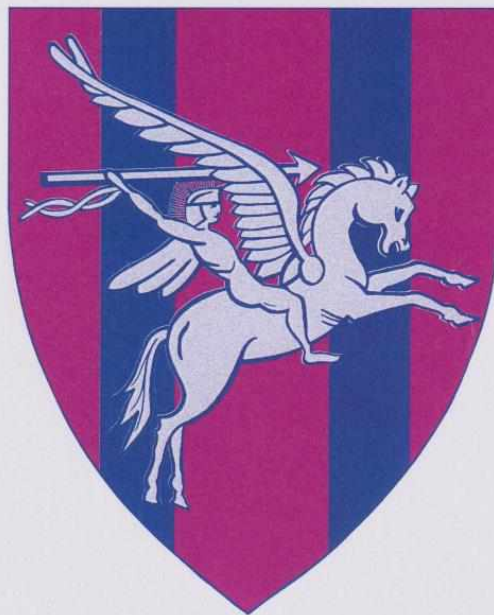




THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS JOURNAL



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Airborne Engineers Association



June 2020 Issue No. 54

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President's Update

John Lee – President

This year has been an eventful one, especially with one of the wettest winters recorded causing an enormous amount of damage and then followed by the Corona Virus pandemic, which has affected all aspects of life throughout the world.

This pandemic has had a huge effect on everyday life and the resulting restrictions of lockdown and social distancing have of course curtailed all normal activities. This has resulted in all formal Association and Branch activities being stopped for the foreseeable future, including the AEA Annual General Meeting and Gala Dinner, which was to have been held in Harrogate this year, courtesy of the Yorkshire Branch.

The decision to cancel this event was not taken lightly by the Executive Council, but in view of the uncertainty of when the restrictions will be lifted and the well-being of our members' at large gatherings, the Council considered in the circumstances this to be the best course of action. Hopefully, some of the current restrictions will be eased somewhat in the not too distant future and we can all return to some form of normality.

The ramifications of the pandemic have of course had a huge effect on the various commemorations held during the summer with many events being cancelled and the likelihood of the curtailment of others until the end of the year.

There has however, been one positive aspect from the lockdown and that is with modern technology virtual contact is now possible and the Executive Council are planning to hold a full meeting using these means in the near future. Preliminary meetings have been held between some Council members, and I am aware of other branches looking into these means of maintaining contact.

I feel that in these times we should do all we can to maintain contact with our members and the association is there to help should the occasion arise. With these thoughts I will now close and wish all members and their families my best wishes for the future and hope the current situation will soon be resolved.

Stay safe

Chairman's Update

Steve Wallis

Hello to you all, I hope that you and your families are keeping well in these troubling times.

It is just over a year since I was elected to the Post of Chairman of the Airborne Engineers Association, and what a year it has been. There have been many highlights, including Chairing my first AGM in Banbury, attending many of the annual memorial services, Melanie and I being invited to the Chatham Branch Christmas Lunch and the launch of the new Wales and West branch of the Association.

The AGM brought home to me the depth of the Association and the many activities in which it is involved. It was especially pleasing to see the number of serving Airborne Soldiers who attended the Gala Dinner.

In November I was proud to present the AEA wreath at the annual service of remembrance at the Cenotaph in London. We had 29 marching, the highest representation the Association has had, and we met with many more friends at the 'Sherlock' following the event. This year I have applied for 36 tickets, more in hope than expectation. I am hoping that this event will be spared, but it is looking doubtful as the Royal British Legion are considering cancelling the event.

At the Chatham Branch Christmas lunch, I was asked to make a speech following the meal. As a theme I chose 'What is the AEA'. I was able to recall stories involving many members present who I have known for most of my Adult Life. My conclusion was that the AEA is an association of Friends that is tasked with keeping alive the memories of Airborne Engineers and sharing them with today's generation, what they are we once were, what we are they will become!

Melanie and I were especially pleased to attend the second meeting of the New Wales and West Branch in Hereford in January. Over 50 members attended the meeting, most with 'Hereford Accents'. The aspiration was to have had a formal branch launch at Monmouth Castle in April which sadly did not take place. Congratulations go to Gus Hales, Mick Leather and Gerry Bonner for their efforts in getting the branch up and running.

As you will have heard, the Executive Council have taken the decision to cancel this year's AGM and Gala Dinner in Harrogate. This was an extremely hard decision to take but we had to consider the health and well-being of the Association Members many of whom are in high risk groups. The intention is that the Yorkshire Branch will now host the AGM in Harrogate in 2021 followed by Birmingham in 2022 and Wales and West in 2023.

It only remains for me to wish you all well and to Stay Safe.

Rogues Gallery



Cas Casterton, Louis RIP, Bing Crosbie & Snowy Adams



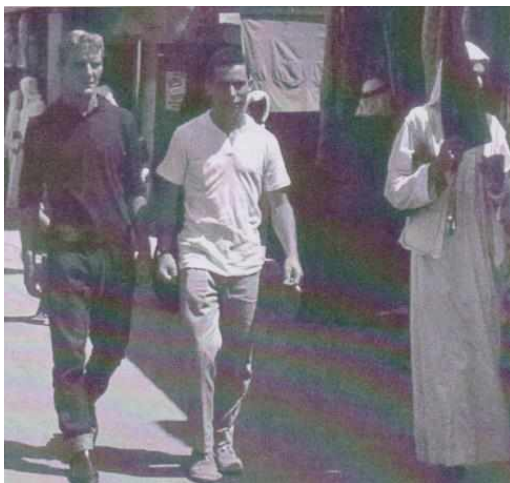
Bob Varey & Joe "Wally" Wallace – November 2019



Don Urquhart & 'Atu' Laqeretabua – Bahrain 1965



Peter Bates, Bob Ferguson & Tom Ormiston
AEA AGM - October 2004



John Fleet & Chris Read – Manama, Bahrain 1965



Ron Day & John Elliot – Taken several years ago at an
AGM/Reunion

4 Troop 9 Parachute Squadron 1982

(Trevor Stimpson - 3 Tp, 20 Fd Sqn, 36 Engr Regt AKA 4 Tp 9 Para Sqn RE)

Everyone knows that the Argentinians invaded the Falkland Islands on 2nd April 1982. Many people remember the speed with which a Naval Task Force was sent South to exercise a bit of *gunboat diplomacy*. Some people remember that, after a couple of Royal Navy ships were sunk, suddenly the whole thing wasn't going to be that easy. Those who were more closely involved will know that more Infantry were required than the Commando Brigade (already reinforced by 3 PARA) could supply so, on 26th April, 2 PARA was crammed into a North Sea ferry, *MV Norland*, and despatched South. With it went 2 Troop 9 Para Squadron, leaving a much-depleted Squadron champing at the bit.

In 3 Troop, 20 Field Squadron we merrily carried on as normal in Maidstone and watched with interest the unfolding events. Our primary role was Home Defence. All these Expeditionary Force shenanigans wouldn't affect us, would they? Wrong!

Out of the Blue, on 26th April, 2 Troop had hardly left Portsmouth when we were informed that we were being transferred to 9 Para Squadron as a replacement field troop. OMG! It was bad enough being stood up for war but being told to fall in alongside the red-bereted, supremely-fit-and-proud-of-it, God's gift to the Corps, was, to say the least, daunting. One of our section commanders, Andy McIlvenny and a few others had served alongside 9 Para Squadron before, for a tour in Northern Ireland. His advice was to "keep your heads down, don't make waves and let your results speak for you", wise words.

In the next couple of weeks we trucked to Sennybridge, dashed about like mad things doing refresher training, learning to work with 'our' infantry (The Welsh Guards) and packing kit. Before we knew it we were on the QE2 and sailing South with the rest of 5 Infantry Brigade. Talk about frantic! And things did not slow down on the ship. Training, more training and PT (that was a shock) all in an atmosphere of having no idea what was intended for us. Finally, on 2nd June, we were put ashore at San Carlos. We had arrived and, of course, it was raining!

I won't dwell on the mud, the wind, the rain or the uncertainty that governed the next week of occupying defensive positions, doing some Combat Engineer tasks and, constantly, trudging down to the beach to be loaded on to a ship to be taken somewhere. Each time the plan was changed, and we went back to our muddy holes. Finally, on 7th June, we were piled into the *Sir Galahad* and told that we were being taken to Fitzroy. What joy! Cramped but dry and the chance for some decent scoff; life was suddenly looking up. We arrived in the creek off Fitzroy in bright sunlight on the 8th June - and we waited. There was a problem with the landing craft that was supposed to take us to the shore; then there was a problem with the loading ramp. Most of all there was a problem with deciding the order of disembarkation. The medics of 16 Field Ambulance wanted off first so they could set up their field hospital. The Welsh Guards wanted off but they needed to be in Bluff Cove, not Fitzroy and they didn't want to walk. As a RE troop we were way down the pecking order, so we scoffed, watched films and took in the view from the deck. It was a cold but beautiful day; you could see for miles. Sadly, as we were to find out, so could the Argies. With hardly any warning four Skyhawks suddenly appeared and, with a blinding flash as their bombs hit us, our lives were changed forever.

Andy McIlvenny was definitely a "come on" not "go on" leader, which is why, when he detailed off one of the youngest, least-experienced sappers to do a stag of guarding our kit on the tank deck, he went with him to keep him company. He and Wayne Tarbard died in the searing maelstrom of hell that the tank deck became when it took a direct hit. The rest of us were, suddenly, fighting for our lives to get out of the burning ship. Chaos!



Learning helovac on the job!

We learned helicopter evacuation on the job and those playful days at Weymouth, learning to row cutters quickly came to fruition as we scrambled down nets into lifeboats and headed for the shore.

The pain, the chaos, the bewilderment of that awful day do not bear dwelling upon. Those who were there have their own memories and stories to tell. In 4 Troop we had lost 2 men killed and 8 badly wounded. We had only what we stood up in, and we were cold and shocked. Slowly, we found each other and, under our deafened, singed but still operational, Troopie (Capt David Foxley), we gathered at the 9 Squadron HQ on the helicopter LP in the Fitzroy settlement.



Making best possible speed away from the smoking hulk of Sir Galahad - 8 June

Sometime later we were flown back to San Carlos and then on to *HMS Intrepid* where we got our act back together. In fact, for the next two weeks we were the *Indriid's* own Sapper troop and they were happy to put us ashore all over the place on West Falkland to begin to restore the settlements there to normality. To be honest it was a bit of a wrench leaving *Intrepid* but, when the fighting stopped, there was lots of work to be done in Port Stanley and we were needed by The Squadron there.

I will gloss over the next month or so of work, eat, sleep, repeat routine that we had in and around Stanley before we were finally extracted and sent home but I will quote a tribute

that the OC (Chris Davies) wrote about 4 Troop a few years' after the Campaign:

"This is a very brief (and inadequate) summary of what was a VERY trying time for all. 4 Troop had a particularly difficult time. Firstly they were a Blue Beret troop foisted upon a fiercely Airborne Squadron. I was very pleased to have them (and their Troop Commander, who was a much smarter engineer than I was!) However it is fair to say that an element of the Squadron was anti, and they only grudgingly accepted the non-Para boys of 4 Troop. As only the most bizarre bad luck can have it, 4 Troop was attached to an infantry Battalion that was hopelessly unprepared for war. 4 Troop were thrust into a most unenviable position, but they made the best of things. As if this were not enough, it was appalling bad luck that it was 4 Troop on the Galahad when it was bombed. However, I received the casualties and the Troop at my Command Post a couple of hundred yards from the ships and I was immensely proud of the stoicism and determination to fight on that they displayed (even the badly burned guys who also wanted to stay in Fitzroy and get back at the Argentines). I can't think of a time when I was more proud of being a Sapper. When the Squadron got to Stanley, I could not have done without 4 Troop. As it happened, I had to boost 2 Troop with Squadron Tradesmen when it was sent off with 2 PARA on 27 April 1982. I could not release 2 Troop to go home with the Commando Brigade when it left around 21st June, but I did release them on 4 July 1982 (they had marched and fought with 3 PARA. They deserved to go home with 3 PARA, but I could not spare them.) Once 2 Troop left most of my available tradesmen were now in 4 Troop. To a man they were examples of the best the Corps produces: I was proud (and very thankful) to have them. Certainly, with the million and one tasks we had in and around Stanley, I could not have done without them."

I accept that tribute on behalf of my friends who served, suffered and died during what was the most remarkable experience of being the 4th Field Troop of 9 Para Squadron RE. Hats, maybe, but we didn't let you down!

Tribute to LCpl Pashley

LCpl JB Pashley RE - KIA 13/14 June 1982



Lance Corporal John Pashley was 'Army Barmy'. He grew up near Sheffield and from an early age all he wanted to be — was a soldier. Yorkshire grit was in his bones, and he wanted to be wherever the action was so, as soon as he was old enough, he joined the Parachute Regiment. After a couple of years he saw the light and transferred to the Royal Engineers so that he could join the unit he most admired, 9 Parachute Squadron RE.

He was strong, full of energy and always 'up' for a challenge, so he soon earned a good deal of respect in what has been described as the toughest minor unit in the Army. After a successful tour in Northern Ireland, in 1980/81, John was detached to 1 Training Regiment Royal Engineers as weapon training instructor with the important remit to represent The Squadron and to attract good quality recruits to it by his outstanding personal example.

In April 1982 Argentine Forces invaded the Falkland Islands and The Squadron was placed on a war footing. As soon as he realised what was going on John appeared in The Squadron lines with his kit packed. Of course, he was still on the posted strength of the Training Regiment, so he was sent back there. For a man like John it was unthinkable that he should be left behind so he deliberately provoked a fall-out with his superior - a traditional Guards Warrant Officer. To placate the situation and to avoid disciplinary action, the OC 9 Para Squadron recalled him. The Warrant Officer's sense of pride was placated, The Squadron's reputation remained intact, and John got what he wanted: he was off to war.

John's Troop was placed in support of 2nd Bn Scots Guards and moved with the Battalion in the approach to the battle for Port Stanley. After the successful capture of the outer ring of the Argentine defences (Mt Longdon, Twin Sisters and Mt Harriet), it was recognised that the hardest nut to crack would be Tumbledown Mountain and this was the objective given to the Scots Guards for the night of 13/14 June. To deceive the enemy on the direction of his main thrust, the CO Scots Guards sent a strong fighting patrol to carry out a diversionary attack from the right flank.

The patrol was reinforced by two RE NCO's, ostensibly to assist in the crossing of obstacles and to provide guidance through areas that were known to be mined, but also, with the 84mm Carl Gustav anti-tank weapon that they carried, to add substantially to the firepower of the patrol. At that time, no technology existed to detect the non-metallic mines that the Argentineans had laid: the fingertips and bayonet of a crawling Sapper were the only mine detection and clearance techniques available. Notwithstanding the evident risk, Cpi Foran and LCpl Pashley volunteered without hesitation and, ignoring the freezing cold, the darkness and indirect fire, they took it in turns to lead the patrol to its attack position. With great courage they succeeded in getting to about 20 metres from the enemy position before a machine gun opened up and a furious firefight began. Being nearest to the position and the most exposed, John Pashley was killed outright, as was WO2 Danny Wight of the Scots Guards. The attack was a success, and it contributed hugely to the overall success of the battle for Mt Tumbledown but, inevitably, there was a cost.

John Pashley died as he had lived: always to the fore, leading by example and with great courage. At the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we WILL remember him.

Membership Report

Steve (Billy) Morris MSM

We welcome the following new members

Membership No	Name	Units	Service Dates
1516	Aaron L Crane	51 Para Sqn RE	2006-2012
1517	William Hehir	51 Para Sqn RE	2008-2017
1518	Richard (Dick) Hunnibell	9 Para Sqn RE	1975-1981
1519	Andrew J Nelson	300 Tp 131 Para Sqn	1970-1974
1520	David (Robbie) Burns	9 Para Sqn RE	1980-1982 1987-1990
1521	Royston McCleery	9 Indep Para Sqn RE	1971-1975
1522	Brendon Barr	9 Indep Para Sqn RE	1973-1978

“GENTLEMEN, WELCOME TO THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION”



Members of 131 Para Engr Regt (V) - 1966

Tom Smith, Bob Dorrell, Barrie Aitken, Pete Smith R.I.P., Roger Howies, Dave Anderton and Mac Nash.

Emplaning at Abingdon for Heavy Drop
Exercise on Salisbury Plain
Beverley Aircraft, boom exit.

2 Champ vehicles piled in. 7 RHA were also involved on the exercise.

Why 9 Squadron?

John (Lofty) Smith

Many many, years ago (in the 60's) I joined the Royal Engineers. Whilst at Cove training camp one day a certain Corporal Tony Roberts attended the weapons wing. I wondered why everyone moved out of his way. What was so different about him? His fierce pride and confidence made me wonder, just what unit did he come from?



Proud dad outside his married quarter in Haig Lines

A couple of years later whilst stationed at Tidworth, (not the best posting in the world), I was told to attend a B2 combat engineering course. Approaching the classroom I had to pass two paratroopers who both growled "crapchat" as I moved past them. I later knew them as Combat Harper and Jock (Colin) Lippe.

In the classroom us "crapchats" were introduced to Ken Mason, Mick Hough and Pete Ellis.

After a few weeks at Tidworth we all went to the Bridge Camp at Weymouth. This is where 9 Sqn made an impression on me, literally. During those summer afternoons someone suggested a game of football. Naturally it had to be 9 Sqn against any crapchat who would face them.

Each afternoon I would take my place and each afternoon make the same idiotic mistake. I stand well over 6 feet tall so I thought if I tackled the smallest member of 9 Sqn I would stand a chance.

Every time I ran towards Mick Hough who would grin at me and somehow I always ended flat on my back. This is where I was introduced to a 'squadron' ritual. Umpteen boots DMS would pound over me as I lay there. As I said before, they impressed me, those marks were on me for ages

At Tidworth in 8 Fd Sqn I met Pat Neal. I was so proud to read of his career in our AEA magazine.

When I decided to try to join 9 Sqn I attended pre-para with Ian Rogalski, Chris Blagg, Bob & Paul Parker. We were introduced to airborne training by Sgt Tom Downie, Mick Caddick, Jeff Langford and Ron Hadden. Sgt Henry Morgan took over later when Tom Downie got posted. Paul (Scouse) Downey joined us as did Paddy Boyce (ACC)

During pre-para we were called to a meeting by the Sqn 2iC, Captain Oliver. He had himself recently passed 'P' company and gave us his advice.



One moment during pre para training I will never forget was when Ron Hadden took us out for a run through Tweseldown training area towards Crookham. With packs and weapons we did our best to keep up with him eventually reaching the cafe a Church Crookham crossroads.

A 4 ton truck was waiting for us (Dennis Hewitt the driver). We were ordered to put our packs and weapons on the wagon then followed Ron into the cafe. We decided to watch what Ron ordered to eat. A light snack meant we would continue our run while a big meal would mean we'd be too full to continue.

BAOR bridging exercise 1975 with Pat Neal

Ron ordered a large plate of pie, chips and anything else that could be squeezed on the plate. So we did the same. That was a big mistake. When we left the cafe feeling very full and bloated after our heavy meals, we were ordered to grab our packs and weapons and start running. We did our best, Ron was ahead of us as we attempted to keep up with him.

Everything that we had eaten was left amongst the trees we passed on the way back to Aldershot. Ron was fine by the way! I realised then that he was a machine that could eat all the fuel he needed and keep going for ever.

During actual 'P' Company selection, Sgt Colin Walker joined the 'P' Company staff. In 1996 my son Sean joined the Royal Engineers and whilst at Ripon he met a Colonel Walker who mentioned me and talked about 9 Sqn. What a small world.

During my career, 9 Sqn has followed me. As a SNCO at Dover I met Scouse Strettle (the elder), the RSM was Alec Craigie and my ex troop commander Freddy Kemp.

Captain Chadwick arrived at Dover and convinced me to go with him to Aldershot to watch him play hockey. He later mentioned that he had organised a balloon jump at the same time. Once again I landed like a ton of bricks!

At Dover I also served with Big Dave Weaver and met a Cpl Ellis (REME) who mentioned his brother in 9 Sqn (Pete). A couple of years later I served in Oman and once again 9 Sqn wasn't far away. With the Omani Engineers in Muscat I met Maj Harry Ashurst and in Salalah a civilian called Paddy Hoon (ex Troopy).

During those years in Oman I served with two members of 59 Commando, they were Jim Moir and Paddy Rainey.



In Salalah I received a phone call from a desert location (Thumrait) from Bob (Ginge) Coles. We sank a few warmers into the bank and talked of 9 Sqn. Bob was serving at Hereford at the time, and it was good to catch up with him.

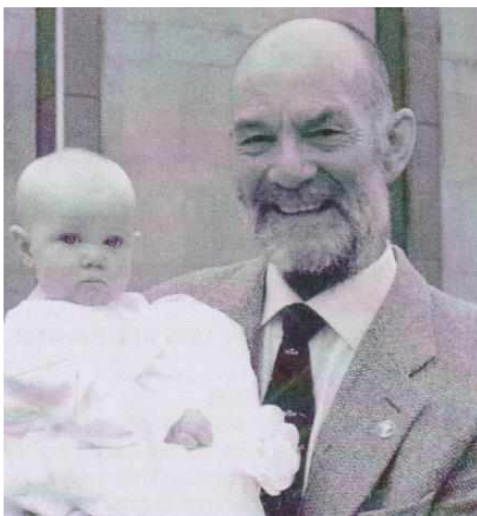
I now live in North Lincolnshire in Scunthorpe. It was while at Abingdon, where the RAF instructors were doing their best to get us to land without looking like a pile of bricks that I met a WRAF Cpl, and we were married in 1975. As she came from Scunthorpe this is where I settled on leaving the army.

**Antrim Bridge Camp 1973
Scouse Downie, Taff Sweeney,
Stan Swierzbinski, Paul Donner
& John 'Lofty' Smith**

Since living here Martin Walker, Colin Sweeney, Colin Sangwin and Derek Taylor have visited my wife Wynne and me.

Now in my seventies and having been married for nearly 45 years Wynne and I (like all other families) have been through, joy, sorrow, happiness and pain. Such is life.

9 Sqn taught me a lot. Not when I was in Aldershot, but when I left, I realised what I had learned. Whatever happens, face it. I call it "Bloody Mindedness". Take it on the chin and keep moving forward. Like I said, 9 Sqn did impress me. I couldn't beat them, so I joined them. Might I add, I still couldn't beat them!



To those of you still serving in the Squadron, enjoy your tours and all you experience. When you leave your life will never quite be the same.

Those times were very special. Be proud. I am.

John with the youngest of his 4 grandsons

The History of the Tune – ‘Wings’

JJ Ferry

As we all know the Regimental Quick March of our Corps is ‘Wings’, and also of some affiliated Commonwealth Units. So how did it become the chosen marching tune of the RE?

As with other military tunes it was originally composed for marching brass bands and dates from 1870. It was also later transposed to the bagpipes. Prior to this the Corps marched to ‘Tm Ninety-Five’. This was an old Rifle Brigade tune, also used by many other regiments such as the Green Howards, Duke of Wellington’s, Kings Own Shropshire LI to name a few. The tune was also known as ‘John of Paris’ within the Rifle Brigade. As we old soldiers know, they march at a faster rate of 140 paces to the minute, the Corps however opted to continue marching at 116 paces.

We owe the existence of the tune ‘Wings’ back in 1869, to the unhappiness of the Commandant of the School of Military Engineering Establishment, Maj Gen Sir T Gallwey. He ordered the RE Band Committee to find a replacement for the existing ‘I’m Ninety-Five’ March. He directed that the Band Committee should adopt a popular ‘air’ of the day as the Regimental Quick March. It is also possible that the Commandant was responding to a War Office Instruction from the 1880’s that all Regiments were to register ‘quick step marches’ along with relevant historical data!

In response Bandmaster William Newstead proposed a new march that he had composed, or perhaps more accurately arranged. Newstead amalgamated two older tunes for his new compilation, one English, the other German. The origins of the English tune, ‘The Path Across the Hills’ is unknown. It has been described as a ‘Lilting March’ (a jaunty spirited cheerful tune). The German tune was a melody entitled ‘Flugel Flugel (Wing or Wings)’ and was apparently; a sentimental ballad originally composed by a mid-Victorian lady, Miss Dickson. She was inspired by the words of a German Poet. The tune had been published many years before by a Bavarian, Friedrich Rucket and translated by Percy Boyd RE, under the title ‘Wings’. Newstead’s proposed arrangement was adopted by the committee in 1870 or thereabouts. This was all to change again 19 years later!

In 1889, the then Commander-in-Chief of the Corps, noted with disapproval, that the march was not the one to which the RE were entitled by tradition. He considered Wings ‘frivolous’ and ‘un-military’ and decreed that it was not to be used and to play ‘The British Grenadiers’. This led me to think, why? In my research for this article, I read the latest version of the Corps Memoranda and para 3018, describes the RE Grenade:

‘An embroidered Grenade was first worn on the tail of the RE Officer Full Dress scarlet Coat. A brass Grenade was introduced for a similar purpose on the Rank and file Coattee of the Royal Sappers and Miners in 1825. The adoption of the Grenade as a Badge became associated with those who would routinely fight alongside the Grenadier (or assault) companies of the Army’.

Therefore the link with the ‘Grenadiers’ was born and that is why we still wear a ‘Bursting Grenade Badge’ on our uniform today. Thankfully ‘Wings’ was saved from musical oblivion following the direct intervention some thirteen years later by the Commander of the Army, Lt Gen Viscount Kitchener of Khartoum. In 1902 on returning to the UK from the Boar War, he visited Chatham, England, where he had been an RE Subaltern in 1871. He well remembered walking past reviewing stands on parade to ‘Wings’. Dismayed to find it was no longer used, he made enquires and learned there was a strong demand among members of the Corps that ‘Wings’ be officially re-instated. Lord Kitchener discussed the matter with the War Office, and also with the Adjutant General. In a letter dated 14th October 1902, and with the approval of the Adjutant General, he reinstated ‘Wings’ as the official march of the Corps of Royal Engineers.

The music ‘Wings’, scored for military brass bands, was published in 1903, copyright by Hawkes & Son of London and Newstead’s arrangement of the RE quick march regained its rightful place on the parade ground. Because of the close affiliation with the RE, Wings was also chosen as the quick march when the Royal Canadian Engineers (RCE) were formed in 1904 and later passed on to the Canadian Military Engineers (CME) when the RCE ceased to exist in 1998. The date of transposition of the tune to the bagpipes is unknown, but it is known that it was being played by British and Commonwealth army pipe bands well before WW1.

The words of Wings, as it was originally set to the tune now used, are:

Wings to bear me over mountain and vale away;
Wings to bathe my spirit in morning’s sunny ray;
Wings that I may hover at morn above the sea;
Wings through life to bear me, and death triumphantly.

Wings like youth’s fleet moments which swiftly o’er me passed;
Wings like my early visions, too bright, too fair to last;
Wings that I might recall them, the loved, the lost, the dead;
Wings that I might fly after the past, long vanished.

Wings to lift me upwards, soaring with Eagle flight;
Wings to waft me heav’nwards to bask in realms of light;
Wings to be no more wearied, lulled in eternal rest;
Wings to be sweetly folded where Faith and Love are blessed.

According to the Corps Memoranda, there is no tradition of singing Wings, but units may exercise the option of using it in religious services as a form of inspirational hymn.

So there you have it, the Corps has over the years marched to ‘Tm Ninety-Five, Wings or The British Grenadiers’ and thanks to the interventions of Maj Gen Sir T Gallwey in 1869 and Lt Gen Viscount Kitchener in 1902, Wings was saved.

Star Ferry to Star Wars

Pat Neal



About 7 years ago the 'Grim Reaper' came calling. I had the Big 'C' in the throat area. I told him to clear off and that I wasn't ready yet. He did. During many hours of treatment and recuperation I received numerous calls from Sqn and Hereford men who I assumed had long forgotten about me. They didn't have to get in touch, they just did, and it got me wondering.

I had left the Army in 1997 and moved back from whence I came, Leicester. From 1997 to 2013 I had very little contact with my previous life. I was at the end of the phone to Keith King, Peter Kershaw and a lovely man called Gallagher, who came to stay a few times

Other than that I had cut myself away. To this day I cannot fathom it out. I promised myself that when this was done I would reconnect with the lads I'd served with and who were very special in my life.

My brother, who also served in the Sqn, took out membership for us both into the AEA. Which opened up new interests and opportunities to re-unite with military colleagues.

I started attending the Wales gathering, a great weekend, and have become a regular attendee. The occasion is one of the first dates entered on my calendar. Teaming up with Gerry Bonner I bunk up (twin bedded room!) every year for the AGM/Reunion. Again, a lovely occasion where offering the chance to meet up with friends old and new.

Sadly, I, like many of our readers, have attended funerals of colleagues taken far too early, and the current corona virus has left many of us holding our breathe.

I recently enrolled as a member of the new Wales and South West Branch of the AEA. Great bunch of lads! With Gus Hayles as chairman, Mick Leather secretary and Gerry Bonner as treasurer, the branch is bound to be a success.

I have now embraced the IT world buying myself a Smart phone, tablet and laptop, and have now entered the 'Star Wars' world. What a difference they have made, especially during lockdown. I'm able to keep in touch face to face with loved ones and mates. The other day I had a video chat with 5 other Sqn men. Bit a fiasco setting it up, but we got there in the end, and it was well worth the hassle.

I think I only use about 20% of what these IT items offer me, but to be honest I have no need of the other 80%. I get by quite well with the mere 20%. I can't copy and paste, don't need too, I can WhatsApp but can't send a text, doesn't interest me. I also still type with one finger, but it does me and I'm content with that.

With these newfound skills I became a member of the Sqn "Old & Bold" group, which gives me great pleasure every day. I can now talk to the likes of Steve Ainley in Oz, Sam Hesketh in France, Geordie Lightowler in Crete, Poncho O' Donovan in Dublin and Sam Robson in Thailand, just by pressing a button.

Some years ago Mark Creer-Thornton and a small group of Sqn men decided to set up a group on Social Media, Facebook 9 Para Sqn RE 'Old & Bold' Pre 1990. Froth Beer recently became our 372nd member. There are some great stories and banter with loads of photographs. Our two most venerable members are Willy Wiltshire and Dave Edmonds who both joined the Sqn in the mid-50's!

I can assist any lads wanting to join the group. Mark hired me (he hasn't paid me yet) as an Admin dog's body, I have the means at my disposal. A short time later Mark promoted Chris Davies to an admin thingamejig. Mark was a snapper in the Sqn when I was a Sgt and Chris the OC. So we must have left some sort of impression on him to promote us!

To join "Old & Bold". Firstly, get yourself a Facebook account, its free and easy. Secondly, request to be my friend, my profile picture is a fat bloke that looks like me, wearing a Leicester City shirt, standing in front of a mural of Jamie Vardy. Thirdly, if you're known to me I will invite you to join the group. If unknown to me, I will put your name forward to the group requesting for someone to vouch for you. Fourthly, having invited you and you accept, jobs as good as done.

Don't be too concerned about this Social Media thing. I have 190 odd friends, and they are nearly all Sqn. I don't have civvy friends or any relations, not even my wife has Facebook friends, and it's worked out quite well for me. That's the way I handled it. If I don't know people or links to other things, I simply delete them.

There are other Sqn groups on Social media, but I only deal with the pre 1990 lads. Come and join us.

Lest We Forget

Saving Private Robert (Bob) Urquhart "C" Coy 15 (Scottish) Battalion The Parachute Regiment.

On 7 May 1966, members of 300 Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers and 15 (Scottish) Battalion The Parachute Regiment parachuted into Black Bog, Northern Ireland. While 15 Para were due to carry out their exercise, 300 Para Sqn RE were on DZ clearance.

During the drop, those already on the ground were horrified to witness that someone's parachute had failed to develop properly and he plunged into Black Bog. Only his legs were above ground, and everyone thought he was dead, until his legs moved.



Had it not been for the quick actions of Sappers Gordon McLeod and Alex Cockburn and others from 300 Para Sqn RE, who have sadly passed away, pulling him out of the bog, there is no doubt Bob Urquhart would have perished.

Although Bob later thanked those Sappers who had saved him, they were not fully recognised for their actions.



Mrs Doreen Hughes

Fred Gray

Reading the article published in the December 2019 edition regarding Mrs Doreen Hughes reminded me of how she became a special member of the AEA.

Shortly after the AEA was formed in 1987 I took on over from John Thompson as 'Membership Secretary'.

At that time there was a service on Channel 4 called 'Forces Reunited' I would trawl through the thousands of names trying to spot any former members of the Squadron. I left my name and phone number for contact and had quite a good response.

I had one caller, a lady (my wife Betty took the call) asking if I was an elderly gentleman. I took the phone and spoke to the lady who wanted to know if I knew anyone who might have known her husband Jack Everitt of 9 Field Company (Airborne) RE who had died in a POW camp from his wounds, which he suffered during the Battle of Arnhem. Although I had no knowledge of him, I told her I would do my best to find someone who did know him.

I immediately rang that great old warrior Tom Carpenter, who also served in 9 Field Company during the battle and suffered from a serious wound to his back. To my surprise Tom said 'yes' he did know him, and he was at the burial, walking behind the coffin which was draped with the Union Jack.

Without hesitation Tom contacted Doreen and that was the start of a long friendship between the two of them and only ended with the death of Tom a few years ago.

I also stayed in contact with Doreen exchanging Christmas cards every year until she sadly died.

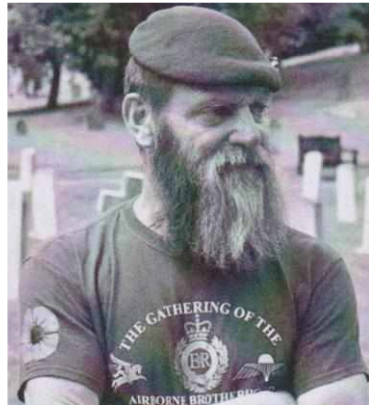
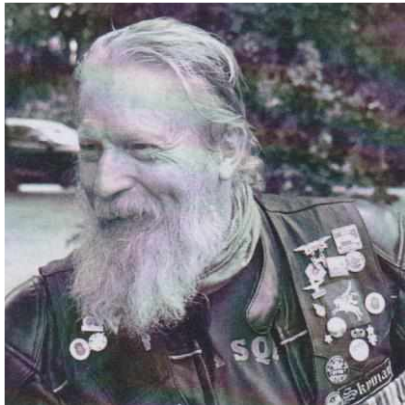
When I had completed the Roll of Honour of Airborne Engineers, I took it over to Doreen's home in Calcot near Reading. Although her sight was failing, she was delighted to see her beloved Jack had been remembered along with all his former army mates. She took me to see Jack's shrine which she had created to his memory in one of her rooms of her home. Although she had remarried after Jack's death and had a very successful relationship, Jack was her first love and would never forget him.

I would be interested to know where the photograph of Doreen at Jack's grave was taken as he was buried in grounds adjacent to the POW camp. Is it possible that all British POWs who died in captivity were exhumed and brought back to more suitable cemeteries in Holland?

South Atlantic Medal Association- Ride of Respect 2020

Paul Moore

As I write, I am mindful that 38 years ago the Argentines had invaded the Falkland Islands and that 2 Troop 9 Para Sqn were preparing to sail south on the MV Norland with 2 Para.



The bearded photos of Paul & Charlie were taken during the 2019 Ride of Respect - they had vowed not to shave or have a haircut for 12 months thereby raising several thousand more pounds for the charity.

From Saturday 01 August to Saturday 08 August 2020 a team of three veterans - Paul Moore, Charlie McColgan (both 9 Para Sqn RE), and Tony McKie (1 Para) will be riding around the UK by motorbike visiting the gravesites and memorials of men of who lost their lives in the Falklands war in 1982. A total of 2215 miles in 8 days.

We are doing this ride to demonstrate that these men are not forgotten, to pay our respects to each one and their families, and to raise funds for the South Atlantic Medal Association who continue to support veterans of the Falklands war and most importantly, the families who have lost loved ones.

We did a similar ride in 2019 and visited all of the 3 Para graves, however, this year we are making a ride of over 2400 miles that will encompass the graves and memorials of 2 Para, Scots Guards, Welsh Guards, Royal Marines, Royal Navy, Royal Engineers, Royal Signals, Gurkha Rifles, Army Catering Corps, Royal Army Medical Corps and Army Air Corps.

We will cover the whole of the UK from Whitley Bay, Dundee, Macduff, Arbroath, Edinburgh, Oban, Glasgow, Irvine, Lisburn, Wrexham, Liverpool, Stockport, Sheffield, Derby, Lowestoft, Braintree, Hereford, Pontypool, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Tidworth, Frimley and Aldershot. On returning to Durham our final act of remembrance will be at Hutton Rudby in North Yorkshire where we will pay our respects to Sir Rex Hunt, the former Governor of the Falkland Islands in 1982. The programme is out on our Facebook page, and we would love families and friends of the fallen to join us in our act of remembrance and respect at the grave or memorial.

We are limited to only 30 minutes at each location due to the distances we have to cover each day, so we have to keep our short service very simple and respectful. As we did not know all of the fallen personally it is always emotional and inspirational to talk with their families and friends who attend and find out a little about the person that they lost.

Our itinerary is:

Day 1 - Sat 01 Aug 20

0800 Hrs Whitley Bay, NE25 9HB Memorial - Captain Chris Dent 2 Para

1100 Hrs Mortonhall Cemetery, Edinburgh, EH16 6TX - Sgt Daniel Wright 2 Scots Gds

1245 Hrs Kenoway Cemetery, KY2 6HQ - Captain David Wood, 2 Para

1445 Hrs Western Cemetery, Arbroath, DD11 3RA - Cpl Peter Fitton 45 Cdo, Cpl Ian Spencer 45 Cdo, Cpl Laurence Watts 45 Cdo

1600 Hrs Laurencekirk Cemetery, AB30 1HF - LSgt Clark Mitchell 2 Scots Gds

1830 Hrs Macduff Myrus Cemetery, AB44 1 PQ - Cpl Peter McKay 45 Cdo.

Day total - 355 miles - Overnight - 39 Engineer Regiment, Kinloss.

Day 2 - Sun 02 Aug 20

0930 Hrs - Spean Bridge Commando Memorial, PH34 4EE

1130 Hrs - Penny Fuir Cemetery, Oban - Mne Gordon MacPherson 45 Cdo

1400 Hrs - North Dalnotter Cemetery, G81 4SL - Sgt John Simeon 2 Scots Gds

1500 Hrs - Cardonald Cemetery, G52 1SB - Gdsm Archibald Stirling 2 Scots Gds

1600 Hrs - Sandymount Cemetery, G32 OHW - Gdsm Derek Denholm 2 Scots Gds

1700 Hrs - West Cemetery, Hamilton, ML3 9BY - Cpl David Hardman 2 Para

1845 Hrs - Knadgerhill Cemetery, Irvine, KA12 0YE - Gdsm James Reynolds & Gdsm David Malcolmson 2 Scots Gds Day total - 285 miles - Overnight - Premier Inn, Prestwick.

Day 3 - Mon 03 Aug 20

1700 Hrs Blahs Cemetery, Lisburn, BT27 5RA - LCpl Tony Cork 2 Para Day total - 110 miles
Overnight ferry Belfast to Liverpool.

Day 4 - Tue 04 Aug 20

0900 Hrs Kirkdale Cemetery, Aintree, L9 9EN - Gdsm Ronald Tanbini 2 Scots Gds
1100 Hrs - Stockport cemetery, SK2 6LS - Pte Mark Fletcher MID 2 Para
1300 Hrs Welsh Guards Memorial, Wrexham Town Hall, LL11 1ZA
1700 Hrs Yew Tree Brake Cemetery, Cinderford, - Spr Chris Jones 59 Cdo Sqn RE Day total - 236 miles
Overnight - Patriots MC South Wales

Day 5 - Wed 05 Aug 20

0930 Hrs Courtesy Call - SAMA82 Office, Pontypool
1330 Hrs Buckland Monochorum Cemetery, Yelverton, Devon, - Cpl Jeremy Smith RM
1430 Hrs Weston Mill Cemetery, Plymouth, PL2 2EP - Cpl Mick Melia 59 Cdo Sqn RE
1530 Hrs Drake Cemetery, Plymouth, PL7 1UQ - Sgt Roger Enefer RM
1830 Hrs St Nicholas Church, Winterbourne Kingston, DT11 9QE - LC Adrian Wellstead RN 1930 Hrs St Michaels Parish Church, Poole, Sgt Nicholas Hunt RM SBS
Day total - 349 miles
Overnight - Forgotten Veterans UK, Fort Cumberland, Portsmouth.

Day 6 - Thu 06 Aug 20

1045 Hrs RM Museum Southsea PO4 9PX 'The Yomper'
1120 Hrs Royal Navy Falklands Memorial Old Portsmouth, PO1 2JE
1300 Hrs Tidworth Military Cemetery, SP9 7JR - Maj Roger Nutbeem RAMC
1430 Hrs St Peters Church, Frimley Green, GU16 7AQ - LCpl Simon Cockton AAC
1530 Hrs Aldershot Military Cemetery, GU11 2DD

Lt Jim Barry RSigs
CSgt Gordon Findlay 2 Para
Cpl Steve Prior 2 Para
Cpl Paul Sullivan 2 Para
LCpl Gary Bingley MM 2 Para
LCpl Nigel Smith 2 Para
LCpl Badharparsad Limbu 1/7 Gurkha Rifles
Pte Steve Illingsworth DCM 2 Para
Pte Tommy Meehan 2 Para and others from Airborne Forces.
Day total – 118 miles
Overnight - Premier Inn, Aldershot

Day 7 - Fri 07 Aug 20

1000 Hrs Holy Trinity Church, Twydall ME8 6JU - Cpl Andy McIlvenney 4 Tp 9 Para Sqn RE 1200 Hrs All saints Church Basildon, SS16 4PX - Pte Stephen Dixon 2 Para
1330 Hrs PRA HQ & Pegasus Magazine, Colchester
1630 Hrs St Michaels Church, Oulton Broad, NR32 3JP - Pte Dave Parr 2 Para Day Total - 266 miles - Overnight - Bickel family, Attleborough

Day 8 - Sat 08 Aug 20

1330 Hrs Memorial Meadow, Hilton Derby, DE65 5NR - Spr Wayne Tarbard 4 Tp 9 Para Sqn RE 1430 Hrs St Mary's cemetery, Derby, DE21 6FN - Mne Micheal Nowak 45 Cdo
1530 Hrs Eckington War Memorial, S21 4BH - Cpl John Pashley 9 Para Sqn RE
1800 Hrs All Saints Church, Hutton Rudby, TS15 - Sir Rex Hunt CMG Day total - 307 miles
Ride total - 2215 miles

The South Atlantic Medal Association was formed to maintain and promote a sense of pride and comradeship among all veterans of the South Atlantic campaign, in a manner which respects both individual privacy and personal requirements. The Association also helps to establish and maintain contact with other organisations involved in the welfare of the Armed Forces and ensure that due consideration is given to the interests of South Atlantic veterans.

Our Facebook page is at: https://www.facebook.com/Falklands-War-Ride-of-Respect-2020-in-aid-of-SAMA-82-369572600436147/?modal=admin_todo_tour

We have also established a Just Giving Page in order to assist SAMA: <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/paul-moore48>
Donating through JustGiving is simple, fast and totally secure. Your details are safe with JustGiving - they'll never sell them on or send unwanted emails. Once you donate, they'll send your money directly to the charity. So it's the most efficient way to donate - saving time and cutting costs for the charity.

Please support this worthy cause

Down Memory Lane

Fred Gray

During last summer, I made a nostalgic visit to a museum in Yorkshire to see the only remaining 'Blackburn Beverley', the workhorse of 'RAF Transport Command' during the fifties and sixties.

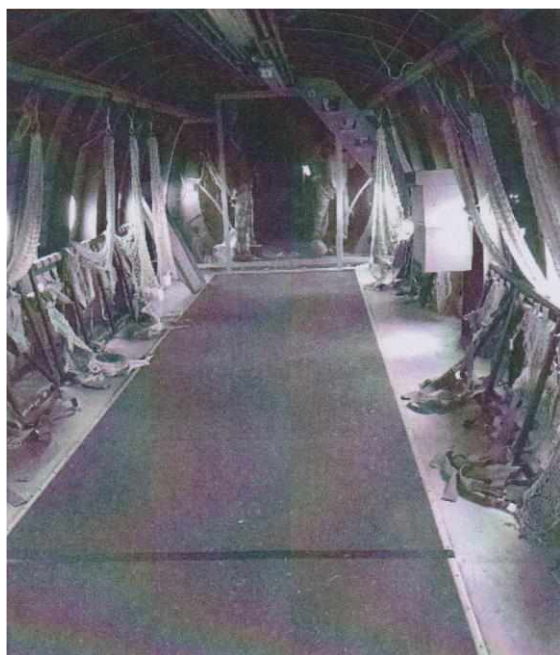


The Beverley was originally on display in the Royal Army Service Corps museum in the small market town of Beverley In Yorkshire and was relocated to 'Fort Paull an historic fortification commissioned by Henry VIII in 1542 and used by the Royal Artillery for their gun batteries protecting the sea approaches to the city of Hull and it's large dock area.. The fort is situated on the northern bank of the River Humber in the small village of Paull about eight miles from Hull.

This former transport aircraft is in excellent condition and is open to visitors able to wander around the huge cargo space looking at exhibits donated by Mr Malcom Staves a former Royal Air force officer and Radio Operator who

flew on many missions over Germany in Lancaster Bombers of 207 Squadron RAF.

A visit to the upper deck of the plane brought back memories for me of dropping through the aperture of the boom rather than the side door exit. A far better way of jumping out of a perfectly serviceable aeroplane. The boom had seats for thirty men whilst the lower deck had forty.



Eight of these huge aircraft were used for 'Excise Bar Frost' held in Norway during November 1959, two hundred miles inside the Arctic Circle. An exercise made more memorable (and miserable) by the lack of winter clothing for the men who had to rely on a lightweight blanket and poncho for sleeping gear, a heavy duty pullover and one pair of 'Long-Johns' as extra clothing, both of which had to be handed back at the end of the exercise.

Major General I H Lyall-Grant MC



Ian Lyall-Grant, who died in February aged 104, had a long career in the Royal Engineers, including commanding both 9 Squadron and 131 Regiment.

He was born in 1915 and was commissioned into the Royal Engineers in January 1935. His first posting was to the Bengal Sappers and Miners in Roorkee and he chose to travel to India overland by car with three other Sapper officers, rather than spend several weeks on a troopship

In 1941 he raised 70 Fd Coy (Bengal S&M), being its first OC as a Temporary Major. The Company was mobilized on 1 Feb 1942, landed in Rangoon on 3 March, and operated in Burma and Imphal. This was when he was awarded the MC. In 1945 he was posted to HQ 17 Div, which became part of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan.

In 1951 he trained as a parachutist and took command of 9 Independent Airborne Squadron RE, which was then based in Cyprus as part of 16 Para Bde. Shortly afterwards the Bde moved to Egypt and 9 Sqn were based in Moascar Garrison, close to Ismailia by Lake Timsah. The principal duties of the Sqn were internal security, but as OC he strongly encouraged sporting activities and the Sqn were very successful in all the Bde competitions. He also masterminded the construction of Pegasus Village close to Lake Timsah, where the Sqn built a number of married quarter cabins. Another innovation was conducting a number of recces across the Sinai desert to establish a route to the Gulf of Aqaba.



In 1953 he returned to UK and attended the Joint Services Staff College before taking command of 131 Parachute Engineer Regiment RE (TA) in 1955. In 1956 16 Airborne Division (TA) was reduced in size, becoming 44 Parachute Brigade (TA). However, because it was so well recruited and because of its high reputation, Lyall-Grant was able to persuade the MOD to retain 131 as a regiment, a status that remained until further defence cuts in 1967. During his command he also established Exercise Sea Splash, an annual water jump into the sea off St Peter Port in Guernsey, which continued for many years. The Governor of Guernsey at that time was another famous Sapper General, Sir Philip Neame, who had won the Victoria Cross in WW I.

Later appointments included Brigadier A/Q at HQ Mideast in Aden, Commandant RSME at Chatham and DQMG in MOD. He retired from the Army in 1970 but continued to work as a civil servant in MOD for a further five years, filling the post of Director General of Supply Coordination.

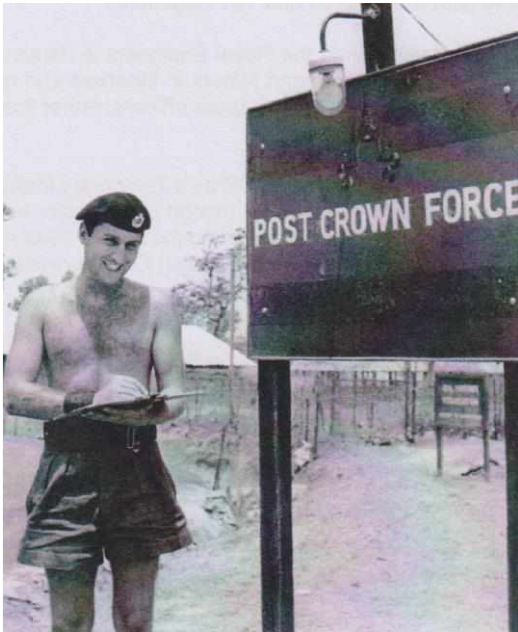
Following final retirement he wrote two military history books on the fighting in Burma during WW2.



Led by Maj Lyall-Grant Officer Commanding 9 Para Sqn leaving Aldershot for the Canal Zone

Operation Crown & Post Crown (1963-1968) Thailand.

Mike Ellery



Although the Sqn was not involved in this Project, a number of Sqn lads were. To name but a few - Fred Gray, Pete Guerin and myself. Fred was with 11 Indep Field Sqn RE, Pete was with 59 Field Sqn RE and I was with 34 Field Sqn RE. In 1954 the French lost a major battle in Northwest Vietnam at a place known as Diem Bien Phu. The French troops, mainly Paratroopers and Legionnaires were heavily outnumbered and finally overrun and defeated by the VC (VIET CONG). This resulted in the French handing over responsibility to the Americans of stopping communism from spreading to South Vietnam. In late 1954 an organisation known as SEATO was established in which the UK, along with Australia, New Zealand, the USA and four other countries were members.

Mike must be important, he's got a mill board!

The Americans were afraid that if South Vietnam fell, the rest of Indo China would follow - (the domino effect). This fortunately never happened. At first the Americans supplied military advisors and financial aid to the South Vietnamese Government. As the war escalated the Americans asked for troops from the SEATO members however the UK refused, but to placate the Americans

they agreed to build an airstrip, to enable troops to be swiftly transported to the Laos/Cambodian border in case of filtration by the VC troops into Thailand. This airstrip although completed in 1967 was never used in anger. In 1965 America sent its first combat troops to Vietnam. Marines were sent to Danang to defend the airfield. The number of troops being sent to Vietnam quickly escalated. Australia and New Zealand contributed combat troops to the war effort however the UK still held out. Operation Crown was thus initiated.

A suitable site was located near the Laos/ Cambodia border at a place named Leon Nok Tha.



Peter Guerin RIP

The hutted camp was protected with Dannert coiled barbed wire, which had holes large enough for herd of elephants to get through and was patrolled by Thai armed guards. The camp was never attacked, but nearby Communist insurgents targeted and killed village headmen, police, teachers and government officials. As with any military or civilian projects when the politicians get involved, you can guarantee it will end in tears. There was a lack of personnel, using old and obsolete equipment that kept breaking down, obviously trying to do it on the cheap. Along with the monsoon rains, inadequate roads and bridges, this resulted in numerous accidents. The first strip was a disaster and had to be ripped up. The replacement, a concrete wearing surface managed better and is still in operation today. This resulted in an escalation in costs, plus the project over running by 3 years, although an extra 40 metres of road was added to the contract. How often have you heard the cliché "We will learn from our mistakes", Not our politicians! The building of two aircraft carriers with no planes to fly on them a classic example. I'm sure you have pet gripes about our overpaid incompetent politicians. To end on a happier note, it was a fantastic time if you were young and single. One week R&R in Pattaya, with the odd weekend in Ubon. The large American airbase was stationed there and they were always happy to see us Brits. For the Pads- as usual they were never happier unless they were moaning about wanting to go home. I hope you enjoy the attached history of Operation Crown. Just a thought- if our politicians had not vetoed sending UK troops to Vietnam, we could all have been another statistic on the wall of the Arboretum.

The History of Operation Crown

While the United States became increasingly embroiled in Laos and Vietnam, mounting pressure was being brought to bear on the British Government, as a signatory of SEATO, to go to the assistance of its allies, but this pressure was with equal force resisted in Whitehall. In December 1962 however, the Prime Minister, in anticipation of a meeting with President Johnson, wished the UK to be seen to be playing some part in stemming the march of Communism on the mainland of Asia without, if possible, becoming involved in the actual fighting.

The Americans were then simultaneously engaged in a massive programme of Special Logistic Aid to Thailand (SLAT) and a UK participation in this might be acceptable as a token of Allied solidarity, this participation was accordingly put to C- in - C Far East Command.

As the work in North Borneo was then all but practically completed and the revolt in Brunei had not yet erupted, the advent at this time of SLAT was welcomed in FARELF as a potential fruitful field for further endeavour, offering opportunities to gain valuable experience and favourable publicity for the Services, of the schemes examined by the Chief Engineer FARELF, the construction of an entirely new MTR airfield for use by SEATO forces appeared to be the most attractive. The site was at Leon Nok Tha, near Mukdahan. It was close to Thailand's eastern border with Laos and some 70 miles north of an existing rail/air head of Ubon Ratchathani.

In February 1963 this proposal was submitted to Whitehall and came to realisation under the name of Operation Crown. Authority to conduct even a preliminary reconnaissance was, however, delayed, awaiting Thai Government authority, until May 1963, by which date the coming dry season (Sept - April) was uncomfortably close and, more significantly, the situation in Borneo has deteriorated, drastically reducing the availability of men, machines and transport, it was, notwithstanding, agreed to produce a team led by CRE SLAT, with a representative of FEAF Airfield Construction Branch, visited the site and quickly produced in very adverse weather conditions a proposed design, along with a rough estimate of £600,000 for an airstrip 5,00 feet long and 120 feet wide with 500 feet overruns 90 feet berms along with a million square feet of associated apron and parking space.

More extensive reconnaissance was prescribed for fear of prejudicing the negotiations in which HM Ambassador in Bangkok was simultaneously engaged with the Thai government regarding their contribution to the cost of the works, so the CRE - designate was constrained to make his early plans on incomplete information and, at first, with no staff, at last, at the end of November, authority came from London to go ahead and CRE FARELF could release his first Engineering Operation Instruction. Conveniently, the completion of the Commonwealth Cantonment at Terendak had by then thrown up the establishment for CRE (Works) FARELF, which was promptly appropriated to this project and, with effect from 1st January 1964, renamed CRE Crown.

It had previously been envisaged that one Field Squadron would be employed to set up camp and be followed by another with plant and administrative support to build the airfield and the whole project was to be completed over two dry seasons by June 1965. Owing, however, to the delay in starting and the approach of the rains in May, it was resolved to double the initial effort in Thailand with the consequent large addition to the accommodation and logistic requirements there. This turn of events had the effect indirectly of securing for Borneo much needed and long overdue reinforcements which, though repeatedly asked for from UK, had hitherto as often refused. Meanwhile in December 1963, an advance party of CRE Crown was deployed to Mukdahan to begin detailed site investigation work, in particular, to locate construction materials and do a detailed survey of the runway alignment, pre-requisites for confirming or revising the findings of the preliminary reconnaissance team.



At the same time, leading elements of 11 Field Squadron established a tented camp on the airfield site. In January they were joined by the rest of the squadron (including its attached troop of RAE), followed by plant from 54 Corps Field Park Squadron, newly arrived from UK. Machinery was meanwhile brought up from Singapore by sea to Bangkok, whence it was forwarded by rail and road, which necessitated the strengthening of some of the bridges on the route. Air maintenance, limited because of operational demands from Borneo, was from then on to be a containing constraint of the movement of men and of urgently needed stores.

The main effort to begin with was applied to the construction of roads, a helipad and a hutted camp for the workforce. Water for the works was from the outset a recurrent problem and at one time had to be hauled from a distance of 18 miles. By April the camp was ready for occupation and 11 Squadron could be released, the plant working two shifts a day, had cleared the alignment for the runway and removed topsoil to an average depth of two feet to reach sand suitable for cut and fill operations to form the sub grade, clay in the sub grade being replaced by sand.



The ground was extremely dry and the whole area became covered with dust, making it unpleasant work in shade temperatures up to 110 degrees Fahrenheit (40c). Progress at this point was well ahead of schedule, but operations were being increasingly interrupted by unseasonal rains and, at the end of May, earthmoving was suspended. Water supply had, for the time being, ceased to be a problem. In July, after completing a temporary strip for light aircraft, 59 Squadron returned to Singapore for a period of rest and retraining.

The initial design for the airfield produced by ORE SLAT in June 1963 was for a wearing surface of Pierced Steel Planking (PSP) on a base of compacted laterite and sand, 18 inches thick. The top three inches of the laterite were to be stabilised with bitumen to produce a waterproof seal to the pavement. The findings of the more detailed investigation carried out by CRE Crown technical team from January to June 1964 led to a re-design of the runway pavement. It was found that the locally occurring laterite, apart from being much less extensive than expected, contained a high proportion of clay. This rendered the material unsuitable for bitumen

stabilisation. Also, there were second thoughts about the use of PSP.

The Americans had experienced difficulty with a nearby airfield at Nakhon Phanom surfaced with PSP, where the metal cut through the waterproof seal. There was also concern that PSP was unsuitable for the higher tyre pressures being used on modern aircraft and a worry about the effect of the metal on electronic equipment. Revised designs were developed by CRE Crown and a final proposal submitted in October 1964 - was well into the second dry season of the project - was for a surface of two inches of bitumen macadam on a base of six inches of stabilised laterite, upon a sub-base of compacted laterite and then sand, giving a total pavement thickness of 22 inches. It was proposed that the base stabilisation should be done using both lime and cement and this method was endorsed by the Road Research Laboratory in the UK. The pavement design was approved by the Chief Engineer FARELF and financial approval for an extra cost of £38,500 was given by the Treasury in November.

Meanwhile in August work had been resumed on site, six full days a week, now hindered once more by an acute water shortage and by breakdowns in the whole range of ageing plant. Because some of the materials had to be collected from sources as much as 200 miles distant, when stabilisation began it was sometimes impossible to keep more than one of the four Howard trains in action. However, the runway base was finished by the end of March, and the macadam surface by the end of May, when the New Zealand detachment was withdrawn.

Determined efforts to beat the monsoon enabled the control tower, airfield fencing and lighting to be completed in time for the opening ceremony to be performed on 17 June 1965 by the Thai Minister of Defence in the presence of his Prime Minister and the British Ambassador. It was now apparent that the cost would overrun the approved estimate by a substantial margin and, furthermore, it would scarcely be possible to complete the outstanding works and evacuate the site by the planned date, 31 October 1965. More alarmingly, it was soon apparent that the airfield was showing signs of failure, with soft patches and rutting.

In October 1965, Colonel Engineer Plans (Airfields) in MOD visited Leong Nok Tha to investigate what residual work was required to reinstate the pavement. In doing his investigation, he identified the most likely causes of failure.

The main reason he found was the porosity of the bitumen macadam. This, coupled with an inadequate cross-fall, allowed water to be retained as if in a sponge, from whence it filtered down through cracks and imperfections in the stabilised base to soften the laterite subbase below, sufficient to cause failure. With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to catalogue many contributing causes for the failure.

For reasons of economy, the bitumen macadam was very much a marginal design. It should have worked, but the aggregates used were of poor quality due to local circumstances and the mixing plant was too old and inadequate for the task. The result was a macadam that looked fine when laid but which "stripped" (bitumen aggregate adhesion failure) when wet. The inadequate cross-fall accentuated the problem. The stabilisation generally worked well, but there were many problems with equipment serviceability, no compounded by the remote location and operator experience. There were doubts too about the quality of the local cement. It was expected that there would be minor imperfections in such stabilised bases and a waterproof seal was essential. The laterite used for the sub-base was of a very variable quality, comprehensive laboratory testing had indicated a reasonable bearing capacity for this layer, but in the event, the material as laid proved far weaker. Desirable field trials could not be carried out because of time constraints, the percolating water guaranteed failure.

Pending the outcome of technical enquiries, the whole question of SLAT and of Crown in particular, came under review at high level, with certain circles in Whitehall pressing for a decision to cut the losses and clear out of Thailand as quickly as possible. This unsoldierly proposition was, however, most strongly resisted by the E-in-C, contending with eventual success that, quite apart from political and military considerations, the Royal Engineers should be allowed the opportunity to retrieve their fortunes, to regain confidence in themselves and to restore their reputation in the eyes of the RAF. The latter was particularly important as the assumption of responsibility for airfield construction by the Royal Engineers from the RAF was at its height at the time.



In November 1965 11 Field Squadron took over from 59 Field Squadron the ongoing works, while the latter moved back to Singapore for re-training. Meanwhile, a new batching and mixing plant was ordered and brought up in time to be taken into use by 59 Field Squadron on their return in May 1966.

The resurfacing sequence involved stripping back the blacktop, ensuring that the underlying stabilisation was intact, or repairing as needed, and then placing an 8 inch layer of pavement quality concrete (PQC) in this phase, the force found itself fully stretched with two concreting parties working alternate 8 hour shifts with others employed on associated and secondary tasks, which included laying blacktop shoulders, re-turfing, runway and taxiway markings, cutting and sealing joints in the pavement, besides normal camp services and administration. The task was, notwithstanding, all but complete by October when 59 Squadron had to be taken off the project to assume its new role in support of 3 Commando Brigade, Royal Marines. By then 11 Squadron was engaged elsewhere, including Vientiane in Laos whither a detachment has been sent to assist in flood relief operations.

The confrontation in Borneo was, however, then seen to be coming to an end. 34 Field Squadron, which had arrived in Singapore in September from the UK was to be deployed there, was deflected to Thailand to finish the work. When, in December 1966, the reconstructed airfields was finally proved and handed over, CRE Crown was dissolved, some of its staff going to join the HQ of CRE (Ops) FARELF and the establishment cover being transferred to 63 CRE (Construction), which opened in Singapore in January 1967. Thus ended the not altogether happy saga of Leon Nok Tha. With so little by way of preliminary investigation, the bold decision to proceed was from the start fraught with risk yet, the risks most feared were - as is often the case - not that those materialised, while the circumstances which led so nearly to failure were at once unpredicted and unpredictable. In the event, no lasting damage was done, for, as the operation neared its end, negotiations were already underway with the Thai Government under which a similar workforce was to remain for a further year to undertake, under the code name Post Crown, road construction.

Post Crown and Beyond

The original suggestion made in September 1966 to the Thais was that a road should be built Northwest of Loeng Nok Tha to a village some 25 kilometres away called Ban Khok Klang. Such a road would provide access in all weathers for several hitherto isolated communities, while at the same time contributing materially to the internal security of an area open to communist incursions from across the nearby Mekong river, the Thai Government agreed to pay for and deliver to the site all construction materials, and provide civilian labour, the British were to provide plant and project control staff. The alignment - after several revisions - was finally fixed in November and work started in earnest on 2 January 1967. The initial target of 25 kilometres had been fixed largely because it had been assumed that the force would have to leave Thailand at the end of 1967. However, in August it was agreed that the British could remain until May 1968 to extend the road westward from Ban Khok towards Nong Phok, some 14 kilometres away, if the Thais extended their existing road from there eastward to meet them. In the event, the link was completed by a combined British and Thai force, under British command, working west. Control of the project was exercised under CRE (Ops) FARELF by each OC of the squadron deployed to the task at any one time, who had additional staff including a Thai liaison officer and the FARELF Air Troop RE in support. The main base camp remained at the Crown site, with a forward construction camp at Hong Kong.

34 Field Squadron, having completed its task on the airfield, began work on the road in December and was relieved by 59 Field Squadron in May 1967. In August they were relieved by 11 Field Squadron who bore the brunt of the monsoon. By the end of December - when the original 25 kilometres of road would have been finished - no other unit was immediately available at hand to continue the rotation. Accordingly, from January 1968, a composite workforce made up from a 54 (FARELF) Support Squadron and one troop each from 51 (Airfields) and 59 Field Squadrons, took over and, with the Air Troop RE still overhead, brought the extended project to completion.

The 40 kilometre long road was formally declared open on 18 April 1968. An impressive ceremonial was mounted by 54 support Squadron marching past in white No. 3 Dress and comparing favourably with a smart detachment of the Royal Thai Army brought in for the occasion.

Since the people of Leong Nok Tha had virtually no experience of operating or maintaining any form of machine, the development of water supplies in the surrounding villages began with the provision of hand pumps drawing from shallow wells but, towards the end, a start was made to introduce a more advanced system, putting down 200 feet deep wells, with eclectic pumps powered from diesel generators, in association with limited piped distribution and water towers built by the villagers themselves, in this and in other directions training the local inhabitants turned out to be a rewarding by-product. Some of them quickly mastered the procedure for setting out unsupervised, straightforward sections of road alignment.

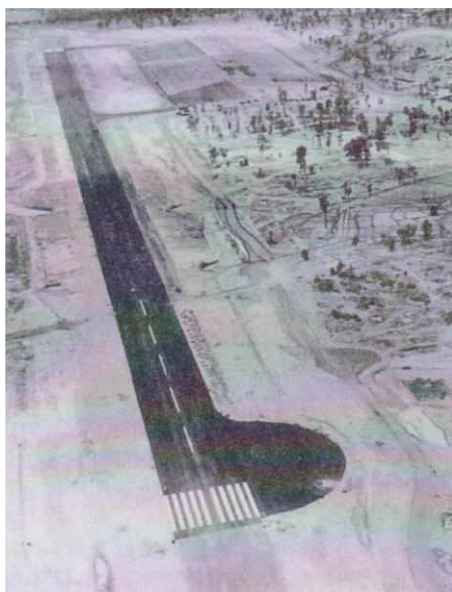


The 15 bridges (some of five or six spans) were built by teams of two Sapper carpenters and 12 Thais, and the 1,700 reinforced concrete pipes required for the 93 culverts were manufactured entirely by villagers under the supervision of a Sergeant of the Thai Army, up to 200 were engaged to work on the road, not all on unskilled tasks.

Numerous subsidiary projects were carried out by the Sappers - not infrequently in their off-time - with the grateful cooperation of the local populace, before the last of them left the district in November 1968.

Other Projects

The friendships forged at Leong Nok Tha blossomed into yet another programme of projects in another part of the country. In October 1969, an ad hoc Specialist Team RE (Thailand) under 63 CRE (Construction) was formed. A combination of geological, political and administrative considerations led to the STRE being based at Chm Bung, near Rat Buri and some 50 miles from Bangkok, where it was occupied principally with well drilling and water supply installations, but also building schools. By the time its programme had been completed in September 1971, the team had drilled eight wells, the deepest of which was 236 feet.



The original airstrip



The concrete airstrip still in current use

An Extraordinary Career of Bluff and Forgery

Thomas Edward Chater, 14/8/1921 - 3/4/2019



Thomas Edward Chater was born in the Birmingham parish of All Saints in August 1921. He was the only boy amongst four siblings. After leaving school and taking various employments, in September 1941 at the age of 20, he enlisted into the Army and became a Gunner in the Royal Artillery. His Army number was 1128982, later changed to 2222898.

He joined 50th Anti-Tank Training Regiment R. A. at Church Stretton and was immediately "Declared on Active Service". In March 1942 Tom, now a trained soldier, was posted to 52nd Anti-Tank Regiment R. A. and set sail for India. The voyage must have been tediously long, because Tom was given 14 days' detention under section 9 of the Army Act (*insubordination*). It's unlikely he was the only one.

He remained in India until August of that year when his regiment moved to Iraq, based in Basra, conducting mountain warfare training in Iran and Syria. After a short spell in Egypt training in amphibious operations, in July 1943 Tom took part in operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily. Next on the list was operation Baytown, part of the invasion of Italy followed by the first battle of Monte Cassino in January 1944. After the Italian campaign the regiment moved to Palestine. In February 1945 52nd Regiment was posted to the Northwest European Theatre and remained in Germany through the end of the War until April 1946. Tom nevertheless managed to find time to marry his sweetheart Joan Ward on 7th May 1945, the day before VE Day. He finally returned to the UK in April 1946 to the RA Depot and then to 21 RA Training Regiment until he was demobilised to the Royal Army Reserve in January 1947.

His wartime service was recognised by the award of a bunch of medals; he received 1939/43 Star, the 1939/45 War Medal, the Africa Star, the Italy Star, the France and Germany Star and the Defence Medal.

He stayed on the Reserve until discharged on 19th August 1948, and enlisted in the Territorial Army the very next day, joining the 18th Battalion of The Parachute Regiment. Naturally pre-Para and Parachute courses were no problem for Tom. Whilst a paratrooper, Private Chater was promoted to Lance Corporal, and appeared as an extra in the 1953 Alan Ladd film "Red Beret". He soldiered with 18 PARA until August 1953 when he took a well-earned break. Tom marked time until his soldiering urge returned in 1957, and he passed the Commando Course, swapping his maroon headgear for a green beret with the Royal Marines Reserve. He was a Bootneck for four years, decided to take another break, and then re-joined RMR for a further four. In January 1965 he enlisted in 23 SAS (V); a smudge had appeared on his documents which changed his year of birth from 1921 to 1927.

Officially 37 years old but at a true age of 43 he passed selection under the watchful eye of Paddy Nugent, and joined A Squadron in Thorpe Street, Birmingham. Late in 1971, even the apparent years caught up with Tom, (he was officially 44 but really 50 years old by this time) and he was obliged to leave 23. Undaunted, and aided by another smudge on his documents which changed the year of birth to 1929, he rejuvenated by another two years, and an apparent 42 but really 50-year-old Tom joined 131 Independent Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers (V), where he served the final two years of his military career.

During training for SAS selection, Tom reported into a rendezvous point. A pile often bricks was on the verge. He was told to put two bricks into his Bergen, to weigh it down. He took all ten. "Chater - just take two!" shouted the directing staff. "I'll take the lot" said he. The DS had to persuade him to take just two, and "leave some bricks for the others", which he reluctantly did. In the late 1960's, everyone wanted Tom to be in their patrol, because he could dig like ten men.

On a winter exercise in BAOR, the weather was bitterly cold, cold enough to permit the issue of G1098 Rum to the troops, to help keep out the cold. At midnight Tom was "eyes on" the crossroads, for a two-hour stag; at 0200 he rebuffed a shift change, at 0400 he rebuffed a shift change, at 0600 the same thing.

At first light, Tom was found with a big and satisfied grin from ear to ear, and of course the rum had gone. On another exercise on Salisbury Plain, after a parachute descent Tom said to his buddy, "you know that parachute I jumped with last night?" Staff said "why, was there something wrong with it?" "No" he said, "but I'm sure I jumped with it in 1948".

In civilian life, Tom was an accomplished, hard-working and extremely loyal carpenter. He was tireless and would keep going when others around him were flagging. So fit was he that he continued working well into his eighties. On the day of an Association Midlands Lunch, an A23 member explained to his wife that they would be picking up Tom Chater, who was getting on in years, must be in his late eighties, didn't drive and hadn't seen him for some years but would recognise him.

Fifteen minutes past the allotted time there was still no sign of Tom; wife suggested he might have forgotten about the lunch date or that he may have fallen ill. But Tom appeared, hurrying down the road. He got in the car and offered his apologies for not being on-time; he was late finishing work and explained he was renovating an old house and had that same morning demolished a dividing wall and needed to clear it up before the skip was taken away. "I do up old houses just to give myself something to do and earn little extra". Wife said, "I was expecting an old man with a stick and up turns a property developer. I hope you are as fit as Tom when you are his age!" Some years later, at the age of 95 Tom's horrified neighbours pleaded with him to climb down from the roof of a shed that he was in the process of renewing. Age did not weary him.

He was a regular attendee at the Birmingham branch of the Parachute Regiment Association, until he and Joan, whose health was beginning to fail, moved to Wales, to be nearer their family. He was also a great supporter of the Regimental Association Midlands Lunch. The last lunch he attended was in 2017.

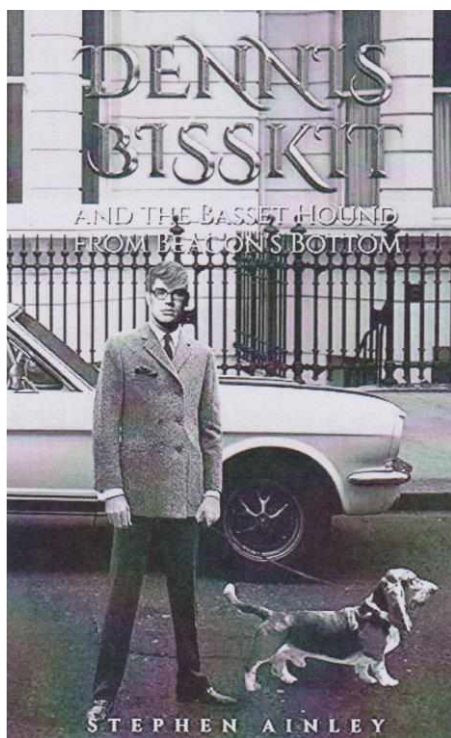
Tom and Joan were blessed with two children. Keith in 1947 and Diane in 1953, both of whom survive their father. Joan sadly died in 2010.

Tom Chater was always a modest man, hardy and willing with an iron constitution. Small in stature, but enormous in personality and determination, he was a model soldier and a credit to the nation he served for so long. All who knew him were glad they did.

Book Review by Acorn

Dennis Bisskit and the Basset Hound from Beacon's Bottom

by Stephen Ainley



This is the third book of the trilogy of Dennis Bisskit novels. Like other great detective novels we have two leading characters in these stories. There is Dennis Bisskit aka 'Ginge' our hero and his partner Jack Blackshaw trading as 'Stinky'. The two had been childhood friends who joined the army together then after returning to civilian life formed a private detective agency.

I doubt whether the Author set out to create a searing indictment of man's inhumanity to man nor indeed had his sights set on being a candidate for the Booker Prize. What we have here could be top class copy for an Ealing Comedy. The incessant chuckle level humour works because neither of the protagonists intends to be funny. They are good working class boys from Dudley, they are 'Brummies' and that is where the humour lies. Brummies have their own unique outlook on life. Whereas most of us learn about irony as we mature Brummies are born with expertise in the subject as part of their genetic makeup. They are the only people who have their own, regional facial expression, a sort of a half-smile half sneer which they tweak slightly too powerfully express the full gamut of human emotions. That facial expression could probably qualify for EU Regional Protection except that The West Midlands is no longer in the EU. And, of course, they have supreme self-confidence: "Yo can always tell a Brummie - but yo can't tell im much". That confidence is the usual cause of the many pitfalls and pratfalls that humorously blight Dennis's working life. Like Watson to Holmes, long suffering Stinky is always there with loyal support.

In this book our intrepid heroes are engaged to provide close quarter protection to the aristocratic Bertie the Basset Hound. Bertie has been entered for Cruft's and it is the job of the boys to ensure that he gets there

If I had any criticism of the book it would be that the storylines can become quite convoluted with sub-stories and flashbacks to childhood adventures, for instance in one piece, shows himself to his best advantage and returns home safely. Pitted against the duo is their nemesis "The Scottish Man". That is the basic story line but there is enough material packed around it to make two more novels. All of that material is chuckle fodder.

accidentally traversing all 3000 yards of the Dudley Canal Tunnel in a baby's pram. Is that convolution a bad thing? Not necessarily, it means that recaps and rereads are required, in my case anyway, and that means more bang for your buck.

The endearing charm for me of all three of the books is that I can relate to Bisskit and Blackshaw. In some ways I see myself in them, certainly I see characteristics of many of my childhood and army friends in them.

Without doubt the book is an enjoyable read. At the Amazon Kindle price it is as cheap as chips so I would have to have a good reason for not buying a copy. I highly recommend all three of the books.

Media Report on Saturday 7th July 1990- 50 Years of Glory

Two Wars Defied Death and Disaster

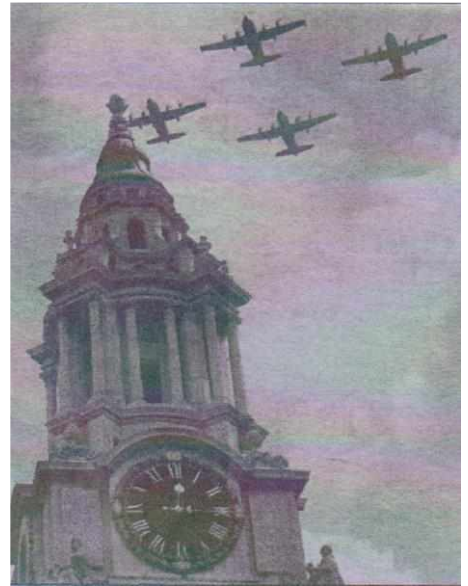
It was a day for pride and pageantry ... and the Paras brought both to London when they marched through the capital to celebrate 50 glorious years. Soldiers who fought the evil of Hitler marched alongside those who defeated the Argentineans in the Falklands.

Prince Charles took the salute as 3,500 Red Devils, heads held high and medals of valour gleaming, brought the City to a standstill.

Old soldiers, crippled in action, were pushed in wheelchairs by younger Comrades. But the thousands who lined the route from St Paul's Cathedral to the Guildhall reserved their loudest cheers for the brave veterans who formed the airborne forces in the 1940s.

The birthday celebrations on Friday 22nd June, began with a thanksgiving service at St Paul's. As the haunting notes of the Last Post rang out to honour fallen comrades there was hardly a dry eye among the vast congregation.

Then led by Pegasus - the Parachute Regiment's Shetland pony mascot - the great parade marched off to Guildhall. As it moved away four RAF Hercules aircraft thundered overhead in a dramatic salute from the skies.



Arnhem



Defeat in the bloody battle of Arnhem played havoc with Major General John Frost's GOLF!

Before flying out to lead the Paras in their finest hour he ordered his clubs to be sent with him - "so I could enjoy myself after beating the Germans".

But the Para hero found himself playing a different kind of game, grimly defying the might of a German SS Panzer division.

General Frost, DSO and bar, MC, then a young Lt Col commanded the Paras 2nd Battalion at Arnhem. They were among 35,000 troops parachuted behind German lines to capture five bridges, allowing ground troops to sweep into Germany and end the war in 1944.

Light

Gen Frost and his 600 men captured the northern end of Arnhem Bridge over the Rhine. They expected to defend it for 24 hours. But reinforcements failed to arrive, and they held out alone for three days and four nights.

Carrying only light arms and little ammunition they defied German tanks until they were finally overwhelmed and taken prisoner. Frost holds no bitterness towards his old commanders. He confines his criticism to remarking, "our generals had an off day". He believes the worst mistake was the failure to take Nijmegen bridge 17 miles to the south, on the route of a relieving Guards armoured brigade. When the Guards arrived, Nijmegen was in German hands. "A US unit should have taken that bridge", he says, "Wasn't their fault, they were only acting on orders, instead the Americans were sent to some high ground where they were totally out of things. It was a waste of resources". "It slowly dawned us that no help was coming". "By the time we surrendered we had 250 wounded, including myself, I'd been hit in the feet by shrapnel"

Life

Thirty-six years after the epic battle, Frost returned to Arnhem - this time as an adviser to maker of the film A Bridge Too Far. He instantly loathed Anthony Hopkins, who was playing his character. And Hopkins disliked him.

I told the director, Richard Attenborough that it wasn't working says Frost. Attenborough told me to stick close to him, watch his every move and tell him where he was going wrong. At the end of two weeks we had worked so closely together that we became the greatest of friends".

The thrill-seeking General had 'one last bash' at parachuting with his men 25 years ago ... and it almost cost him his life. "I remember hurtling through the air, aware that something was very wrong", he recalls. Above me people were shouting that I'd got a thrown line. "That was serious because it meant the parachute wasn't behaving properly. Luckily, I landed in a rabbit warren as soft as thistledown. I walked away without a bruise. But I swore it was my last attempt". General Frost - Johnnie to his men - believes the shared fear of jumping into battle is what makes the Paras special. "There's an invisible bond that's still there when you're on the ground".

Links

"In the early days of the war the Ministry sent a psychiatrist to study us. "Afterwards he told me, "It's extraordinary, but 80% of your men have an inferiority complex".

"Maybe he was right. Paras do need to prove themselves - like they did at Arnhem".

It wasn't for nothing that Hitler nicknamed us the "Red Devils."

Falklands



On the killing fields of Goose Green, Para hero Major Colin Connor ought never to have beaten the odds

Isolated behind enemy lines, pinned down by machine gun fire and napalmed by the Argentines as he spied on their positions, death looked a terrible certainty. Yet Colin, then 25, survived to become one of the youngest soldiers to win the Military Cross. The ex-graduate's name is mentioned in most of the books recalling the 1982 campaign in the South Atlantic.

Bitter

He has been hailed as the "eyes and ears" of legendary hero Colonel "H" Jones in the bitter battle for Goose Green.

But he has remained a quiet hero of the war, his amazing story of courage untold... until now.

The 5ft 10in officer was one of the first men ashore at San Carlos.

His mission was to lead a behind-the-lines patrol ahead of 2 Para to spy out Argentinian positions and report back to Colonel H, the battalion's commanding officer.

By the time the battalion had moved off Sussex Mountain for Goose Green, he was already stalking the enemy. In freezing conditions, and without food or water, Colin crawled five miles to note enemy positions. For 14 hours he lay still as Argentinian lookouts scanned the hills for signs of an advance. Finally, disregarding his own safety, he radioed RAF Harriers to blitz their positions.

It was a call that almost cost the brave Para his life.

Enemy gunners were dug in and well protected against anti-personnel bombs.

Worse, the radio signal Colin sent had blown his cover and left his men a sitting duck for a machine gun nest.

"The sound of the crack and thud all around still sticks in my mind," says Colin. "Our job was to go ahead of the battalion and locate the enemy to assist the Commanding Officer's battle plan. "I was only doing what I had been trained for. Every man in 2 Para would have done the same."

As the murderous hail of bullets continued, Colin led his tiny, hand-picked team in a controlled retreat. They hid in chest-deep water for half a day with Colin relaying intelligence messages back to base until his radio batteries faded. "We were totally cut off and the only way out was to run for cover," he says.

"We certainly didn't have time to be frightened — we were too busy."

Blaze

"The atmosphere is hard to describe. It was ugly, but I was glad to have been there. I would have felt like a fireman who missed the fire brigade's biggest blaze had I not gone. Everything was moving so quickly no one realised our casualties were high. When I heard 'H' had been hit I was so shocked I just couldn't believe it. Everyone was stunned."

"Then we heard the Mirage jets screaming towards us dropping napalm". "It was close ...but somehow we got out alive"

Colin's Military Cross citation records that his "outstanding bravery" in spotting the enemy saved many British soldiers in the battle for Goose Green.

And the Paras still speak his name with pride. A sergeant who served in the Falklands recalls: "At one point we thought he was dead. "We knew he was trapped by enemy gunfire, but we couldn't help him because he was too far ahead. "Then when we saw him we gave him a bit of stick. "He did a great job, even if he won't admit it.

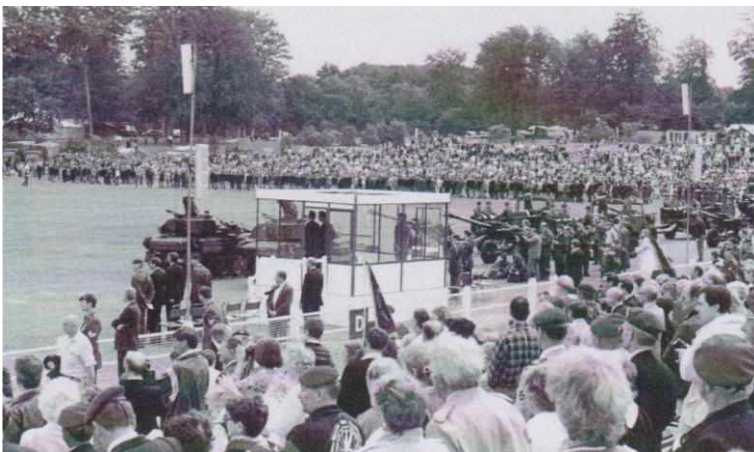
"No one in the Paras likes to blow his own trumpet.

"But there's no doubt that he was the battalion's eyes and ears and his reports certainly saved men's lives."



Taking the salute on this grand occasion was HRH Prince Charles. Unfortunately due to a recent fall during a polo match HRH was unable to actually return the salute with his right arm and handshakes were limited to this left hand!

The weekend activities commenced with an invasion of hundreds of former and serving airborne colleagues who literally took over each and every pub in Aldershot on the Friday afternoon and evening. Then, as in 9 Sqn's case, as the pubs closed (2300 hrs) we headed for our own Aviary bar in Rhine barracks.



attendees had travelled from near and far with some former airborne colleagues travelling over from various parts of BAOR.

Celebrations to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the creation of Airborne Forces for the year 2020, has in the main been firmly placed on the backburner. This will be in contrast to the fantastic events held in Aldershot for the Golden Jubilee of 1990. Many will recall the superb tattoo held in Rushmoor Arena, which involved military displays from virtually every airborne unit within the brigade.



Under the blazing July sun, not surprisingly, one venue within the Rushmoor Arena that proved most popular was the beer tent! It became the priority meeting point for friends and colleagues who had probably not met for many years. Stories of old were told with gusto, some much embellished with the passing of time. Many



N/k, Mike Ellery, Paddy Martin, John Barrie, Fred Gray, Scouse Ebbs, Graham Harrison, Sid Davies, Dave Norminton, Alex Cockburn, (Front Row) Ken Turk, Dave Rutter, Chris Lunn, Dave Ruddock & Malcolm Barnwell

The 'Sqn's Saturday evenings activities located in Maida Gym had been planned well in advance . The then OC (Maj P. Wall) wrote the following in the program of the events:

Welcome to the Golden Jubilee Reunion of Airborne Engineers. This is our largest ever reunion and the climax of PARA 90 for the Sappers. Our thanks are due to Captain Joe Houlston who, in addition to all his efforts on behalf of the Airborne Engineers Association, is the architect of tonight's celebrations. On behalf of all serving members of 9 Parachute Squadron I wish you a thoroughly enjoyable evening.

Having stated that this was to be the largest ever Airborne Sappers' reunion, the OC could not be accused of exaggerating. Over 700 tickets, priced at just £5 per head were sold. Maida Gym was packed to capacity.

Programme of Events

1930-2115	Disco
2115-2200	Group
2200-2210	Announcements
2210-2220	3 Para Drums Spectacular
2220-2230	Speeches/Presentation
2230	Last Post – Toast to Absent Friends
2230-2330	Disco/Buffer/Pipes
2230-0030	Sing-along
0030-0100	Group
0100-0200	Disco



Ken Turk, Fred Gray, Tom Ormiston, Dave Ruddock, Pete Bailey, Malcolm Barnwell, Graham Harrison, Chris Lunn, Dave Rutter, John Barrie, Colin Brian, Mike Simms & Roger Christie



Tony Roberts, Barney Barnwell, Mike Simms & Wally Clift - 1990

History of the Airborne Engineers as at July 1990

9 Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers currently fulfils the role of Airborne Engineers in 5 Airborne Brigade. Yet "the Squadron" as we know it today was first designated 9 Field Company RE (Airborne) in October 1941, as part of 1st Airlanding Brigade Group. Indeed, the story of Airborne Engineers starts right at the onset of Airborne Forces and has carried on uninterrupted since. On a summer's day in 1940 when Winston Churchill, the then Prime Minister, issued a directive that a force of five thousand men be trained as airborne troops, they looked to the sappers! Forty eight hours later a Major John F Rock RE was summoned to the War Office. There he was told to "take charge of the military organisation of British airborne forces". Predictably he was given no clear directives on exactly what form the new force would take or the role it would play; what type of weapons, equipment, training and aircraft would be suitable. The problems seemed endless and insurmountable. Regardless, John Rock in true sapper tradition 'just got on with it' and in due course, together with Sqn Leader L Strange, the Central Landing School was formed at Ringway, Manchester, later to become the Central Landing Establishment belonging to the RAF. These were the forerunners of No 1 Parachute Training School.

The first British airborne operation, "Op Colossus", the Tragino Aqueduct raid, had its fair share of sappers as did the Bruneval raid with C Company 2 Para. The next airborne operation was an all sapper affair with 261 Field Park Company (Airborne) and 9 Field Company (Airborne) on Op Freshman, the first abortive attempt to destroy the Norsk Hydro plant at Vermork in Norway. It was a tragic affair where all who took part lost their lives, the majority being executed by the Gestapo. Subsequently, Airborne Sappers took part in operations in North Africa, Italy, Southern France. Greece and Java. The Indian parachute sappers, including 411 (Royal

Bombay) Parachute Squadron Indian Engineers and 12 Parachute Squadron RE (ex-Chindits), fought in the Far East with the 50th Indian Parachute Brigade.

The Ponte Grande bridge operation on 9 July 1943 in Sicily was a particularly successful operation with 9 Field Company (Airborne) taking part. This was honoured by the late King George VI who presented a scroll to the Company for its part in the battle. A few days later 1st Parachute Squadron RE was involved in the capture of Primosole Bridge.

Arnhem again saw Airborne Sappers in the forefront of the action and indeed a significant number of men around Arnhem Bridge were sappers, including Capt. Eric McKay, with nearly two platoons of sappers at the schoolhouse near the bridge, and Capt. Eric O'Callaghan's depleted sapper platoon in the old factory building which ran alongside the approach ramp to the bridge. Both units fought magnificently in the infantry role. In Normandy, 3 Parachute Squadron RE destroyed a total of five bridges on the River Dives. This included an epic jeep dash by Maj Roseveare DSC who, under heavy fire, managed to reach the main road bridge at Troarn and destroy it. Fighting then continued in the infantry role and during the battle for Breville, Sgt Irving won the MM for chasing a SP gun with a PIAT. 249 Fd Coy (Airborne), as part of the coup de main parties, helped seize the vital bridges over the River Orne and the Orne Canal.

During the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes, Airborne Sappers were again heavily involved in mine clearance and bridging. The Rhine crossings, from Wismar to the Baltic, Norway, Palestine, Malaya, Suez, Aden, Cyprus, Borneo, N Ireland and of course the Falklands war saw Airborne Engineers in the thick of battle. Indeed one of its units, 9 Parachute Squadron RE is now the longest continuously serving in role fighting unit in Airborne Forces. From the forerunners to the present day, in the finest Royal Engineer tradition, first in - last out.

"Unique and Ubique"

9 Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers Formation and History

The Squadron's beginnings go back to 1787 when the Chatham Company of "Royal Military Artificers" was raised at Chatham. In 1806 "The Company" was numbered 9 Field Coy in Gibraltar. The next hundred years' of the Sqn'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 7th Division during the Boer Wars.

During the First World War the Company served with the 4th Infantry Division. They bridged the rivers Marne and Aisne and took part in the first and second battles of Ypres. In July 1916, the Company took part in the Somme offensives.

1939 saw 9th Field Company RE back in France and still part of 4th Division. It took part in the evacuation of the BEF from Dunkirk and a sadly depleted company returned to UK where, in May 1942, it was reorganised as 9 Field Company RE (Airborne). 9 Field Company RE (Airborne) became the Engineer support for the newly formed 1st Airlanding Brigade. Interestingly, about one-third of the company were trained in the parachute role and the remainder trained as glider-borne troops.

One of the earliest Airborne operations 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 crashed on landing and the few survivors were executed by the Gestapo. The company then took part in airborne operations in North Africa 1943, Sicily 1943 and Italy 1943.

On 9 July 1943 the company, as part of 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 and the Company was honoured by the presentation of a vellum scroll by his late Majesty King George VI to commemorate their part in the battle.

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

The Company emplaned on the morning of Sunday 17 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 having knocked out six or seven armoured vehicles with a plat anti-tank gun. The platoon were used as the counter-attack force by Lt Col John Frost, the CO 2 Para and fought magnificently in the infantry role.

Unfortunately, they took heavy casualties. Of the original Sqn of 215 All Ranks, only 57 men returned to UK, the remainder being captured or killed.

Deployment to Norway -1945

On VE Day 1st Airborne Division was ordered to Norway to accept the surrender of the 400,000 Germans there. While in Norway 9th Company was reorganised to hold the younger members of the divisional engineers and then dispatched to join 6th Airborne Division which was preparing to move to the Far East. The sudden collapse of Japan changed all plans, however. 1 Airborne Division

was disbanded, and 9th Airborne Squadron accompanied 6 Airborne Division to Palestine.

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. Casualties in Palestine were two officers and one OR killed in action.

9th Squadron accompanied the division to Germany, and when 6 Airborne Division was reduced to a single brigade (16 Independent Parachute Brigade), the Squadron was chosen to be the Sapper unit. Elements from the disbanded 1st Parachute Squadron RE, 3rd Parachute Squadron RE and 147 Airborne Field Park Squadron RE were posted into 9th Squadron.

9 Independent Airborne Squadron RE returned to UK in 1950. Since that year the Sqn has served on active service in countries such as Egypt, Cyprus, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Aden, Radfan, Borneo, Rhodesia and including six full tours and two spearhead tours of duty in Northern Ireland. In April 1982, the Squadron embarked for the Falkland Islands as part of 5 Infantry Bde. In true sapper tradition the Sqn 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 tradition of the Sqn.

Since the Falkland's War, the Squadron has had tours in Belize, Kenya, the Falkland Islands and Canada. It has also provided the Queen's Guard for St James' Palace and Buckingham Palace and also a guard for the Tower of London. This was an especial honour as it occurred in the Royal Engineers 200 Anniversary year.

The epic saga continues.

Formation of the Airborne Engineers Association

Joe Houlston

Early days

It all started one Airborne Forces weekend in 1989; I was working late in my office at 9 Para Sqn, Rhine Bks in Aldershot. I was feeling rather tired, hungry and desperate to get home. Airborne forces weekend always gave the Admin Officer of 9 Sqn a lot of organising to do and invariably I had to work late. I did a last check to ensure everything was OK and with a sigh of relief I packed up and locked my door. As I walked out through the front door, I saw three older gentlemen standing beside the Falkland's memorial plinth. "Bugger", I thought, "now I am going to be harassed by some Para Regt 'golden oldies' who are probably lost and will want to tell me lots of 'when I' stories".

I put on a brave face and resigned myself to having to talk to them. As I walked down the steps, I noticed they were wearing Royal Engineer ties. Somewhat intrigued, I thought "make an effort Joe, they probably deserve it". I said hello and asked them who they were and could I help them. They asked me about the plinth, I explained and then they told me who they were. I was gob smacked - these were ex Airborne Engineers from the early days of Parachuting; one had even been on the Tragino Aqueduct raid, the first airborne operation.

My history of Airborne Engineers started and finished with 9 Indep Para Sqn RE and a regular RE officer had once told me that there had been no 9 Sqn soldiers at Arnhem Bridge (there had been about 50). I had no idea of the extent of Engineer involvement in Airborne forces. Full of interest I invited them upstairs to see some of the memorabilia which we had stored in an old locker and was gathering dust. These guys blew my mind away, here was walking history and they were bright, intelligent and funny; they had the same sense of humour that was unique to soldiers in 9 Sqn. Immediately, I felt a strong affinity with them and could not wait to see them again the next day and continue our conversation.

The following day opened my mind to the wealth and diversity of Airborne Engineers since 1941. I was determined to learn more and research the history of Airborne Engineers; I did, but that is another story.

I could not get those guys out of my mind and resolved to do something about it. I had an idea about forming a club or organisation like the PRA that would bring Airborne Engineers together. First, I had to find out if there would be any interest in such an idea. I talked to the QM, John Aldridge and my good friend Pete Kershaw, both thought it would be a good idea and Pete suggested it had been spoken about before, but no action taken. I felt encouraged by what they said and determined to give it a try. How to start? It was obvious that I would need a consensus of ex Sqn members to have any chance of forming an organisation, so decided to test the water by starting a branch in Aldershot with local ex Airborne Engineers.

With help from various sources I put together a list of addresses of those living locally and sent off a letter outlining my ideas and included a date for the first meeting to be held in the Cpl's club of 9 Sqn. I got rather a muted response but resolved to carry on with the meeting and hope for the best. I confess that I was extremely nervous when waiting in the Cpl's club, wondering how many, if any, would attend. After what seemed an interminable wait the first guy turned up. Well, at least one person had come! Then in quick succession people arrived, some from quite a distance and all pleased and excited to meet up. I looked on with some pleasure, thinking "This is what it is all about - old comrades back together, with instant rapport, smiles, jokes and laughter. We must make this work"!

I needed to give them an idea of what we could achieve together. We sat down for our first meeting and I explained my thoughts and ideas for an organisation and then asked for their response. It was immediate and incredibly positive, "Yes, let's go ahead" was everyone's reply, and they made light of my suggestion that it would be hard work.

I had thought through this first meeting many times and knew everyone there had to feel they were deeply involved in the new venture. First, we needed to have a name for the association and then form a committee to investigate how we should proceed. After a lot of discussion, we finally agreed on 'Airborne Engineers Association'. The word Airborne embraced a multitude of skills, including glider borne troops, and allowed us a wider base to our membership. We were noticeably clear that the membership should not be restricted, and we wanted to include all who had served with any Airborne Engineer unit in any capacity. This was especially important to me; there should be no stupid restrictions, but a genuine willingness to embrace all.

The next thing was to agree on was a committee and I gently steered things along. I was nominated to be the first chairman, and though I would dearly have loved to have been the first chairman, I had thought about this and realised that Aldershot would be the centre of the new association, and I would be posted soon and could end up anywhere. Reluctantly I turned it down, but I knew who I wanted and deftly moved to have Bob Ferguson nominated; all ultimately agreed and so Bob took on the role. As expected, he was to become an excellent chairman.

Luck was with us that night as we had a nucleus of outstanding individuals who worked tirelessly in those early months, and in the following year, to make the organisation what it is today. We all owe them a great debt, and they all deserve our grateful thanks.

We had lots of meetings in quick succession, the momentum needed to be maintained. Momentum- it was like a tidal wave with countless ideas put forward from badges and ties to the charter. More committees, more meetings, even more phone calls, they were exciting times. We approached Maj Gen Mike Mathews to become our first president and much to our delight, he agreed. I had fantastic support and assistance from the Sqn, especially the office staff, SSgt Pete Harrison and his clerks, the QM, John Aldridge and his staff, the SSM 'Taff Sweeney and the OCs Maj Robbie Burns and Maj Peter Wall. Their patience and support were remarkable considering the burden I put on an already busy organisation.

We needed to expand and encourage new membership and confidence in the association. Our first real effort was at Chatham when 9 Sqn celebrated 50 years of sapper involvement in Airborne forces. This gave us a good boost in membership and finances, but we still needed a real breakthrough. It was decided to hold a big reunion at Aldershot on Airborne Forces weekend in July 1990. Again, I spoke to Pete Kershaw who had done something similar before. He left me in no doubt as to the scale of the undertaking, gave me some sound advice and plenty of encouragement. I had full support from the AEA committee and the Sqn. I then set out to organise a large reunion which could give the massive boost the association needed or, I thought, become a complete failure. We needed to be able to contact as many ex-airborne engineers as possible. I made had contact with most of the old squadrons and generously they gave us lists of members. I also approached RE Records, and they were extremely helpful in giving me details of a great number of ex and serving members. Names and addresses came from numerous sources until we had compiled a formidable list.

Again, I called on the help and resources of the Sqn office to produce an information pack and letter to be sent to every address we had. Postage was a problem with so many letters, but this was resolved by the assistance of one of the founder members, 'no name - no pack drill'.

Bundles of letters went out and we just had to await the response which from the start was overwhelming. I was constantly changing the plans to accommodate more people; tickets flew out of the window, the venue was changed to Maida Gym, an extra marquee, bars, tables, chairs required sourcing, etc., etc. Luckily, John Aldridge took it all in his stride and the OC and SSM gave constant support.

The weekend was a complete blur for me. I did not rest for a minute and felt guilty I could not sit and talk with my old comrades. The association committee and especially Chris and Jan Chambers did a wonderful job on the evening and the expected breakthrough materialised. Chris Chambers constantly told me "look at what you have started now". We had really put ourselves on the map. Membership increased dramatically in the coming months, confidence was high within and outside the association, and we were here to stay!

As expected, my posting to Chatham came through and the next meeting after the reunion was my last and I left 9 Sqn the next Monday.

The association was in great hands, confident, vibrant and going full steam ahead. I was happy and left my side of things in the very capable hands of Baz Bassett. Down in Chatham, I could, with the assistance of Pete Kershaw, Eric Blenkinsop and others, form the Chatham branch. Our 'wings' were spreading fast.

The most contentious and upsetting part of the formation was our inability to bring the REA on side. I had spoken to the Controller REA and met him at Chatham to put forward our case. Unfortunately, nothing I said would convince him to support us in any format from full branch to affiliation. This was a blow to our esteem and the start of a rift with the REA. Nevertheless, we continued to write and talk to the REA, including efforts from Maj Gen Mike Matthews and Lt Col Paul Scoble, all to no avail. The stock answer was, "We have an association join that"!

The saddest part was the Controller was an Ex Airborne soldier from WWII and yet he was the most obstructive and made it clear to me he could never support our aims. Some individuals will never forgive the REA, but really it was one of our own who had done the damage. I always worried that this would never go away and unfortunately it has not. It is a thorn in the side of the association and sadly some of our best men felt unable to support the will of the majority and left. Some, even now, continue to canvas on behalf of an organisation who cast us aside.

In all this turmoil I always thought back to the first meeting. What were our aims, what did we hope to achieve? It was simple; we wanted to create an organisation for the benefit of ex-Airborne Engineer soldiers, nothing more, and nothing less. Not some fancy organisation for the glorification of some individuals but an open, easy going and outgoing association. We have achieved that, not with some huge organisation with their fingers on our necks, but with the hard work and dedication of individuals and for each other!

The continued spectre of the REA continues to bedevil the AEA with a split in the two parties, Join or not! We have lost some good men who felt they had no choice but to resign from the AEA. One must accept their honesty and integrity. The formation of an Airborne Engineers branch of the REA and the subsequent pressure on Commanding Officers has led to a reduction in new members to the AEA. How it could have been so different with some give and take from the REA in those early days.

I have great pride in what we have achieved, and enormous respect for those individuals who have put their heart and soul into the association and made it such a success. To remain a success we must embrace each other, listen to each other, accept the will of the majority, and above all respect each other's views. We can then remain what we started out to be. To coin a phrase 'Friends Reunited'.

Ministry of Defence

Air Commodore Nigel Bradshaw MSc BEng RAF

Defence Services Secretary - Head of Ceremonial and Honours

February 2020

(The following is in response to John Donaldson's most recent letter to the MOD)

Mr John Donaldson,

Thank you for your letter of 23rd December 2019 requesting an internal review into the handling of your complaints concerning medallic recognition for members of 131 Parachute Engineer Regiment (TA). The internal review has been conducted in accordance with the MOD'S maladministration process, which considers complaints from members of the public about the services provided by the MOD, whether the correct procedures were followed, and whether a suitable reply was provided. I have reviewed 19 items of correspondence from you, or those representing you (such as MPs), and the responses that you have received from the Department.

I have established that all except three of your letters and emails were responded to in a timely fashion, but there were three occasions when we fell short of the high standards that we set ourselves on timeliness. I apologise for these delays. I have been unable to establish the cause for two of these delays as they date back more than two years and there has been a turnover of staff in this time. The third occasion was a delay to your letter of complaint dated 31st August 2019. The reply sent on 16th September 2019 was posted to you as that was how your letter had been received. Unfortunately, it appears that letter went missing in the postal system, but I am aware that you subsequently received a copy. Once again, I apologise for any delay that there has been in responding to your complaints.

On reviewing that correspondence, it is clear that there were significant inconsistencies in what you were told about the posthumous award of the General Service Medal 1962(GSM62) to Squadron Sergeant Major John Loneragan and to the two men who were injured in the attack on the night of 11th/12th April 1965, Captain MacLachlann and Sergeant Earl. It is MOD policy that those deploying to Aden in 1965 needed to serve a minimum period of 30 days to qualify for the GSM62. However, if Service personnel in a medal-earning theatre are killed or repatriated due to injuries sustained before they have met the qualifying period, they are automatically awarded a medal in view of the circumstances. I am afraid that I cannot explain, over 50 years later, why this did not occur at the time for those members of your Regiment who were killed or injured.

As a result of your correspondence this situation was rectified in November 2018, Despite the award of the medal to those individuals, the situation remains as previously stated that the remaining members of 131 Parachute Engineer Regiment (TA) who deployed to Aden for 15 days did not qualify for the GSM 62, having not been there for the minimum required period of 30 days. This policy applies to all Regulars and Reserves, and is applied to all medal earning theatres, including recent operations such as Afghanistan and Iraq. I appreciate that you may not agree with this, but it is a long-standing policy for the MOD.

Having explained the policy and in reviewing our correspondence with you, there are clearly inconsistencies in what you were told about the eligibility of your three colleagues for medals. I can only apologise for this, but I am satisfied that there was no intent to mislead you. Your correspondence was dealt with by a number of different officials both within the Head Office of the MOD and the MOD Medal Office, which led to different interpretations of the policy. This resulted in you receiving incorrect information in some

instances. One of those occasions was in a letter from Minister (Lords) but the Minister would have been acting on advice provided to him by officials and I apologise that this happened.

It was most unfortunate that, having been informed in advance that he would qualify, when Capt Maclachlainn applied for his medal he was informed that he was not entitled as his status in Aden was at a training camp and not on the attached or posted strength of a unit. While technically correct, this response did not take account of the background to his case and I again apologise for that.

As you know, the review by the Minister resulted in the award of the GSM62 with South Arabia clasp to the three individuals from your unit who were entitled to it. It is, of course, most regrettable that Sergeant Earl passed away without personally receiving the medal to which he was entitled. However, I think you can be proud of the fact that your perseverance ensured that your three colleagues were awarded their medals, as well as the Elizabeth Cross that was presented to Mrs Lonergan in recognition of the tragic loss of her husband.

All of the shortcomings I have highlighted are disappointing and I apologise to you for these. To ensure that this type of issue does not happen again, we have engaged with our colleagues in the Medal Office, with whom we now have daily contact, to ensure better liaison in the future on issues where both we as the MOD policy lead for medals and the Medal Office are in correspondence with an applicant. This should ensure a more consistent and joined-up approach. We have also instituted a monthly catch-up between our offices when we are able to update each other on the cases that we are involved with.

I also appreciate that it has taken some time to respond to your request for an internal review, but this was a complex case and we wanted to ensure that the review was as thorough as it could possibly be.

None of this should detract from your service with 131 Parachute Engineer Regiment (TA), which remains greatly appreciated, and your efforts to ensure that your colleagues have been appropriately recognised for their service.

If you are dissatisfied with the response you have received, you have the right to contact the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman through your Member of Parliament. It is important that you make the complaint as soon as you receive our final response as there are time limits for the Ombudsman to look into complaints. You should also be aware that the Ombudsman is usually unable to consider complaints about someone's employment. In these specific instances, it may therefore be helpful to look at their website www.ombudsman.org.uk or contact their Customer Helpline team (0345 015 4033) to discuss your complaint before seeking a referral. They can also be contacted at the following address:

Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman - Citygate, Mosley Street, Manchester M23HQ

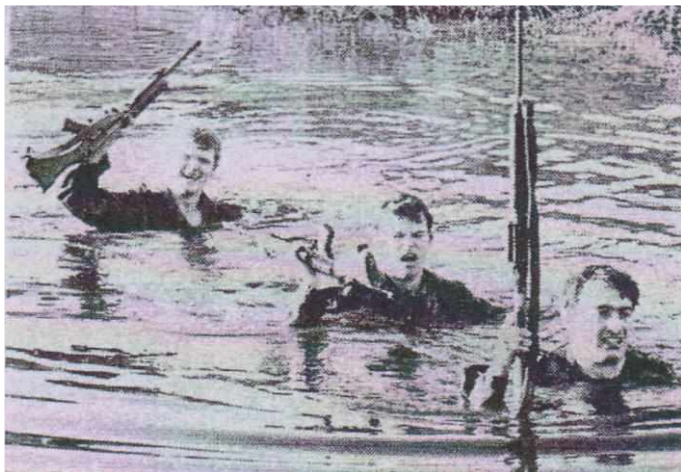
The letter is signed: Yours Sincerely, Nigel Bradshaw

131 Independent Parachute Squadron R.E. (V)

Farewell to the Red Beret as at April 1978

The sad demise of the 44 PARACHUTE Brigade Volunteers on 1st April 1978 marked a new point in the history of 131 Parachute Engineer Squadron. Far from being disbanded they now change roles, berets and titles to become 131 Independent Commando Squadron Royal Engineers (Volunteers). This new role is to provide Engineer Support to 3rd Commando Brigade Royal Marines. The Squadron now joins 289 Commando Battery RA (V) who transferred from 44 Parachute Brigade to 3rd Commando Brigade Royal Marines on 1st April 1977.

Although 1st April 1978 was the official date of the change, the real test did not come until the first taste of the Commando course. Annual camp this year for the Airborne trained ranks of the Squadron was spent at the Commando Training Centre Lympstone carrying out an Airborne Engineer conversion course. The course was a special one in recognition of the trained status of the Airborne ranks and was aimed at converting them from their Airborne to Commando role. . The first week of camp was therefore



spent at Lympstone on Commando Training in order to qualify all ranks for their Green Beret. All the tests normally applied to the Royal Marine Reserve were successfully passed by the end of the first week, culminating with the Endurance course on the Saturday morning. This particular test consists of one and a half miles of cross country terrain interspersed with obstacles such as tunnels, water obstacles, aimed at 100 per cent individual immersion, ponds and streams.

Lieutenant John Carter (centre) 300 Troop, encouraging members of his Section whilst crossing Peter's Pool on the Endurance Course.

The final phase is a four and a half mile wet and soggy speed march back to the range, to score six hits out of ten. All this has to be achieved in seventy five minutes.

The second week of the camp was spent doing Combat Engineer training with 59 Independent Commando Squadron Royal Engineers, the Regular Engineer Squadron from 3rd Commando Brigade. Training on the Class 16 Air Portable Raft was done at a disused quarry where the gentle arts of abseiling were also practised. This phase ended with a 20 ft abseil down the sheer face of the quarry into the water where the Class 16 Raft was waiting. A further day was spent on live demolition training out on Dartmoor, where some very successful steel cutting charges were practised on parts of the Royal Naval Dockyard cranes.

Prior to a final exercise on Dartmoor an exhilarating day was spent with the Royal Marines Raiding Squadron, practising with their Rigid Raiding Craft and Gemini's, an art mastered by the Sappers. The experience gained on this day was put to good use on the incursion phase of the final exercise, where the Squadron set out in the Motor Vessel for a Sea RV with the Rigid Raiders, which then infiltrated the Squadron onto a beach landing. Tasks on the final exercise included setting up an OP position and hand laying a 600 metre minefield consisting of Mark 7 and Barmines. We also learned to do an under-attack crash move out of our position. Royal Marine style!

The finale to the camp was the presentation at a simple but dignified parade of the Green Berets. This was done by the Major General Commando Forces, Major General Sir Stuart Pringle, Bart, who first presented an Honorary Green Beret to the Squadron Honorary Colonel Major General F. W. J. Cowtan CBE, MC. and then went on to present each individual member of the Squadron with his Green Beret. With the Royal Marine Band playing a suitably nautical air the Squadron was then marched off parade by the OC, Major A. Clements RE. It is worth recording that amongst the spectators were the three immediate past OCs of the Squadron. Major T. B. Gillett TD. RE (TAVR). Lt Col J. R. Hill RE and Lt Col I. B. H. Murray TD, RE (TAVR), spanning between them a fair portion of the Squadron's recent history.

After the parade all ranks were entertained to pre-lunch beer by the Royal Marines, which gave all the VIPs a chance to meet the Squadron and get their views on Commando soldiering so far! The Squadron officers then entertained the Royal Marine officers and other VIPs to lunch in the Officers' Mess.

By the time all footsore ranks were despatched to their various destinations it was generally agreed that they had certainly earned their Green Berets.

Links with the Airborne world will continue to be strong however, as the Squadron is now able to carry on Parachute training in a limited role with the Royal Marine Reserve.

Chatham Branch

Baz Bassett - Chairman

Well where do we start, 2020 will be another of those years which I am sure people will be talking about for some time. Unfortunately, as I write this, we are into the 4th week of isolation and lock down. Those words themselves give me an uncomfortable feeling. The full outcome of this virus is yet to be understood and it will be many years before it can be accurately measured. I am sure my grandchildren will have something about it in their school exams for many years.

Having served for some 37 years with the purpose of defending the country from our enemies it is strange that we are now under attack from an unseen enemy almost from within. The situation may, or may not, make some of the younger generation realise that those words "self-isolation and lockdown" could very easily be interpreted for "curfew" and some form of sympathy towards what the families of Europe faced in WW2 and what a number of families face, who are today oppressed and living in many countries around the world today.



For me, and I am sure for others, the ability to use technology to "beam" into our families and friends was a real bonus. Using it to remotely work and carry on part of our normal life assisted us in moving on as well. Although work itself for many was put on hold and daily, we see the suffering of families having to struggle to keep going.

I do hope that my many friends are well and coping and I am sure we are all looking forward to trying to get back to life as we knew it.

Looking back just a few months the Chatham branch, since the last newsletter, has held its Christmas Function when some 80 members with families and friends sat down to a bumper event.

We were of course delighted that the association's new Chairman, Steve Wallis with his delightful wife Melanie found time to attend.



The Branch wish him and his wife every success in his new position and have offered our 100% support to him in his new role. Although we were somewhat concerned of his choice of drink.

The only comment that was made was that we appeared to fix it that Steve and Melanie appeared to win every other prize at the Raffle!!

We were also delighted to offer our thanks to JJ and Sandra Ferry as the outgoing Chairman, for their unstinting loyalty and remarkable support they have given to the association over the years, we wish them the very best and hope that things calm down for a while and they can both relax.

The branch, although small is well supported by its friends and families and these events are a great way of relaxing amongst likeminded people and to allow us to just let the afternoon flow.



Bob and Helen Matthews with Bill and Sheila Shields waiting for Pudding!

Although future meetings and events have been cancelled we have had a "Zoom" meeting with a few of the members meeting online, is it a first I wonder and is it something for the future?

I am sure like the other branches we are all feeling a slight bit of apprehension, our events, which really are a cornerstone that we look forward to, have been cancelled or postponed. However, we will get around that.

As I said, technology has assisted in keeping in contact with the members a quick ring round and a chat helps, and we know it is not forever and the restrictions will end soon, the challenge will be to maintain our morale

and get back to where we were. That Airborne spirit we are famous for will see us through

Best wishes to all, stay safe and I look forward to meeting up in the not too distant future.

Airborne Engineers Association (Scotland)

Gil Nicol - Secretary

Some members and their wives attended the annual P.R.A. Lothian Branch Christmas Dinner Dance, on Friday 6th December 2019 at The Royal British Legion, 33 Rodney Street, Edinburgh. They had a wonderful time and were successful with the raffle prizes.

On Friday 13th December 2019 some members attended the funeral service of a PRA Lothian member at Warriston Cemetery, Edinburgh

Some branch members attended the funeral of an ex 1 Para. Member who served in Suez, Aden & Cyprus, and his funeral was held on Thursday 16th January 2020 at Falkirk Crematorium. His death was brought to our attention via Andy Nelson, a new member, who received a communication from The Royal British Legion Branch, Grangemouth.

On Thursday 27th February 2020 the funeral was held for "Jinty" Murray the wife of the late Frank Murray, who was a member of AEA Scotland. The funeral was held at Warriston Crematorium, Edinburgh and some members, with wives, attended. "Jinty" had been ill for a couple of years.

Another of our members, Bria Earl, lost his wife recently who had been ill for quite a long period of time
Our commiserations and condolences go to all families

We had an Ordinary General Meeting on Sunday 15th March 2020 where we decided to carry on as normal, however The Scottish Government has since suggested restrictive movements for everyone and only to make journeys when necessary. In view of this decision we have agreed to cancel all meetings and events until further notice effective from Tuesday 17th March.

Since "lockdown" we have all been keeping in contact with each other and happily none of our members, including wives / partners have been affected by the Corona virus. Long may that situation continue.

Best Wishes to our colleagues and their families South of the Border

299 Association

Gary Coe - Secretary

NO MEETING IN JANUARY 2020 BECAUSE THE MINERVA WAS CLOSED FOR ESSENTIAL REFURBISH.

The funeral of former 299 Troop Sgt John Fredrick Thomas Davis took place on the 27th January 2020 at the Rose Hill Crematorium, Doncaster. Eighteen former service men representing every unit he had served with attended the service, respecting over 30 yrs in uniform for King/Queen & country, both as a regular and reservist, mainly with 299. John's active service included the Suez Crisis, Cyprus & Aden, he leaves 2 sons and many Grand & Great Grandchildren.

Carl Ham posted the welcome news about Kevin Blacker's massive & courageous achievements on the top of the Pennine's, proving he still has what it takes in having a go at the notorious and brutal race known as the "Spine Challenger" held over the weekend of 11th - 13th January 2020. He did himself proud, completing well within the parameters (108 Miles under 60 hrs), enduring horrendous weather conditions throughout.

Gary Coe's wife Christine passed away on the 5th April 2020 at her home, another sad loss to all that knew her.

The year has been cut short for us all, and the future is no way certain for any of us. The 299 AGM was scheduled for the 3rd May 2020, I therefore wish you all the best of luck and may our friendships remain for everGaz Coe.

N/B: I want to take this opportunity in thanking the people from 299/131 (including the President of the AEA) for the tremendous support I have received in helping me cope with the loss of my wife Christine.

If, and when times get better we can all say goodbye to **four** Chris without the scourge & fear that haunts the world today.

Due to the 'lockdown', there were no other branch reports

Military Hospitals That I Have Known

Alec (Froth) Beer

In November 1974 I was a member of a search team which was tasked to clear and search an unoccupied house in Lurgan, Northern Ireland. It was my turn for initial entry. In a downstairs room stood a small cabinet, which on examination exploded taking off my left leg and leaving me with various other injuries. I was taken to Craigavon hospital for the first few days then by Lynx helicopter to the military ward of Musgrave hospital.

Six weeks later just before Christmas 1974 I was Casevaccated from Musgrave in Belfast stretched onto an Andover at Aldergrove and took off for Northolt in west London arriving at the Royal Herbert in Woolwich that pm. This hospital was built on the authority of Sidney Herbert, he was the bloke responsible for sending Florence Nightingale to the Crimea. It was designed by Sir Douglas Galton of the Royal Engineers and opened for business in 1865. My first night was spent in the intensive care ward opposite the bed of a soldier from a Scottish Regiment who had a severe head injury from being bottled in a pub fight in Colchester, his parents at his bedside. Later that night the boy died, the image of his distraught Mother will stay with me for life.

Next day I was moved to an orthopaedic ward which after Musgrave and the I/C ward seemed massive. The beds on either side merged together as railway lines in the distance do. Few characters from those days remain but there were two severe burns patients one of whose flak jacket had caught fire when doused with burning petrol he was known as Cinders the other had fallen into a drunken stupor while smoking a cigarette setting his bed ablaze, being Scottish, was known as Rabbie . After a month or so I was given an afternoon pass and with Spike Lawson of the Scots Guards who had fortunately lost his right leg and more fortunately still took my size in shoes we made our way into Woolwich to do some shopping.

I stayed in the Royal Herbert Hospital until scar tissue was robust enough to take a new leg then off to RAF Chessington for rehabilitation. It was very acceptable to be in an RAF establishment be it Abingdon for parachute training or Chessie everything was more refined, or so it seemed. Then back and forth to Roehampton Artificial Limb Centre accompanied on one occasion by Paul Thomas of the Welsh Guards who was a triple amputee from the Caterham pub bombing. On another occasion with Margaret Lyle the policewoman who had lost a foot in the Moorgate tube disaster.

Millbank Military Hospital was next. Here I found myself in a ward with a young boy of about twelve and six Chelsea pensioners. Dominic, the young lad and I became firm buddies and we both must have seemed children to our ancient ward mates one of whom thought to enlarge our education by describing the precautions necessary before sleeping with an Egyptian whore circa 1922. I may have screamed, it still worries me that I possess such information.

Then it was decided that I needed a pedicel graft on my hand so it was off to the Cambridge Military hospital in Aldershot, home at last. The Cambridge, at the top of gun hill, was the first hospital in the empire to carry out plastic surgery, I was in good hands.

A year had now passed it was autumn 1975 but my memory of the Cambridge is much clearer. I remember vividly one Saturday morning a badly injured civilian being brought in and placed in a plastic tent like structure , what had happened to him I never found out he was in a bad way but conscious. Skip forward a few hours, mid-afternoon, in comes our very own the late, great, Sid Davies absolutely reeking of overtime. Taking out his baccy tin starts to roll up. How you doing Froth? Alright Sid, lovely to see you. At this Sid notices the tent and pointing with his roll up asks who's that? Some civvy. At which Sid takes exception and wanders over to the poor bastard to find out what he's doing in a military hospital, I saw pure terror in the man's eyes. Fortunately Sid was distracted by someone he knew and presumably went back to the pub, sighs of relief from the tent and me. Then in came Pete Ellis as a patient to have his ingrown toenails chopped out. Pete and I were sappers together in 1 Troop back in the day.

And all along was a sergeant from 2 Para, Mick Cotton who had caught my attention from the outset, a larger than life character that I took to immediately. We played chess and had a crack at the Telegraph crossword puzzle each morning, he had a gift for wordplay and a wry sense of humour and greatly improved my stay at the Cambridge. Outside of the Sqn. lads I can't remember anyone else there. Mick was married with two small children in quarters in Aldershot.

One Sunday we were allowed out for the day so after a visit to one of Aldershot's watering holes we went to Mick's quarters where I met Audrey, Mick's wife who had cooked a sumptuous roast beef dinner, then some of Mick's whisky and back to the Cambridge. A memorable day in which I felt my life inching back to normal. The pedicel took much longer than initially thought so I think Mick and I spent quite some time together but before Christmas 75 I was back at Chessington and lost touch with him until last month when out of the blue I received an email from him, forty five years on. He now lives in Cyprus moving there after retiring from the army with a commission. Sadly, Audrey passed away some time back. As soon as restrictions end and we can travel again I'll go over to see my good friend.

The Royal Herbert Hospital closed in 1977
The Cambridge Military Hospital closed in 1996
RAF Chessington closed in 1985
Millbank Military hospital closed in 1977

9 Independent Parachute Squadron RE

ULSTER the second time around -1971!

Exactly twelve months after returning from its first tour of duty in the Province the Squadron embarked once again on another four-month tour. (We were again to be employed in the engineer role, this time in support of 39 Inf Bde in the Belfast area.)

The hand-over from 3 Field Squadron revealed that the emphasis had shifted very much more to defensive works since we were last in the City. The three field troops were deployed as follows: 1 Troop to support the battalions in East Belfast; 3 Troop responsible for West and Central Belfast; and 2 Troop looking after the suburban/rural areas around Belfast. The Plant Troop detachment equipped with medium and light wheeled tractors was based at Girdwood Park to provide the stand-by force for barricade and bomb damage clearance. As on the previous tour the Squadron was based at the Antrim Bridging Camp, 15 miles west of Belfast. Compared to the "shift" work of the infantry patrolling the city, our working hours were more normal, starting with a 0730 hour parade and aiming to return to camp for the 1800 hour evening meal.

A top priority "immediate task" however meant working until the task was complete. Engineer support was available twenty-four hours a day with each field troop, in turn, providing a quick reaction, readiness force in camp and a recce detachment (Troop Commander/Troop Sergeant plus three escorts) at Girdwood Park for a week at a time.

Nowhere has the cry of "not enough sappers" been more frequently heard than in Belfast during September and October 1971. On the one hand the "brains" of the IRA were devising more and more sophisticated methods to disrupt the city; and on the other hand the Squadron "think tank", i.e. the nightly 'O' group, was coming up with ideas to combat the latest threats. Such was the volume of work that it was difficult to keep one step ahead. "Had I but a dozen more sappers," was the cry from even Troop Commander! The threat against Army posts and police stations came from bombers/gunmen operating from speeding cars, nail bombs thrown from behind cover, snipers, 3.5 inch rockets and finally, large explosive charges planted in neighbouring houses. Our principal task was to defend police and Army posts against this threat.

1 Troop, under Capt Mike Warren, were fully occupied fortifying the Short Strand and Mount-Pottinger locations, the prison ship *Maidstone* and various RUC stations. The fortification process included the erection of 20ft high anti-bomb chain-link perimeter fences, and occasionally similar fences made of corrugated iron as a counter measure to the sniper threat. So many of the Squadron welders were working on the prison ship at one stage that a rumour soon spread that it was being welded to the quayside as an anti-hijack device!

The escape by internees from Crumlin Prison provided the Troop with another lengthy task. In fact Cpl "Blackie" Brian was working there so long that the prisoners thought he was "doing time". The Troop had an unexpected break from Belfast when they were employed for two weeks in October cratering minor roads on the Eire border. Their activities were the subject of a BBC News film with Sgt "Bernie" Baldwin and Cpl Pete Guerin featuring strongly. Alas, Sgt Baldwin was not wearing a belt with his smock and found his name in Sgt-Maj Ivor Anthony's "little black book".

Capt Tim Robertson's Troop became known as the "Hut" Troop because of the number of Twynham and Nissen huts they erected all over the city. This nickname later changed to "Bumps" Troop when in one stroke of genius hit and run gunmen operating from cars and trucks had their activities curtailed. The laying of asphalt "bumps" 5-6in high across the roads in front of all military and police locations was the simple solution. It effectively slowed down all Belfast traffic. Some reckless milk float drivers also learned their lesson.

3 Troop, under Capt Peter Williams, found themselves operating around the Springfield and Falls Road, Andersontown and the Ardoyne. The sight of red berets working on top of a 20ft high fence around the Henry Taggart Memorial Hall for three weeks proved too great a temptation for the Ballymurphy gunmen. Consequently, the Troop formed a "figure 11 target" Club with Cpl "Louie" Gallagher and Spr Phil Poulton as founder members and with a full Troop membership by the end of the tour.

The Troop also became quite skilled at converting primary schools into comfortable and well-fortified company locations. For fitness fanatic Cpl George Dun and his section the hut maintenance task on top of Divis Mountain provided them with a bracing 500ft climb every morning, but even so it was noticed that he didn't turn down the offer of a helicopter to lift the two tons of stores to the mountain top!

The Plant Troop Detachment under Cpl "Buster" Crabbe were mainly creatures of the night and some typical tasks included barricade clearance on the Lower Falls Road and rubble clearance after numerous bomb incidents. The morale of the operators took a great boost when the tractors (or "scooby-doo" to the infantry) were fitted with armour-plated cabs. Shortly afterwards the armour plate proved its effectiveness during an "aggro" night at the Monagh Roundabout. Some of the most spectacular television news film taken in Belfast was of L/Cpl Colin Parker on the New Lodge Road removing a blazing tipper with his "scooby" after a petrol bomb attack. The operators' skills were further put to the test later on in the tour when new techniques were developed, in support of the bomb disposal teams, of moving bombs in the bucket of the tractor.



Sgt McCabe with a Scooby-Doo was called upon to clear the wreckage of McGurk's bar

After working hours, everyone's taste was catered for in the Squadron disco, "The Avery" (by now a County Antrim landmark!) and, in a new institution, the Maple Leaf Diner, run by L/Cpl Keith "Canada" Frost, ACC.

Christmas saw some "happenings" in camp, a memorable carol service and generous donations by everyone for our Antrim CAP Fund.

With practically no time for training, the Squadron rugby team played some local civilian teams, 1 PARA, whom we beat handsomely, and three rounds of the Army Cup. Having defeated the Coldstream Guards by 86 points to nil in the semi-final, we

met the Duke of Wellington's Regiment in the N.I. Army Cup Final. In a tough and exciting match we finally went down in the closing minutes by 10 points to 3. These rugby matches were usually preceded by a Free Fall display with Capt Alex Black leading the Squadron Free Fall team.

The tour came to an end in mid-January with a proposed Squadron drop onto Hankley. Unfortunately the weather forced its cancellation. It had been another memorable tour with plenty of varied and hard work and a one hundred per cent effort from the whole Squadron. Some unlikely events typifying this were the Squadron cooks laying asphalt bumps on the Springfield Road on their rest afternoon and the Squadron clerks turning out to help the bomb disposal team in Lisburn one busy afternoon and being ambushed on their way home.

We were sorry to leave but glad to be home. Aldershot seems pretty tame in comparison!

Snakes can't scare them from Bridge Building Work - Kenya 1972

THEY get a five o'clock call and an hour later 140 sun-bronzed men, clad only in shorts and khaki hats, are hard at work building a Bailey bridge over the Ramisi River in the Shimba Hills area of Kenya's Coast Province.

The bridge with an 80-foot span is to be officially opened by the Vice-President, Mr. Daniel arap Moi, on March 31st, and has taken less than three months to complete.

It is being built by men of the 9th Independent 'Parachute Squadron, Royal Engineer' from Aldershot for Kenya's Ministry of works. As part of the Shimba 'Hills Development Scheme' the bridge will facilitate the movement of agricultural produce to Mombasa, sugar cane to the Ramisi Factory, and provide additional access to the Shimba Hills National Park.

The engineers have been here since mid-January under an arrangement 'between the Kenya and British Governments — offering training facilities for the engineers on one hand, while on the other providing Kenya with a badly needed bridge at cost price.

With the job complete, the men start flying home next month. They described their sojourn here as a "stimulating experience."



Their tented camp, which boasts an open-sided makuti-roofed officers' mess named the "Ramisi Hilton" is situated in a remote and very dry area, some 50 miles outside Mombasa. Often, they are working in sweltering temperatures of 110 degrees.

They work 6 days a week, then comes a much looked forward to day off. This is spent in Mombasa, or nearby at the Silversands Leave Centre, Nyali Beach — where the men cool off in the Indian Ocean. Colourful kikois, worn by many Swahili people at the Coast, are now the "in" sleepwear, while bright khan-gas adorn the tables in various messes, giving a homely — albeit local touch.



Because of bilharzias in the water, the men have had to wear waders and gloves while digging into the riverbed. On one side this necessitated going down six feet to sink foundations and build a 26-ft. high reinforced abutment, and on the other, digging down three feet in sandstone, then having to blast the rest of the way to enable an 18-ft. abutment to be built.

Spr Willis & colleagues constructing the form work

One local inhabitant whose makuti roofed house on the riverbank unfortunately came within this new development, has had a new house built for him nearby — which is a great improvement on his last home.

Life has had its ups and downs in this Al-Fresco camp. One of the curious snakes visiting the site to see what was going on, was found cosily curled up in a sleeping bag. Scorpions have also left their visiting cards — by some painful bites on the men. Invariably, however, the scorpions have died — and the men have lived to tell the tale.

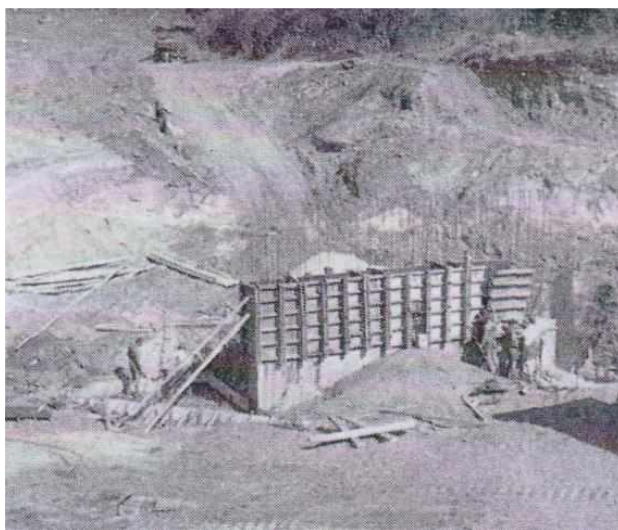
The fame of its medical centre quickly spread round the countryside, and was soon attracting long queues daily, with many people travelling long distances for treatment.

While Maj J. B. Awford, officer commanding, has not been to Kenya before, most of his men have — and are delighted to be back again. In 1967 they built four bridges in the Aberdares, and two years later, were roadbuilding at Mau Narok.

Entertainment at the camp runs to two films a week, and local people have given performances of their colourful traditional dress.

The West abutment wall being prepared for the second lift of concrete

Many of the men enjoy falling around in the sky, and six recently took part in the free fall parachute display at Nairobi while 12 joined up with 36 men of the Kenya Army in a parachute exercise near Voi on 11th March, watched by Maj-Gen. Ndolo, Chief of Defence Staff, and Brig. Mulinge. Commander of the Kenya Army.



Spr Cockburn operating the vibrating poker

The soldiers get on with the locals, and a team from their football and volleyball league has played against the nearby Eshueshu School, while a staggering number of spectators — about 2,000 — turned up to watch them play against a local team at Msambweni. In town they have played rugby at the Mombasa Sports Club.

In addition to the Bailey bridge, a 500-yard approach road on either side is also being built. The men are also building a football pitch for the Shimba Hills Harambee Secondary School.



Construction of the Bailey Bridge launching nose



The completed bridge in situ



**Official opening by the Vice President,
Mr Daniel Arap Moi, on 31st March**



The opening event proved to be of great interest to the surrounding community



"All work and no play, makes Jack a dull boy!" No problems here on the beach at the Silver Sands leave centre and at the swimming pool of the Nyali Beach Hotel

Obituaries



Ralph Young

Ralph sadly died at the age of 80 on January 11th of this year due to complications following a fall at his Wolverhampton home. He is survived by his wife of 60 years Christine, daughter Kathleen, sons Ralph and Christopher, grandchildren Charlotte, Alexander, Molly and Lisha, and great-grandson Rory.

Ralph was born in 1939 in Hertford into a nomadic family - his father was a sergeant in the R.A.F. His favourite place to be stationed as a boy was France, where he spent what seemed to be endless sunny days cycling the local lanes and villages and fishing - a favourite hobby. Nostalgia for this time in his childhood was such that it led to him re-visiting his Gallic haunts with Christine and the purchase and partial restoration of a farmhouse in the Charente region.

Ralph enlisted into Army Boy Service at Chepstow in 1953 aged 15 as an apprentice draughtsman then graduated to the regular Army with the Royal Engineers 3 years later. As a member of 9 Squadron he saw service in Northern Ireland, Bahrain, Aden, Borneo and Cyprus, and was also 'helping the Americans' (his words) at one point. He then became a Plant Foreman and was deployed in Nepal building the Great Road. His Certificate of Service describes his military conduct as 'Exemplary' and he retired from the Army in 1979 with the following awards - Long Service & Good Conduct Medal, Jubilee Medal and Indonesia Medal.

Ralph was a fiercely loyal man who was, according to his children, 'firm but fair' and his sense of humour could be wicked at times. He adored his family, and the last year and a half were momentous for him and Christine as there were full gatherings for both of their eldest grandchildren's weddings, his 80th birthday, their Diamond (60th) wedding with a card from the Queen, the birth of their first great-grandchild and Christine's 80th at the start of 2020. He was a member of the Airborne Engineers Association and always looked forward to the re-unions with his Army 'family'.

Ralph qualified as a Health and Safety Officer as part of his 'demob' process before leaving the Army, touring the country inspecting operational quarries for Tarmac and RMC. He settled on the outskirts of Wolverhampton, retiring from work due to ill health in 1997. He loved to collect (and tinker with) timepieces, especially watches, had a fascination for computers including building his own, and until his mobility became compromised he loved to rummage around antique fairs. In his latter years, spending time with his family and especially being taken to the pub for a pint or two of good Real Ale were his pleasures - well the Ale always was! He will be missed terribly.

Derek John Andrews

Died 9/10 April 2020

Derek joined 9 Indep Para Sqn RE in 1958 along with Ken Bowen, Billy Davison and Vincent (Paddy) Byrne. He was extremely fit and also an accomplished boxer, I believe that he boxed for the Sqn and I know that he did several exhibition bouts.

He met his wife while at bridging camp, Wyke Regis, Weymouth, (older Sqn members will remember Valenti's ice cream parlour, Anna was family). When circumstances and/or military duties permitted we would hitchhike down to Weymouth nearly every weekend. I had the pleasure of being the best man in 1960.

There was one occasion just before they married when Derek said that we had to go to a Monastery (Anna was Italian and a Catholic, Derek was Agnostic) to receive "pre-marital instructions, I did not believe it but it was true. Three visits for me and five for Derek.

On leaving the Sqn/Army Derek went to live and work in Australia, (he met several ex Sqn members while he was over there). Derek, and later with his sons, had a successful career in the building trade and this continued when he returned to England.

Derek and Anna settled down in Hale, Cornwall and we did manage to meet up 3 or 4 times, the last visit just two months ago.

As with most friendships formed in the military even though you may lose contact for many years you still remain friends. RIP Derek.

Trevor (Andy) Richard Andrews

15th Sep 1946 - 14th Dec 2019



Sadly we lost another of the great characters from our Association recently, and at his funeral in Rochdale, I was asked by Davie Jukes to say a few words. Davie spoke about his time as an LE Officer with Andy and I followed on with the soldier side. The turnout was fantastic, faces I had not seen for 20 -25 years attended. Tim VDK carried our National Standard and I carried the Union Standard. A PRA and RE Branch Standard Bearer also turned up to line the route and members' from 25 Fd Sqn RE were in attendance. Gen Sir Peter Wall also attended, and as an ex CGS that is how much Andy was respected.

I first met Andy back in 1975 whilst serving with 9 Independent Para Sqn. I had just finished my parachute training at RAF Abingdon in late 1974 and 9 Sqn were already half-way through a NI Tour at Castle Dillon. Andy was the Plant Tp Staffy, and I remember a couple of incidents of note, however this example sums up what an excellent leader he was, One day Geoff Barlow crashed out the Quick Reaction Force because he was shot at! Andy cottoned on very quick that there was no terrorist attack, and it was the Sqn blokes using their own weapons to shoot Geoff's milk off his window sill Andy managed to get the weapons back into the armoury before it got well out of proportion and he would have got in serious trouble for that, but Andy knew how much the importance of morale and a sense of humour is to a unit, especially whilst on Operations. HQ NI never got wind of the incident, and that was down to Andy.

The second time I served with Andy was in Osnabruck, West Germany, 1984, when he was the SSM of 25 Fd Sqn RE. I was a recently promoted Sgt and looked to him for guidance and advice when needed. Andy was highly respected by all the men in that unit, as he was always a fair but firm SSM when needed and tough as old boots. I remember one time after a very wet two weeks field training exercise, the CO of our regiment, decided to march everyone back to base, over 100km away whilst wearing our fighting order and carrying weapons. The CO even sent all the vehicles with the crews back to camp and bussed the crews back to join us on the march. Every man jack was on the march. After two days of marching Andy developed a problem in his Butt, Piles to be precise. His trousers were soaked in blood, but Andy refused to give in, until the Regimental Doctor ordered him onto an ambulance, and off to hospital. When we marched through the barrack front gate, who was there to greet us, but our SSM, Andy Andrews, he persuaded the doctors to patch him up, so that he could meet his men at the gate. He gained the utmost respect of all the men in 25 Sqn that day.

To his wife Joan and the family, on behalf of Veterans of the Corps, it was an absolute pleasure to have known and served with Andy, I could go on for hours reminiscing on past events, (especially our R&R with the wives in Belize, San Pedro) and you as a family can be very proud of what he achieved in life. See you at the Sqn Bar one day Andy, Ubique my friend it was a pleasure to serve with you.

John Davis



The funeral of former 299 man John Fredrick Thomas Davis aged 88 years took place on the 27th January 2020 at 1300hrs at the Rose Hill Crematorium, Doncaster.

The 299 Association Chairman Chris Shillito thanked all the men who attended this service, especially the standard bearers carrying their respective colours: Tony Irwin (299), Mike Holdsworth (301) and Mick Williams (Royal British Legion). Good to see John Brennan also Maliy Holliis (Russell) from way back coming to pay their respects.

Eighteen men representing all the units that John had served with lined the route to produce a Guard of Honour on route to the Chapel, the Cortege was led by the Standards at slow order with the Guard of Honour throwing one up as his Hurst entered the Chapel canopy area. This was a fitting tribute to this well-respected man who has given so much service to his country, mostly with 299 Sqn, 131 Para RE Regt.

Big John was born and brought up in Doncaster, he left school at the age of 15 years (1946) and run off to join the Merchant Navy, spent 4 years at sea and visited most of the world, and with National Service pending he signed on in the Royal Military Police for a short term enlistment (3 years regular + 3 years reserve), he volunteered for Airborne seeing over sea service in Egypt To meet his reservist commitment he was directed to 2

Troop, 299 Sqn. 131 Para RE Regt (TA), 44 Brigade at the Scarborough Barracks in Doncaster. Both sons extended their appreciation to those from his military life that attended his funeral.

Jim Masters MBE passed to a higher fellowship at 0500 hrs on Easter Sunday 2020 after contracting the Corvid 19 virus. Due to an age related problem Jim was a care home resident, he was 91.

Although I knew of Jim through his expeditions as Col Blashford Snell's right hand man, I did not meet him in person until I left the service. One of the members of the Bridlington REA was Mr Bob Burnside who in the late 1950's was a Sergeant in the TA in Darlington, Jim was his Regular army QMSI and they became lifelong friends. (One of Sgt Burnside's young TA sappers was a bloke called Bill Rudd).

Because of the friendship with Bob, Jim visited Bridlington often, so often that I invited him to join our REA Branch, eventually after the death of our President Col Ian Ross Bryce I invited Jim to take over as President. He accepted.

In the mid 1970's Jim was taking part in the Zaire River Expedition and met an American doctor called Bill Close who was Congo President Mobutu Sese Seko's personal physician. Bill Close recruited Jim to return as a civilian to organise the distribution of medical supplies to the interior and set up a supply sub depot in each of the country's nine regions. Some task in a country the size of Europe.

One day Jim was called in to be told that a deadly fever was killing hundreds of people in the Equateur Province and was concentrated near a river called EBOLA. The sick were going to a Catholic mission hospital to get help, sadly little could be done as the fever had no history and was killing most of those who contacted it. (Sounds familiar.) Dr Close was aware of the threat and sent for an investigative team from the USA. It was Jim's job to set up a field laboratory for the team. Jim said that because of their ignorance they were still walking around in shorts and Dessi boots.

A memoir of his life in the service and his escapades was written by Jim to leave to his family, I have read it and in one paragraph he said:- "The Ebola outbreak left me with a lifelong admiration for those who battle sickness and disease. I came to realise that it is not just enough to find cures for the illnesses we already know about, but to be on guard against the new developments which evolve with life itself". (PROPHETIC). RIP my friend yours Baz Henderson.

At the time of writing this we are in self-isolation, my wife says that in my case it should be called self-inebriation.



Bert Bamforth BEM

Herbert Ernest [Bert] Bamforth was a member of the Yorkshire Branch of the AEA and a dedicated member of the Bridlington Branch of the REA.

Bert suffered a severe stroke on the 14th February 2020 from which he did not recover and passed to a higher fellowship on the 24th February 2020, Bert was two months short of his 90th birthday [20th April 1930].

We despatched him to the final DZ on the 17th March 2020.

Bert joined the army in 1949 at the age of 17 years. He joined the Squadron and I believe served in the Canal Zone. After an injury on a drop he left Airborne and later served in Korea, seeing much action.

On leaving the army he joined the police force. He became interested in investigating vehicle crashes. After specialist courses and a string of titles after his name he became a forensic expert investigating vehicle accidents gaining a BEM in recognition of his work.

He is survived by his wife Mary.

Brian Hubbard



Brian served with 9 Para Sqn for many years and was amongst the declining number of 3 Troop airborne sappers who took part on Operation MUSKETEER. He rarely missed the opportunity to attend Op Musketeer reunions, which in recent years had been organised by the late John Smith.

Caring for his ailing wife prevented Brian from attending their last gathering and so too from attending the Aldershot branch meetings for the past 4 years or so.

In later years Brian also suffered health problems and over a long period was undergoing dialysis treatment 3 times a day.

Brian's real passion, outside of his family, was golf, and he became a very competent player, testament to which, his name is proudly displayed a number of times on his club's honours board.

His departure to the final DZ was held at the Woking Crematorium, attended by his extended family and much to the family members delight, Aldershot branch members, Fred Gray, Dave Rutter and John Barrie were also present.

Photos from Inside Rear Cover

These photos were on the inside rear cover of the original printed version



Probably the best dressed photo of one Alec 'Froth' Beer (Centre)

Following the catastrophic injuries suffered in a booby trap tragedy, in 1995 after months of surgery and intensive nursing, Froth returned to his hometown Oswestry in 1996. The town's folk organised a welcome home celebration. Needless to say, word got to the Squadron in Aldershot and various members joined in the "Welcome Home" celebration

Louis RIP, Tony Manley, Chris Read, Froth (that's a shadow on the back wall, he's not sporting an Afro hair style,) BOF Harrop, Gerry Bonner, Tom Ormiston, Paddy Denning



Chatham 2012

Ken Barnes, Dave Rutter, Barney Rooney, Dave Grimbley, Pete Bailey, Bob Watts, Colin Walker, Peter Kershaw & Bert Tate

Barney took the casual dress approach!



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