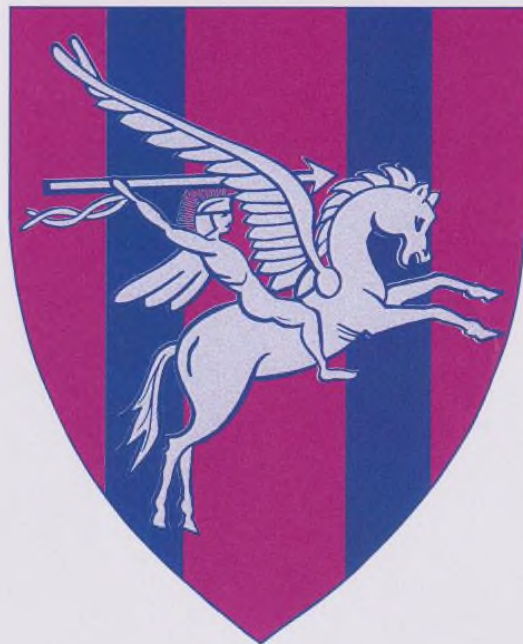




# THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS JOURNAL



Airborne Engineers Association  
Registered Charity No 1009201





December 2021 Issue No. 57

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## President's Update

**John Lee**

Things seem to be slowly getting back to normal, with branches starting to hold meetings, the annual AGM and Gala Dinner being held in Harrogate and a range of commemorative events taking place, some of which I have been able to attend. Details of these are in the Journal. Amongst the latter were the Double Hills memorial service and the Cromwell Lock service both held in September and a number of other dedication events were held as well. The Airborne Engineers Association have been allocated 36 tickets for the annual Remembrance Day service at Whitehall and all tickets have been allocated.

As probably most of you are aware this will be the last printed Journal to be published as from next year the Journal will go on-line, meaning that its long-time editor, Dave Rutter, can put his feet up for a well-earned rest. We owe Dave a lot of thanks for the work he has put in over 20 years in producing an excellent publication. The on-line journal will be initially under the direction of our Webmaster, Dave Pace, and will be in a similar format to the existing one; however, we will be on the lookout for a new Editor, so any volunteers one pace forward!

I have been your President since 2008 and have decided to stand down from next year, a decision not taken lightly, as my term in office has been most enjoyable over the years, but I feel that it is time for a pair of younger feet to take over. Hopefully, things will get better and that the branches will be able to have their regular meetings and we will be able to get back to normal.

With these thoughts I will now close and wish all members and their families my best wishes for Christmas and a Happy New Year.

## Chairman's Input

**Steve Wallis**

It gave me great pleasure to chair the AGM at Harrogate on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October, the previous three National meetings, two OGM's and the last AGM, were held by 'Zoom' which served its purpose but is not the same as a face to face meeting. The Gala Ball was an excellent event, very well organised by Adam Frame and his committee from the Yorkshire Branch and I thank them for all of their efforts. It was fantastic to be able to meet up with so many old friends after the trials and tribulations of the last 18 months.

It is also pleasing to see that the Association Branches are getting back into the rhythm of normal meetings and social events. This year Mel and I will be attending the Christmas functions being held by the Chatham and Birmingham Branches, we look forward to meeting as many members as possible and sharing a Christmas 'Tot.' It is doubtful however that we will take part in the Chatham Raffle as we were barely able to carry all of the prizes that we won the last time we were down there.

As we come out of the Covid restrictions, the round of memorial events continues. Mel and I have attended an extremely hot 'Double Hills' in Sept followed by the reduced memorial service at Cromwell Lock.

The next major event this year is Remembrance on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November and the Association has secured 36 places on the parade which will be our largest ever contingent. It is always a poignant event followed by a few drinks with the rest of the Corps at the 'Sherlock Holmes.'

Sadly, this is the last 'paper' edition of the journal which is now going 'online' details of how this will work are included elsewhere, I would however like to thank Dave Rutter for his Sterling efforts in producing the Journal over many years.

Mel and I wish you all a Very Merry Christmas and a Very Happy and Prosperous New Year.

## Grateful Thanks

**Dr Gay Alexander (Eccleston)**

On behalf of my late husband, Phil Eccleston and myself, our thanks to Dave Rutter for his dedication and hard work in the production of the Airborne Engineers journal over the years.

Phil enjoyed it immensely and did I. As a medic I had worked with the military in several conflicts zones and reading of the experiences of members in the journal brought back many memories.

Thank you Dave.

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## Miscellaneous Items from the Past



### **3 Troop - 9 Indep Para Sqn - 1969/70 Haig Lines, Crookham**

Trevor Round, Ginge Shipway, Pete Thorpe, Gurney Fisher  
Bert Tate, Georgie Flynn, Terry Airnes, Alistair McGuinness, Paddy Smyth, Joe Macintosh, Jonah Jones,  
Terry Sadler, Louis Gallagher, Dick Richards, Gerry Streeton, Lt Dunn, Syd Hoyle, Alec Guy



### **1 Troop - 9 Indep Para Sqn -1969/70 Haig Lines, Crookham**

Froth Beer, Tosh Burns, Pete Ellis, George Murphy, Ian Cook, Pete Bailey, Derek Sowdon  
Tommo Thompson, Paul Dunkley, Titch Collins, Dave Redhead, Taff Denham, Dave Rutter, Eddie Roberts,  
Tom Rhodes, Chris Reid, Paddy Fulton, Phil Eccleston, Bernie Baldwin, Billy Belshaw, Taff Vickery



## Rogues Gallery



Louis Gallagher - Gone, but never forgotten



Parashot Competition - Pau, France Sept 1964  
Mick Turner, Capt Little, Ron Bloome, Lt Hendy, Dave Rutter, Bob Varey, Chris Chambers & Fred Robson



Sept 2021 - Paphos - Meeting with Paul Dunkley after over 30 years absence. Many ears should have been burning!



Sadly they are now all assembled at the Final RV  
John Smith, Ted Ellis, Bill Shields, Gerry Hicks  
& Joe Stoddart - taken in 2007



One of the earliest AGMs some 30+ years ago

In front: Bruce Bissett, Dusty Miller, ?, Ken Cowling, Mick Beadle, Jeff Jelly others amongst the crowd: Mick Tribble, Dave Goodfellow, Jock Gray, Billy Lafferty, Mick Lobb, John Aldridge, Titch Collins, Nicky Coork, Terry Wick, Colin Bond, Ian Rogalski, Titch Netley, Ian Rosenvinge, Rob the Slob, Clog Claughton and others - you can probably recognise.

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# A Wee Scottish Priest's Tale

Doug Swanson



Mess where I spent two lunchtimes a week doing the Mess Accounts as Treasurer. We continued to Brig Archie's and had a splendid if saddened evening enjoying a delicious meal.

Hugh kept popping in and out of our lives. Although I am definitely not a Catholic I did spend a great deal of time in Hugh's company. In Headquarters 1<sup>st</sup> British Corps we shared an office truck on exercises and sometimes had a drink or two together. Hugh was a great supporter of my rugby team, he Bielefeld Javelins, usually arriving from Saturday lunch in the mess, so near half time. Our pitch was on a slope stretching away downhill for some distance. We mostly played uphill first half with the opposition hardly aware of the slope. Sometimes we were losing by a few points when Hugh arrived, he would say a quick prayer for us at



half time and we would generally win the game. This meant that Hugh had to join us in the club to celebrate. One Saturday he was so carried away by our success that he forgot to go and hold Confession. Unfortunately this was discovered by our Commander Lt Gen Sir Rolly Gibbs! Hugh came into my office just before lunch the following Monday to let me know he just had a difficult interview with the Commander. In future we had to make certain he left the rugby club in time to hear Confession!

On 1 March, just ten days after the bombing, I arrived in Northern Ireland as the first field rank OC of the Postal & Courier Unit.

And the next week I made my first visit to Londonderry. Just short of the town there was a 10 foot wall by the roadside and on it in 3 feet high red letters "Paras 13 - IRA Nil" A dramatic reminder of very recent events.

A few weeks later I had a phone call from 1 Para in Palace Barracks in Belfast saying I had been in the Province for too long without visiting, so be here for lunch tomorrow. I went, only to discover quite a crowd as it was the day of the publication of the Widgery Tribunal. After lunch the QM took me to his stores saying he had something for me. It was a parachutist helmet in my size! He told me to be at RAF Aldergrove at 2pm the next day. And so started parachuting again from a Hercules onto Slemish Mountain. I managed five more jumps during my tour.



Back to Bielefeld and meeting with old gang again was good. Now was the time to write the case to form a 1st British Corps Postal & Courier Regiment - oh, and to pass the Staff Promotion Exam. One Sunday evening we decided to go to the cinema to see some popular new films. When we arrived there was an enormous queue. I was not up for a long stand in line, so strolled along the crowd and spotted six pals who I invited home for a small drink. Hugh Beattie was one of them. As the evening drew on folks departed home until there was just Hugh and myself (not an uncommon experience). I said he had better stay the night and get into our spare bed. "Oh it is a lovely warm evening" he remarked going outside, taking off his shoes and settling down on a sun lounger on our patio. Next morning we were awoken by our girls crying "Father Beattie is asleep in our garden!" Such is family history and good pals.

## The Airborne Posties - the mail will get through!

Over the next few years our careers progressed and Hugh became a Chaplain 1<sup>st</sup> Class (Colonel) and on reaching 55 he decided not to retire but to revert to Chaplain 3rd Class (Major) so he could serve from 55 to 60 years of age and to serve with the Irish Guards at Pirbright. We would meet annually at the London District Athletics where my event was always early in the day allowing us to lunch together.



In 1984 I was serving in 1<sup>st</sup> British Corps again and taking part on the huge Exercise Lionheart with my Regiment fully deployed on the exercise delivering all the Corps' mail for troops in their field locations. A real test for war. Lt Eddie Gratwicke had brought his 8 Postal & Courier Regiment (V) on camp to operate the peacetime BFPOs in the Corps Area. They were magnificent. I did a great deal of travelling on this exercise trying to see all my soldiers with their formations.

One day a priest approached me asking, "Are you Doug Swanson?" "Your pal Father Hugh Beattie is in a bad way in BMH Rinteln". It appeared that Hugh was on the exercise and had been visiting one of the many field locations when a trailer broke free from its towing Land Rover and started to run down a hill towards a group of soldiers. Hugh tried to stop it and was run over by it but had stopped it. I had to get to Rinteln to see him, but first I needed to get some supplies.

Armed with a 5-Man ration pack I arrived at the BMH just after noon. It was no problem getting to Hugh's bedside, to waken him and receive his usual greeting, "Dougie, in the name of God it is yourself!" after a few minutes finding out how he was I asked him to get the nurse to bring a jug of water and two glasses. This was to consume the "rations". Just a litre bottle of Famous Grouse! We passed a most enjoyable lunchtime talking non-stop and laughing much. Just after 2 pm the nurse came and asked if he wanted his injection to help him through the afternoon. Hugh declined. I put the remaining half of the bottle in his locker, tucked him in for his snooze and left. I never saw him again.

When I retired from the Royal Mail in 1999 we moved to Weymouth. In 2002 I read in the Times that Hugh had died on 24 August 2002 aged 74. When he finally retired from the Army, the Pope had made him a Monsignor. Just the greatest honour for Hugh. He was just one terrific character with a zest for life and an incredible mixer with all people he met.

The saddest thing I learned from his obituary was that he was a regular visitor to the prison on Portland and on every visit he would have passed within a 100 yards of our front door. I was deeply disappointed to have missed the many opportunities to meet up with my old pal and share some memories and laughs. I guess that my liver was equally delighted that I had not!

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## History of the Welsh 3000

Mike Ellery



The Welsh 3000 is, or was, a Military Endurance Race which took place in Snowdonia National Park. It comprised of traversing 14 mountain summits over 3000ft in height and a total distance of 23 miles, climbing or descending, a total of 15,000ft. The start was from the summit of Snowdon and finished on the summit of Foel Fras. It basically comprised of three legs:

1<sup>st</sup> leg: Summit of Snowdon to Nant Peris, 4.5 miles. Traverse Snowdon 3560ft, Carnedd Ugain 3493ft and Crib Goch 3023ft.

2<sup>nd</sup> leg: Nant Peris to Idwal Cottage, 9.5 miles. Traverse Elidir Fawr 3030ft, Y Garn 3104ft, Glyder Fawr 3262ft, Glyder Fach 3262ft, and Tryfan 3010ft.

3<sup>rd</sup> leg: Idwal Cottage to Foel Fras, 9 miles. Traverse Penryrolewen 3427ft, Carnedd Dafydd 3427ft, Yr

Elen 3152ft, Carnedd Llywelyn 3485ft, Foel Grach 3196ft, and Foel Fras 3092ft.

In 1984 the summit of Carnedd Uchaf which had a map height of 2950ft, was remeasured and found to have a height of 926m (3038ft) making the total number of 3000ft mountains now 15. Purists still consider the Welsh 3000 as containing 14 summits. The name Carnedd Uchaf is also known as Carnedd Gwenllian. It is also recognised by seasoned hill walkers that going over Carnedd Uchaf is just as quick as contouring around the mountain.

There are two versions of the Welsh 3000 race, the Civilian and Military version, both differ quite considerably.

The Civilian version comprises of an individual competing against the clock. They are mainly fell runners, a peculiar breed of athletes who take great delight in running over mountains. Their dress consists of running shorts and vests and training shoes. They carry nothing and are supplied on route by their support team for all their needs, including food, water and any other requirements. They only attempt the round in perfect conditions, whereas the Military Version is scheduled for the second Sunday in June, irrespective of the weather conditions.

The Military version consists of a four man team, where the whole team has to finish the course, or it is either disqualified or receives time penalties for each member who drops out. Each Unit is allowed one team only. Their dress is combat kit, DMS Boots, Belt order with small packs, which have to contain a certain amount of kit designated by the umpires. The team carries its own food and water and receives no help from outside sources.

Information on the History of the Welsh 3000 can be found on the internet and certain mountain publications, however it mainly refers to the Civilian race. There is relatively little or no information on the Military version, thus all the information and photos in this article have been donated by personnel who were actively involved in the relative races.

The summing of the Welsh 3000ft mountains can be traced back to the Victorian Times, but no records exist as to how they fared. The first recorded time was noted in Spring 1938 by Thomas Firkbank, accompanied by his wife in a time of 8 hours 25 minutes.



In 1950 John Disley with Chris Brasher and friends completed the round in 7 hours 24 minutes. With the advent of better equipment the times started to tumble quite dramatically. In 1960 Eric Beard, a famous fell runner took 5 hours 13 minutes to complete the round. This was obliterated by Joss Naylor in June 1973 in a time of 4 hours 46 minutes, this record standing for a considerably long period. It was eventually broken by Colin Donnelly in 1988 in a time of 4 hours 19 minutes. His wife Angela Carson also holds the women's record in a time of 5 hours 28 minutes. In 2019 Colin Donnelly's record was eventually broken by another fell runner, Finlay Wild, in a time of 4 hours 10 minutes 48 seconds. His record breaking achievement can be seen on YouTube, a truly remarkable and death defying run over the hills. His time will be a challenge to other fell runners and will no doubt be broken at some future date.

In 1970 Tony Roberts returned back to the Sqn, having completed a tour as an Adventure Training Instructor, stationed at Rhyl. He was very familiar with the Welsh 3000 event and thought it was an ideal competition for the Sqn to be involved in. He discussed his idea with John Moss who agreed. They then put their proposal to the OC, who at the time was Brian Awford, who readily agreed. So the Sqns involvement with the Welsh 3000 had begun. In 1971 Tony and John got together a group of volunteers, including myself, and off to Snowdonia we went to get some training in.

The most successful teams are either local units who have an intimate knowledge of the terrain, or teams like the Gurkhas who spend six months of the year training for the event. We had 3 weeks, which was the average time the Sqn teams spent on training. Training was hard but a team was eventually picked. It comprised of John Moss, George Dunn, Mick Caddick and Rocky Turner. A strong team and high hopes were resting on their shoulders. On race day the teams are transported to the top station by the Snowdonia railway, who then make their way to the Snowdon summit.

At regular intervals teams are dispatched from the summit and are sent on their way. At a nearby TA hall a control centre had been set up. Umpires on the relevant summits radio in the team times as they pass through their control point. At the control centre, the times are displayed on a white board against the various teams. Their position can then be compared to the others.

The Sqn team were in 1<sup>st</sup> position on reaching the final stage, but the hard slog up Pen yr Ole Wen took its toll and they were overtaken by two teams. The eventual winners were a TA team from the Welsh Fusiliers, and 2<sup>nd</sup> were an Artillery team. Only a few minutes separated the first 3 teams, but the Sqn team had set the bar high for any future Sqn teams that were to follow.

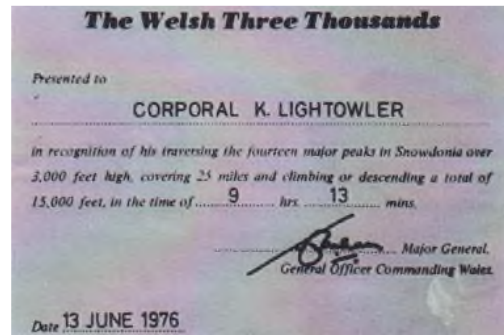
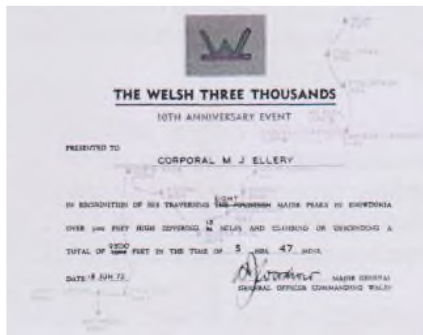
1972 will be remembered for two special reasons. 1) it was the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, so the first race must have taken place in 1963, and 2) it was the race from hell, the final leg being cancelled due to extremely bad weather. The weather was so bad cancellation of the whole event had been considered, although it did go ahead after a long delay. Conditions on the high tops were such that horizontal rain, gale force winds, along with the chill factor reduced the temperature to what felt like sub-zero. The mist was so thick it was difficult to see your feet. Added to those problems, the rock was very wet and slippery and resulted in a number of broken limbs.

Hypothermia was also a problem with team members having to retire, having been overcome with the extreme cold. Even the umpires had difficulty in locating their designated summits. Some never did find them! Teams finding their positions unattended just pushed on regardless. Somehow the Sqn managed to enter two teams into this event. I was in the B team and was promoted to Corporal, as a team captain had to have a minimum rank of Corporal. Needless to say I was busted back to sapper once the race was over. The Gurkhas were the eventual winners. I think most teams that completed the first two legs were highly delighted that the last leg was cancelled. The ground conditions down in the valley were reasonably calm and gave no indication as to what was happening on the high tops.

## 9 Indep Para Sqn RE - Welsh 3000 Teams

- **Year 1971 - Team:** John Moss, George Dunn, Mick Caddick & Graham (Rocky) Turner  
**Finishing position:** 3<sup>rd</sup> - Time taken: 8 hours 34 minutes
- **Year 1972 'A' Team:** Ron Hadden, Mick Caddick, Chalky White & Phil Chatterley  
**Finishing position:** Not known. (Last leg cancelled)
- **Year 1972 'B' Team:** Mike Ellery, Chris O'Donovan, AN other, AN other  
**Finishing position:** Not known - Time taken: 5 hours 47 minutes (last leg cancelled)
- **Year 1975 - Team:** Dave Weaver, Carl Rhodes, Scouse Higginson & Aggie Agnew  
**Finishing Position:** 3<sup>rd</sup> - Time taken 7 hours 53 minutes
- **Year 1976 - Team:** Keith Lightowler, Tom Armstrong, Scouse Higginson & Colin Lovely  
**Finishing Position:** Not Known - 9 hours 13 minutes (included a 1 hour time penalty)
- **Year 1977 - Team:** Geoff Strickleton, Tom Armstrong, Scouse Higginson & Colin Lovely  
**Finishing position:** Not Known - Time: Not Known

The Sqn managed to enter teams in 1975, 76 and 77, the most successful was Dave Weavers team, achieving a time of 7 hours 53 minutes but still only finishing in 3<sup>rd</sup> position, still a remarkable time. Both the 76 and 77 teams only finished with 3 members so picked up time penalties, otherwise they would have been up with there with a possibility of winning.



**3 members of the 1976 Team - Scouse Higginson, Colin Lovely & Keith Lightowler**



**The 1977 Team - Geoff Strickleton, Colin Lovely, Tom Armstrong & Scouse Higginson**

Like so many great Military traditions that have fallen by the wayside, the race no longer exists, due to personnel cutbacks and the dreaded elf and safety regulations.

I can remember getting a tot of rum after a night build in freezing rain at bridging camp, or watching the Marines sliding down the zip wire into the Edinburgh Castle Arena? Even the gun carriage race by the navy has been scaled back. No more amputated fingers! These are a few of the many great traditions which will probably never return.

Julius Caesar once said "Veni, Vidi, Vici" "We came, We saw, We conquered". A fitting tribute to all those who trained for, took part in and completed the Welsh 3000. Well done to you all. The Welsh 3000 is like running a marathon. At some point you will hit the wall. In a marathon it is usually around the 20 mile mark. In the Welsh 3000 it is the final leg and the ascent of Pen yr Ole Wen. It is steep, craggy, scrambling is required and it is relentless. But once the summit is reached the going gets easier. But there are still another 5 summits to conquer therefore no time to take it easy. How hard was it? On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the hardest it has got to be up there with at least an 8.



Several factors need to be taken into account, the main one being the weather conditions. A clear bright sunny day is essential, being injury free is a must, but accidents can occur at any time.

Ronnie Hadden in his late 60s, who took part in the 72 race with the A team, decided to retrace his footsteps and completed the round in under 24 hours solo without backup.

So if anybody feels like breaking his record, let me know!

## Caught on Camera – Harrogate

Relaxing the night/afternoon before the Gala Dinner



**Syd Hoyle with BOF Harrap**



**Steve Brown, Tony Higgins, John Phillips & Roger Howles**



**John Lee with Baz Bassett**



**Pete Bailey with John McCarthy & Alan Lindsay  
Monty Dane in the background**



**Adam Frame, Frank Ryan & Dave Leibrick**



**Bert Tate with Ronnie Hadden**



## Airborne Engineers Association – Gala Dinner 2021



**Alec Beer, Alan Lindsay, Barney Rooney, Phil Poulton & Jim Harrower**



**Bobby Matthews & Pete Bailey**



**Ian Rosenvinge with Paul Moore - hope you keep your eyes open when piloting the plane Paul!**



**Harry Lockwood, BOF Harrap, Dave Grimbley & Yorkie Davies**



**Steve & Mel Wallis, John & Pat Lee, Lt Col, Jack Crossley, Sir Donald Spiers, WO1 (RSM) Jason Betts, & Capt Marc Dorkings**



**Jeannette Rutter with Lt Col Crossley  
CO 23 Para Engr Regt**





**John Lee & RSM Jason Betts**



**Mick Mathis & Phil Poulton**



**Lorna Leibrick, Dorothy Lockwood, Andy Shankland & Jimmy Fleming**



**Frank Ryan with Brian Spivey**



**Ken Mason, Jugsy Unsing & Clog Claughton**



**Mick Humphries & Baz Bassett**



**Steve Brown with RSM Jason Betts**



**Ian Strettle, Dave Leibrick, Mark Desborough & Jimmy Hill**



**Mike & Morag Ellery with Jeannette & Dave Rutter**



**Lesley & Paul Moore**



**Bert Tate, Alec Beer, Phil Poulton, Richard Fleck, Jim Harrower, Barney Rooney, Dave Grimbley & Paddy Denning**



**Ken Mason, Bert Tate with (I'm too shy to have my photo taken) Alec (Froth) Beer**





**Anastasia Kostuch & Richard Fleck**



**Issy & Mick Leather, Adam Frame & Mary Ryan**



**Brenda Davies & Christine Grimbley**



**Charlie McColgan & Mick Leather**



**Tony Weldon, Chris Shillito, Tony Irwin & Mike Tindle**



**Dave Edmonds with Fred Gray**

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# Double Hills 2021

John Lee



This year's Double Hills service was held on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> September at Paulton and was once again organised by Peter Yeates and a number of helpers. The ceremony followed the usual format, except that this year 9 Para Sqn RE were not on parade, as having just come back from Afghanistan, they were undergoing Covid isolation; however, a detachment from 23 Parachute Regiment represented them together with a detachment from 676 Sqn AAC.

## Brig John Clarke Clark arrives in style for the service

The memorial has been re-furbished and was rededicated by the conducting vicar the Revd. Martin Sloco- MBE and three name plaques

were unveiled in the memory three people closely associated with Double Hills including our own Jan Chambers.

After the wreath laying the troops were lined up and inspected in the field by the reviewing officer Brig John Clarke CBE, before returning to their respective bases. Unfortunately, there was no march past through Paulton this year or a reception held in the village hall owing to Covid restrictions. Next years' service will be held on Sunday 4th September.



**John Lee, Steve Wallis together with members from the Riders of Respect**



**Buglers accompany Brig Clark & Jacob Rees Mogg MP**

## The Bath & Northeast Somerset MP Jacob Rees Mogg wrote:

Two years ago, Peter Yeates, who has been the indefatigable organiser of the Double Hills Memorial Service since it started in 1979, said that 2019 would be the last year. Fortunately, by popular demand and thanks to his great energy, after a pandemic pause, it was back in full last Sunday.

What happened in 1944 is a reminder of the heroic bravery of the Armed Forces in war. Not always in charging at guns but the raw courage that saw twenty-three young men board a wooden glider to be towed over land and sea to enemy territory where it would land in a flat field. This glider never arrived, instead it crashed into a field in Farrington Gurney next door to Paulton and as the ammunition it was carrying exploded all the men on board were killed.

This year's ceremony seemed especially well attended both by dignitaries and local people who have supported the event so well for over forty years. The salute was taken by Brigadier John Clark who inspected young soldiers who had made the long journey from Suffolk to take part in the parade. The youth in their faces is a reminder of how young those killed in 1944 were.

Commemorations are important because they honour the dead and give thanks for their sacrifice but they also honour the living. Those who may go into battle, who have taken the Queen's shilling, know that when they do so they are supported and that their patriotism and courage are admired. This year, the parade was changed at short notice because the troops from the Parachute Regiment that had been expected had been in Kabul days before and therefore, could not come. That was a poignant reminder that the Thin Red line is still protecting British people around the world.



# 2021 Falklands Ride of Respect

Paul Moore

The idea for the Falklands Ride of Respect came about originally due to our involvement in riding to the outlying graves around Arnhem, a task the Airborne Forces Riders have had the honour to perform since 2014. Later, Jimmy O'Connell was researching his book 'Three Days in June' about the battle for Mount Longdon, and he asked me to find a grave in Lanchester in County Durham. I soon found the grave of Pte Stewart Laing of Anti-Tank Pin 3 Para but the thought that I had been unaware that he was laying only a short distance from a road I had travelled countless times shocked me, and I reasoned that there must be others who do not know where their friends are buried. The research that followed was the basis for the 2019 3 Para Ride of Respect where we visited all of the 23 graves, raising funds for SAMA and awareness of the Falklands fallen.



More research followed into where all of the other Falklands graves were in the UK. This was a relatively easy task as the Falklands war was the first time that families had been given the option of 'bringing them home' therefore the funerals were well documented in newspapers and Regimental journals and websites. In 2020, in between lockdowns, we rode to all of the remaining Falklands graves in the UK. This was a much longer ride than the first purely due to geographic spread but we completed it over eight days, met many more people and families, and raised yet more money for SAMA than the previous year. It should be noted that both of these rides were entirely self-funded by the riders themselves.

**Dave Raes with Charlie McColgan**

Shortly after the 2020 ride we took the decision to put these rides together and do one big Falklands Ride of Respect in 2021. Immediately it became apparent that this was a huge undertaking compared to the two previous rides, and that it would have to be done over a much longer period, more so for safety reasons as well as distance and time. Following many months of carefully planning routes from location to location, estimating timings, distance and fuel consumption, as well as rations and accommodation, it was clear that the ride would have to take place over 16 days at the beginning of August and that we would have to raise funds to cover our own costs as well as charitable fundraising.

The charitable fundraising bit was relatively easy as we used a Just Giving page online and the funds donated go direct to SAMA. However, having had two years of these rides behind us we knew that we would need to raise around £1500 per rider just to cover expenses! To offset the costs we were able to get sponsorships from a number of businesses and friends which helped massively. Stena Line provided our Irish Sea crossings for free which was very much appreciated especially as both Charlie and myself had been on Stena ships in the Falklands 39 years ago. We also hit on friends to provide some overnight accommodation and we even held an online auction from The Last Post veteran's bar which raised a good amount. By the time we were about to start the ride we had enough to cover our costs with a bit of spare which would be donated to SAMA once the task was done. The weeks leading up to the ride dragged by. All our battle prep was done, equipment had been checked many times over, the bikes were ready but just like any real operation there was that nervous feeling of apprehension waiting for the off.



**Tony Mckie with Paul Moore & Rhine Crossing Veteran (name not known)**

In planning, and following lessons learnt from previous rides, we had limited ourselves to around 200 miles a day with time for breaks and no early starts or late finishes. This was important from a safety point of view, but we knew a 16 day ride is a marathon and not a sprint, and the riders had plenty of tasks to complete along the way and to do that well we had to be able to function properly. One small but significant task was that at the end of every day riding we would raise a dram to the fallen. This was at the specific request of a good friend Bill Nicholson, a fine retired Sapper SNCO who can no longer ride but wanted us to do this as his contribution. Bill provided four bottles of very good single malts, and each rider with an engraved glass. Bill also went above and beyond the call of duty on the ride by meeting us in his camper van at Spean Bridge where he had bacon sarnies on the go and was doing a bit of fundraising for SAMA82!

The first day of the ride started with us meeting Chris Lewis (ex 2 Para) and his girlfriend Katy who are walking the UK coast raising funds for SSAFA. Chris has been walking for around five years now and by coincidence was passing down the Durham coast that day. The day went well and ended in Edinburgh hosted by the Airborne Engineers Association Scotland who had arranged to rededicate the headstone of Cpl Scott Wilson who was killed on Mount Longdon.



Charlie and I were also presented with AEA President's Certificates for our fundraising for SAMA and the Arnhem Flower Children. It was an excellent first night!



#### **The Riders & friends at the Welsh National Falklands Memorial, Cardiff**

I could give a day by day account of the ride but to be honest, it would probably be very boring and tedious, much like the ride itself. However, there were many memorable moments. Shortly before the ride started, a biker - John Savage (ex-Light Infantry Bugler) messaged me to say that he would be touring Scotland at the same time as us and could he join us? John eventually stayed with us for three days and played at every grave and monument we visited. This was particularly special for the families and we are also very grateful to John for that. John also later met us in South Wales. We were escorted through Scotland by the Royal

Marine Riders and our visit to Northern Ireland went well and we were met by a large contingent of RBL Riders there. We relied heavily on local guides in some cases, and Fraser Phillips, Moore Campbell, Dunky Lang and Geoff Burrows all deserve a mention for keeping us on track and taking us the scenic route to relieve the boredom.



Overall, the weather was pretty good for the full two weeks although when it rained it really chucked it down but we soon dried out. In fact it was so warm I never actually put my waterproofs on once and found that just a tee shirt under the bike jacket was usually more than enough to wear. Being 'on the road' for two weeks did bring its logistical challenges in terms of doing the dhobi, but we found an innovative way of blow drying the gear each night in the Premier Inn using the handy fan in each room.

#### **The Airborne Engineers Association (Scotland) hosted the Riders & supporters in Edinburgh**

We had chosen Premier Inn as the overnight location of choice due to their availability, good standard and cost. We booked the rooms early and got some as low as £25 per head. Of course, we did keep costs down by staying with friends as well, but we found that by using Premier Inn we had our own space and could have an early night when needed.



We did have a couple of minor mechanical and electrical issues with the bikes but these were quickly fixed without any loss of momentum. It was in the plan that if any rider had a breakdown he would be left behind to catch up later and this worked well as each rider knew the score, had a copy of the full plan and in good Airborne style, were happy to fend for themselves if need be. This did cause a bit of consternation among some other riders with us as the 'biker creed' says that you don't leave anyone behind, but once it was explained that this was all part of the plan and we had to try to keep to our published timings it was fine.

#### **Riders & Supporters at Spean Bridge Commando Memorial**

Each day seemed just like the last and sometimes we got confused as to which day we were on. We had started to do the live Facebook feeds early in the ride and this helped to keep us on track, especially when people complained if we didn't do one! We had not realised how popular these were but we noticed that the Just Giving page donations were increasing,

and we were getting more 'likes' as we progressed. We were also starting to pick up small but nagging injuries such as pulled muscles and strains, and towards the end of the first week tiredness was starting to show by some small mistakes being made. This was to be expected and our regular evening de-brief and dram was a much-needed source of a bit of ribbing and leg pulling to restore the equilibrium and team harmony, as was piping Charlie on board the Golden Galleon each morning. Media interest in the ride was slightly better than expected, certainly at a local level and this was good for the local awareness aspect. We had fantastic assistance on the media side by the SAMA Office staff Joanne and Marie, as well as help from the SAMA Trustees Tom Herring, Chris Howe and others who were also there to meet us at various places around the UK.



The ride ended on Day 16 at the graveside of The Governor - Sir Rex Hunt - in North Yorkshire and we were met by many family and friends. This was a great way to end the ride but Phil Damant had a further 300 miles to go the following day back home to Devizes in Wiltshire. While it was over for three of us, we could only really relax when we knew Phil was home safe.

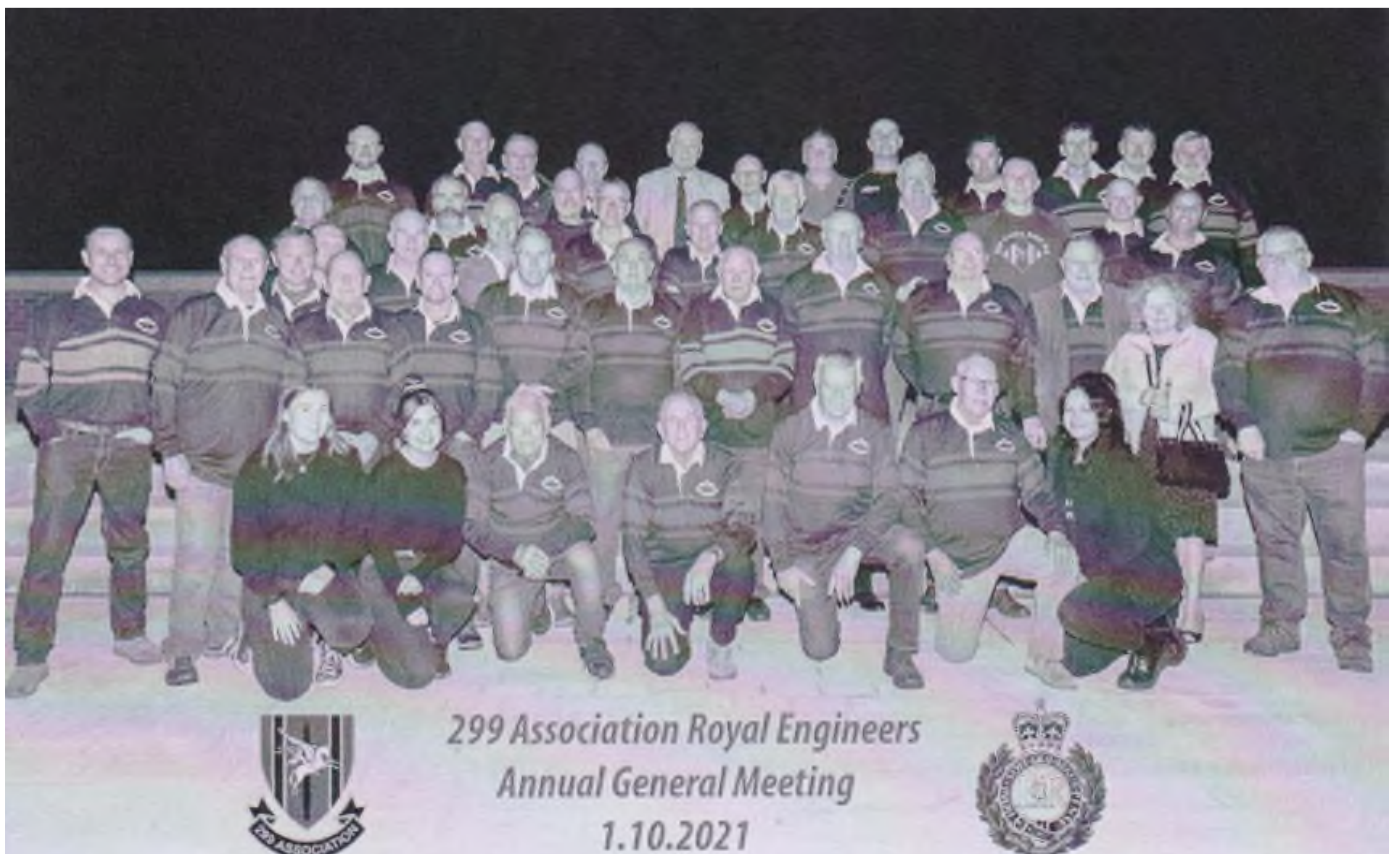
#### **Jon Nichols with Paul Moore in the Airborne Bar at Colonel's Cottage**

So was it worth it? It certainly was. We achieved our aims of Remembrance - Respect - Awareness - Support in many ways, and now many more people know where the Falklands graves are. We also raised a considerable amount of money for SAMA and at the time of writing stands at just over £9000 when the funds of the Just Giving page, funds collected on the ride and what remains in the Admin Fund are taken together. We also met many In every case they thanked us for raising awareness and for remembering families of the fallen and veterans of 1982.

In February 2022 Charlie and I hope to travel to the Falklands on a veterans pilgrimage, and while there ride to the last 15 graves on land on a couple of borrowed motorbikes, and hopefully also pay our respects at sea to those still on patrol. We do not intend to mount a big ride around the UK. next year as there will already be a lot on for the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. However, we hope that bikers around the UK. will make their own Falklands Ride of Respect to visit the graves and memorials in their own areas or regions using the location data which we will provide to SAMA to be published on the SAMA website shortly.

It would be impossible to thank and mention everyone who we met and rode with us throughout the ride, but in every case, we encountered nothing but support, friendship and kindness from everyone we met. It was truly humbling and we thank everyone for that.

**On behalf of the 2021 Falklands Ride of Respect Team - Charlie McColgan, Phil Damant, Tony McKie and myself, thank you to everyone for your support.**





# Much fuss about an acceptable beret for an Airborne Shaki!

**Tom Bridges**

Following on from my Gibraltar article I thought I would share a short ditty with the esteemed readers of the Airborne Journal.

During the annual Remembrance Day parades I have attended since leaving Military service in 2009 I have often been quizzed by other veterans about the beret I proudly wear.

I have decided to share the tale of this Hybrid Beret with my 9 Sqn brethren. Now just before this brief ditty is related I need to state that I do not always wear the same beret for the annual homage to our dearly departed brothers and sisters. So before all the more mature readers throw a choking fit the beret I am about to write about is off the green and not of the maroon persuasion!

As most of my peer group will know I attended Selection in February of 1995 as an SBS volunteer.

In fact the very first Army volunteer for the SBS.

This of course caused many a 'bitten lip' through my year or so trying to actually get in.

As it had never been attempted before there were all sorts of administrative issues along the way but how did a full booted and suited Army Staff Sergeant become the first Army volunteer for the esteemed Special Boat Service .....

Well initially I deem the fault lay with the Sqn!

I arrived at the mighty 9 in late 1988 as a full corporal from BAOR. Having waited ten years to get my chance I was not one for giving it any less than the 100% required. Even though it had taken a call to Mr Kershaw to finally get me my chance. The OC at my BAOR unit had tried and tried to send me down the zone as a budding Sergeant. Comments like

You will hate it there

They are animals

Your career will be over

You will never get promoted

Had not dulled my ardour or intent for an attempt at the maroon machine!

It is probably worth pointing out that my old OC had never served with 9 Sqn and was a former 59 man.

Moving on, Pre-Para, P Company and eventually the jumps and I was standing proudly in the AO's office purchasing my Stable belt and told that I was to join 2 Troop as a Section Commander.

After a mere 18 months I was promoted to Sergeant and took over Pre-Para for a while and then back to 2 Troop as the Recce Sgt.

As far as I was concerned the exact opposite to what my old OC had warned me about had occurred!

I thoroughly enjoyed the role and the companionship in 9 Sqn. I had been promoted and everything seemed to be lining up nicely.

After what seemed a relatively short period myself and two other Sergeants were told to report to the new OC's office.

I did not know what was occurring or what the subject was about but felt a little nervous as all three of us were completely unprepared for what we were about to be told by the Boss.

There was good news and bad news.

The good news I had been selected for Staff Sergeant. The bad news there were no slots for this position and I was to be posted. More bad news according to the OC I had 24 hours to discuss with the long haired Colonel and I was then to choose between ..... Maidstone Tidworth or Ripon.

I was in a state of shock and went home that night extremely crest fallen. I did not fancy any of the choices given. I knew absolutely nothing about the units offered.

I returned to the OC after the discussion period and offered the following....

Could I stay in the Sqn until a slot became available? No!. Could I stay in the Sqn as a Sergeant? No!.

After this I told him that I did not want to be posted to any of the units mentioned so he would have to make the choice for me.

Once again an unhappy evening at the Bridges residence.

Now call it fate or chance that evening I received a call from big Al, the lad I had taken over the dive team from in 9 Para. I told him the tale and his response was 'leave it to me'.

The very next day I received another call from the OC at the Royal Engineers Diving School at Portsmouth. I was offered a job as an SDI and gratefully accepted.

And so to cut to the quick, if I had stayed at the Sqn I would probably have not attempted some of the daft courses and ended up with a unique beret at Poole in Dorset! Therefore it is the Sqn's fault.

To trim the tale even further, life at the Diving School was great but after a year as an SDI I had an epiphany!

I was planning the next training year and when I compared the last training year to the new one, guess what? They were identical, I then decided to have a crack at the Regiment before I got too old and lost some of my boyish good lucks/interest.

I duly put in the required forms via the Chief Clerk and the next day was called into the CO's office at Portsmouth.

Frighteningly a similar conversation took place as to the one prior to going 9 Sqn....

You will hate it there.

Your career will be over

You are too old!



All this by that point was water off the proverbial ducks back. The comment that finally made up my mind to attempt Selection was the CO's leaving statement.

He told me that I was being lined up to take over as a WO2 PSI at the TA centre in Bradford. I had only been there a year!

That is it I thought to myself, it is time to quit talking and start walking as my old pal Badger Burton used to say.

I kept my training going and let one other close pal in on my secret mainly because he was the PTI QMSI at the Diving School and I wanted him to give my training schedule the once over.

#### **Confusion as to which beret I would be allowed to wear circa 1995**

It was during a conversation with Bill that he informed me that Selection was now a joint process and I could if I decided to, go to the SBS. To be brutally honest I had obviously heard of the SBS but knew very little about them.

Bill set me up with a phone call to the training SNCO at RM Poole and I was invited down for a chat with the OC of the training Squadron at RM Poole.

After that rather scary chat and a look at some of the Pictures on the Training Wing wall at Poole, the rest is history as they say. I was told in no uncertain terms that the Shaki bastardo's would not look at me until I had passed the two week SB Aptitude and the 3 week Oakhampton mountain cadre on the lovely Dartmoor.

That would be another story for another time me thinks!

Back to the Beret!

After..... Two week Aptitude at RM Poole. Three week Mountain Cadre at Oakhampton camp. Initial Selection at Sennybridge with the Regiment (Hills). Jungle. E&E I was back at the Regiment in the Lines at Hereford and awaiting the results of my endeavours with about a dozen Regiment and eight RM hopefuls when I was called into the Adjutants office.

I turned up and sat rather nervously in the outer office waiting to be called in by a scary person who I had already clashed with because as far as he was concerned Royal Marines went to the SBS and Army personnel went to the Regiment. He told me midway through the Jungle that he thought I was a traitor to my Corps and probably would not pass anyway.

So as you can imagine I was not looking forward to a second meeting with this man.

I will not name him because that is not what I am about, wouldn't be too hard to work out who he was though .....

The secretary called me in and I was pleasantly surprised to see the Chief Clerk behind the desk and not the Adj. There were people sat behind the door who I could not identify on first entry, the Chief gestured for me to sit down and then introduced the two characters sat behind me.

It was the CO of the SBS and the CO of the Regiment plus the Training Major from Selection.

Flamin' butterflies took off once again!



They both came forward and sat either side of me. I was immediately put at ease by shaking my hand and congratulating me on passing the course. The relief was instantaneous and I felt absolutely great ..... for a moment.

Then the CO of the Regiment said calmly, Tom, there are a few issues.

The Training Major spoke and suggested that I stay on the Army books because of my seniority and the fact that if I transferred I would become a marine and lose a hell of a lot of money and seniority. Because of my age I would not have time to get up to a decent pensionable rank, if I stayed on the Army list I would eventually be shadow promoted W02/W01 and that would make for a far better pension pot.



To be honest I had never thought about this aspect. When volunteering I had been an RE Staff Sergeant on full dive pay. Once in and after a year on Probation I would revert to Trooper on full SF pay which is a hell of a drop in revenue, again that is a story for another day

**Photo shot with bridge at Coronado in background circa 1995**

Good call from him and I am extremely glad that I took his advice.

It was at that point that the Chief Clerk interjected on the age issue stating that I was actually too old for Selection but because of my background and the fact that I was an SBS volunteer they had allowed me to attempt the course.

So after absorbing this information it felt to me that it was even more of a case of 'Now or Never' with regards my attempt at Selection.

Now we came to the meat of the actual discussions, and I am quoting the Boss at Hereford here when he said, "What the hell am I going to wear down at Poole as an Army/SBS guy"?

Again to be honest, I did not really give the proverbial two shakes in regard to dress, most of you that know me also know that I look like a bag of the obvious whatever rig I am in.

Seemingly the two Colonels did care and had been discussing it prior to me being called in.

The CO of Poole was not happy with me wearing the traditional Green Beret with the RM cap badge (prior to the SBS getting their own cap badge in the early 90's).



To be honest neither was I. I had never done a Commando (or Wommando as Jugsy puts it) course and would not have liked to wear the cap badge of a Royal Marine. It was a Corps which I had a lot of respect for and it would not seem right.

**Aboard a 'Chariot' or 'Pig'**

The CO of Hereford then chipped in with the suggestion that I should wear the Sandy Brown which I would be presented with in a couple of days. Happy with that I thought to myself.

Back to the Boss from Poole, he was not happy with this suggestion as he did not want this on his camp.

I then came up with brilliant suggestion. Why don't I wear my Maroon machine? I was Ex 9 Para, had completed all the necessary courses and this would solve the issue.

There was a long silence at this suggestion, the CO of the Service began shaking his head and continued to shake it for at least 20 seconds.

Oh no, no, no, no he stated, a maroon beret would be worse than the sandy coloured one.



### Last juice box off coast of Poole 1998

After this I just stayed quiet and let them get on with it.

What was eventually decided on was the beret that I have to this day and wear proudly when the occasion dictates.

A green beret with the Regiments cap badge instead of the RM cap badge. To cap the dress off I would also wear the bright blue regimental stable belt. According to both the CO's this would allow me to 'blend in'.

I can honestly say that this meeting and discussion stayed with me and every time I don the beret I have a little chuckle remembering back. It was surreal to the point of ridiculous.



As a thought on the effort that a CO can exert when he needs to! The CO of Hereford either had the beret with him or had one produced for the presentation a couple of days later.

As is tradition with the 'Badging' ceremony at the Lines, if you are lucky enough to have your name called out as a successful candidate then you make your way down to the front and receive your sandy coloured beret from the Boss.

### Leaping in during the Experimental boat trial working with James Fisher Defence circa 2010-2014

My name was called out and I made my way down and proudly received my beret with the news that I would be going to Boat Troop of B Sqn, no surprise there then.

After the roll call was finished my name was called out again and I made my way back to be met by the CO of the SBS who then gave me my green lid with the Regiments cap badge hastily sewn on. This was met with raucous applause from the assembled

company and it was with a red face that I made my way back to my seat amongst the bootees at the back of the theatre.

In my first tour with the SBS from 1995-2000 I probably wore the agreed ensemble on a dozen times max, was all the effort worth it.....? **You bet it was!**

## Wales Weekend Friday 13 - Sunday 15 May 2022

Baz Bassett



After a couple of cancelled attempts to get to Wales we have once again booked HMS Indefatigable, the Joint Services Mountain Training Centre, for the weekend Fri 13<sup>th</sup> to Sun 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2022. It will follow a similar format to previous weekends, we book in during the afternoon with a meet and greet on Friday evening in the Bar followed by a meal in the local.

On the Saturday we hope to have two walks one high level and one low level followed in the evening with a BBQ. A lot of sandbags being pulled up, stories re told with another year's embellishment and the inevitable raffle. Sunday is a pick your own day, cycling (bring your own bike) low key walk, there are enough routes around, visit one of the areas or just chill. We hope to find a restaurant to cater for an evening meal for those remaining and

depart on the Monday morning. I do as always caveat this with the problem of restrictions. Wales and the MOD have a different policy so we are still very much in the hands of the civil servants and government restrictions. That does not stop us from planning so if you are interested, drop me an email. I have the addresses of previous Wales veterans and I will email you all in the New Year with booking details. Contact me at [mrb375@gmail.com](mailto:mrb375@gmail.com) if interested.



# The Final Edition of the Airborne Engineers Association - Printed AEA Journal

Dave Rutter



**Cheers, and a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year to all our readers and sincere thanks for your editorial support over the past 2 decades.**

As one era ends a new chapter will soon emerge. The December publication (Number 57) draws to a conclusion my 21 years as editor of our magazine.

Dave Pace (webmaster) together with a volunteer editor (yet to be coerced!) will be taking the journal 'Online'. Details of how and when this will be set up are published on the opposite page. The benefits of an 'Online' version means, no more Journal annual subscription. Photographs accompanying your articles will now be projected in full colour etc. etc.

On the matter of your previous annual subscription payments - over 350 members have been paying by Standing Order, which has been an extremely time saving factor for me. However, despite my appeal in the June 2021 publication, for each and every one of you to cancel this transaction through your **OWN BANK**, with immediate effect, for many, this appears to have fallen on deaf ears!

On receiving the September & October bank statements via our treasurer Dick Brown, many, many members have so far failed to cancel their Standing Orders. These payments will now be accepted as a donation to the AEA Central Funds, so thank you for your generous donations. However, if you wish to stop these donations - it is quite simple...

## **CANCEL YOUR STANDING ORDER FOR THE AEA JOURNAL - NOW!**

Our journal has been distributed to countries far and wide. They include Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, America, Malta, Philippines, Germany, Spain, France, Portugal, Eire, Jersey, Gibraltar, South Africa and Cyprus.

To each and every oversea subscriber, thank you for your support and for the many articles forwarded for publication. We sincerely hope you will remain in contact with colleagues and friends through the 'Online' version of our journal.

To the hundreds of UK subscribers. Thank you for the many hundreds of articles and photographs you have contributed to the success of the journal, and please continue to do so with the 'Online' version.

### **So as Editor I will not miss!**

Chasing up those late subscription payments.

Harassing you all for articles and photographs.

Spending endless hours collating and preparing the final draft of each publication

Sticking address labels on hundreds of large envelopes (down to 430, it was at one time over 700)

Stuffing journals into envelopes

Peeling and sticking (assisted by Jeannette) more than 1300 stamps on the UK envelopes. Before peel and stick stamps we made use of a damp sponge!

Numerous trips to the Post Office.

Or the member/s who forgot to notify their change of address before the magazines were posted!

### **But I will miss!**

The satisfaction as the final draft is forwarded to the printers.

The relief as the last envelope is delivered to the Post Office.

The thanks received from members on reading some of the excellent articles and the journal content that you have provided.

Moving on with the times, Dave Pace has taken up the mantle by introducing an 'Online Version' of the AEA publication. As with the printed magazine, it will only be as informative and successful as the articles, (enhanced with photos) that you provide).

**THE END**

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## AEA Journal 'Online'

### Dave Pace - AEA Webmaster

The December 2021 issue of the AEA Journal will be the last printed issue, as well as the last edition produced with the input and organisation of Dave Rutter our longstanding Editor. Thank you Dave for your time and effort, which has made the print version of the Journal such a successful and popular publication. Our aim is to keep that popularity going in the online version.

From January 2022 any new Journal content will be available in the "Members Only" section of our website, click on "Members Only" on any of the site navigation bars.

### Access to Members Only Content

Access to the Members Only content is password protected. If you do not have or have forgotten your username and password please get in touch with Dave Pace by the means shown in the 'Contacting Site Admin' section below.

### Existing Journal Content on AEA Website

A lot of Journal content is already in place on our site and site admin will continue to add old Journal content, however, some assistance will be required regarding the provision of Journal issues which are not in the possession of site admin. If you think you may be able to help with providing any older copies of the Journal (pre 2003) please contact site admin

### AEA Website General Overview

#### Website addresses:

<https://www.airbornesappers.org.uk/>

<https://www.aea.org.uk/>

The AEA owns both of the above addresses, whichever one you use you'll be taken to the same content.

### Navigating the Website

There are three types of navigation bar:

1. Top navigation bar - Available on every site page
2. Left navigation bar - Available on the Home page and a few other site pages
3. Bottom navigation bar - Available on every site page

### Contacting Site Admin

By Email: [contactaeawebmaster@gmail.com](mailto:contactaeawebmaster@gmail.com)

Via website: Contact Page - <https://www.aea.org.uk/contact.htm>

By Telephone: Mobile 07977 282620 or Landline 01304373933

By Post: Dave Pace 169, College Road, Deal, Kent CT14 6BX

**PLEASE NOTE:** Site Admin is not of a generation where his mobile phone has been grafted onto his ear, so if you get no reply, please leave a message, including your name and contact details and he will get back to you.

The landline number has a screening process before you can speak to anyone or leave a message, so please be patient with it, again if you get no reply leave a message.

**IMPORTANT** - Please provide your AEA membership number as proof of identity on any contact.

### Future Journal Content on AEA Website

It is yet to be decided if a Journal Online Editor will be appointed when we move to online only content. From January 2022, unless notified otherwise, please plan on sending any content to site admin as shown above. When/if an Editor is appointed we will notify you via the Site News page of the AEA web site, as well as by contact to all Branch Secretaries.

### Site Updates

A relatively new feature of our site is to show site updates as follows:

1. A date for the last site content update is included in the Home page welcome text
2. Previous updates will be listed in the Site News page, with the most recent ones highlighted (Click Site News on the navigation bars).

If you have any questions, concerns or comments about any of the above or anything else to do with the AEA site, please get in touch.

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# Cromwell Lock 2021

John Lee



The annual Cromwell Lock service to commemorate the 10 soldiers from 131 Independent Parachute Squadron who died there in September 1975 whilst on Exercise Trent Chase was held on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> September at the memorial. Last year, owing to the Covid outbreak a service could not be held, and sadly owing to building work in Zetland Park, Falkirk, this year the service normally held there organised by our Scottish Branch had to be cancelled.

## Deep in thought during the service

Representatives from the Birmingham Branch and the Newark and other branches of the PRA were in attendance together with local councillors and the service was conducted by the Rt Revd. John Finney who gave an interesting and thoughtful address.



One of the outcomes of the tragedy was that it drew attention to the safety, or rather lack of it, at weirs across the country, especially as a short time after, another boat went over the weir and the father of a family was drowned. This led to the British Waterways Board improving safety at weirs nationally by installing booms and other safety measures in similar locations. At least some good came out of this disaster, sadly too late for the lads of 300 Tp.

Wreaths were laid by the President, the Birmingham Branch, the PRA, the local authority and one on behalf of 23 Parachute

Engineer Regiment. The latter was laid by a member of the LAD, REME who lives in the village of Cromwell and is currently serving with 23 Regiment.



It was good to meet up with our old friends from the PRA and the Muskham Ferry Inn hosted us after the service where plenty of tales were no doubt recounted. Amongst the guests were Lt Col Ingram Murray, ex OC 131 Sqn and his wife.



Reading aloud the names of those who perished in the presence of the Revd John Finney

Proudly displaying 131 Indep Cdo Sqn flag Eamon Smyth, John Phillips, Steve Wallis, Steve Brown & Kenneth Ratten

All in all, a small but dignified way to remember the young soldiers of 131 who lost their lives that day.



Jim Middlemass receives his LS&GC - taken several decades ago!



Roddy MacDonald introduces Gen Ian McKay to Bert Tate - a few years go!

# Fergie Semple Golf Competition - 2021

Mick Wallis

The annual golf competition for 2021 was organized by the Yorkshire Branch. It was played to a Stableford format over 18 holes on a great little course at the Heworth Golf Club. The club is located just a mile from the centre of York and offered great views of York Minster from the 7<sup>th</sup> hole.

12 members of the AEA turned out and were joined by 4 club members, which included the club captain. Totalling 16 players this broke down nicely into 4 times four-balls, with each four ball having a club member in their group to show them the way around the course and to point out the course hazards, of which there was numerous, as the AEA members were soon to discover.

After coffee and bacon rolls we headed for the 'First Tee' to carry out the usual ritual of barracking and slugging off as each player struck their first Tee shot (we know it's not golf etiquette, but we enjoy it). The competition suddenly became serious with players showing their 'game faces' as we hacked our way round the course.

The 'airborne' gods must have been looking down as the sun broke out and stayed with us until we finished the round some 4 hours later.

We then sat down for some well-deserved food (pie and mash) washed down with a couple of pints. With the final scores ratified the winners of the various challenges were announced:

Overall winner of the Fergie Semple Trophy for 2021

Runner up

Longest Drive

Nearest the Pin

Jimmy Hill (37 points)

Dean Ideson

Baz (the civvy) (240 yards)

Chris Duggan (possibly a bandit!)



Chris Duggan receives 'Nearest the Pin' award

Overall, we enjoyed wholesome food, great company, good course, ideal weather, lots of laughs and on occasions, some semi-decent golf. It doesn't get any better than that.

A big vote of thanks is extended to the Yorkshire Branch for a well organised event



Jimmy Hill's hand firmly grips the Fergie Semple trophy as he's awarded the AEA Championship Title 2021

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## In Times Gone By



Alfie Fisher with Bob Masson in the Troodos mountains during the Sqn's emergency tour 1964 - where we later became part of the UN Force but were never awarded the UN medal!



Peter Bates, Bob Ferguson & Tom Ormiston AGM 2004



# Minutes of an Airborne Engineers Association Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Held at Cedar Court Hotel, Harrogate on 16 October 2021

## 1. Opening.

**1.1. Opening address:** The Chairman welcomed all those attending and opened the meeting at 10:05 am

**1.2. Members Present:** There were thirty-four members present

## 1.3. Apologies:

Apologies were received from Lt Col (retd) Dick Brown and Billy Morris MSM

## 1.4. Exhortation for Absent Friends

The Chairman gave The Exhortation followed by a minute's silence for 'Absent Friends'

## 2. Minutes of the previous AGM and OGM.

The minutes of the previous National meetings, AGM held on Sat 17th October 2020 and OGM held on Saturday 17th April 2021, both by 'Zoom' have been previously circulated.

There being no comments from the floor the Chairman asked for a proposer and seconder that the minutes as recorded be accepted.

**Proposer: Baz Bassett Seconder: Ronnie Hadden**

**The minutes as read were accepted.**

## 3. Matters arising from the previous meetings

- \* **Dress** for Standard Bearers whilst representing the AEA at formal events.
- \* Honorary Membership. Branches should send a list of their honorary members to Dave Pace who will update the master database.
- \* Breach of AEA Rules procedure

## 3.2. Rededication of Scotty Wilson's Headstone

Following a refurbishment organised by Jim Queen, the rededication of Scotty Wilson's Headstone took place on the 31st of July. The event was organised by the Scotland Branch with support from 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment and the REA Airborne Branch. The event was attended by over sixty people and was timed to coincide with the Airborne Riders visiting Scotty's grave as part of the 'Ride of Respect'

Afterwards those attending were treated to evening entertainment at the Edinburgh taxi club hosted by the Scotland Branch.

Cpl Wilson was killed fighting alongside 3 Para on Mount Longdon.

## 3.3. National Presidents Commendation

The National Presidents commendation was presented to Maj (Retd) Paul Moore and Charlie McColgan at the Taxi Club in Edinburgh following the Airborne Riders visit to Scotty Wilson's grave.

The award was given in recognition of the efforts of Paul, Charlie, and other members of the Riders in visiting the graves or memorials to all British Servicemen killed in the Falklands conflict.

This year's ride of respect raised over £13,000 for the South Atlantic Medal Association

## 4. Treasurers Report.

On behalf of the treasurer Lt Col (Retd) Dick Brown, the Chairman gave an update on the current national financial position advising all present that these were subject to audit.

A copy of the accounts is appended to the minutes and will also be added to the AEA website.

The Chairman requested a proposer and seconder that the Treasurers Report, subject to annual audit, is accepted as presented.

**Proposer: Mick Leather Seconder: Charlie McColgan**

**Carried.**

## 5. Association Shop Report.

Dave Rutter presented the report on behalf of the Shop Manager, Jeanette Rutter.

Income from sales over the past 12 months totalled £1944.50. Sales profit will be established on completion of the Treasurer's Audited Accounts

The Chairmen reminded those present that the shop is a trading account and forms part of the Treasurer's report, and that the vote is to reflect how the shop is stocked, maintained, and run.

A request was made for a proposer and seconder that the shop report as read be accepted.

**Proposer: Brian Spivey Seconder: Tim Van Der Kraan**

**Carried**

The Chairman gave thanks to Jeannette and Dave.

## **6. Journal - Editor's Report.**

The report was presented by Dave Rutter who stated that the last 'Hardcopy' issue of the Journal would be the Dec 2021 issue.

There are still a number of Standing Orders to be cancelled. If these are not cancelled after the date of the last publication, the funds will be considered as a donation to the AEA and transferred to the General Purposes fund.

John Phillips proposed a vote of thanks for Dave on his efforts in producing the Journal over many years.

The Chairman thanked Dave on behalf of the association.

## **7. Membership Report.**

In the absence of Billy Morris, Dave Rutter presented the membership report.

The current running total of members who have joined the AEA since its conception in Nov 1989 stands at 1533. Those departed to the Sqn Bar - 401 giving a total membership of 1132

It was requested that members check their details in the database to make sure that these are up to date.

There were no comments from the floor.

The Chairman thanked Billy on behalf of the association.

## **8. Welfare Liaison Officer's Report.**

The Chairman stated that there had been no correspondence from Izzy Leather and that he was not aware of any cases requiring welfare support from the association.

Craig Gadd asked the meeting what level of support the AEA could provide to members.

The Chairman advised Craig that the association was not geared up to provide financial support but were able to provide advice and information on where to obtain assistance. It was pointed out that there were a number of SSAFA case workers who were members of the Association who can provide advice.

The Chairman asked Mick Leather to thank Izzy for her continued support.

## **9. Archivists/Historian Report.**

The Archivist report was presented by the National Chairman on behalf of Mr Nick Gibson.

The archives should be accessible soon. Nick Gibson has spoken with the director and anticipates meeting the museum archivist next week to make plans to start work on the archives.

Some work was started before the archives went into deep store but as yet the extent of this is unknown.

Baz Bassett advised the meeting that, under the guidance of the imperial war museum, Corps and Regimental museums are undertaking an exercise to digitise all their records and to make these available to everyone online but that this would be a lengthy process.

Fred Grey stated that he had found a box of material and asked what should be done with this. It was decided that the documents would be passed to Baz Bassett and, except for any AEA confidential materials, deposited with the Corps Museum

The Chairman reminded the association that the Archives were now the property of the Corps Museum.

The Chairman thanked Mr Gibson on behalf of the association.

## **10. AEA Sports Club Report.**

The report was presented by Dave Rutter on behalf of Billy Morris.

Due to Covid there has been little activity, although 'Taff' Adams continues with his Marathons.

The Fergie Semple golf tournament was won, once again, by the great white shark known as Jimmy Hill. Altogether sixteen golfers took part in the competition.

There were no comments from the floor.

The Chairman thanked Billy for his report.



## **11. Branch Reports.**

### **12. 1.299 Association**

The Chairman Chris Shillito presented the 299 Association report.

We had our first real meeting at the Minerva on the first Friday in August, we had a good turnout but still having to use masks etc.

First Friday in September we could not use the Minerva because of the Freedom Festival, so we fell back on the Ship Inn Dunswell were a friend of 299 is the landlord, He let us have the marquee for our well attended meeting just getting the lads back on track.

We held our AGM on the first Friday in October and nearly fifty of us turned up, we had a few long awaited presentations to make, Our Secretary Gaz Coe and webmaster Dave Hines received a silver Pegasus and one of the lads Mike Beardshaw, who does a lot for the Association received a bronze Paratrooper and our photographer Tony Foster received a 299 Association shield.

The committee was boosted by Craig Gadd who volunteered for the vacant vice Chairman's job. We are looking forward to Remembrance Sunday which is always a good day in Hull where we march to the Cenotaph to pay our respects and go back to the Minerva where a buffet is laid on for family and friends.

### **11.2. Aldershot Branch.**

Dave Rutter presented the Aldershot Branch report.

Due to the pandemic our last branch meeting/gathering was back in March 2020. However, with the easing of restrictions we were at last able to congregate at an organised BBQ held in the garden of Fred & Betty Gray on Sunday 29 August 2021.

Even with the easing of the Covid restrictions, we were still unable to resume our branch meetings at Potters International Hotel as due to staff shortages they were unable to provide the customary carvery lunch, which our members were able to enjoy following our meetings in a conference room within the hotel.

Following an e-mail consultation with our members in seeking suggestions for an alternative venue, Chris Davies put forward the idea of the Brewers Fayre located in Aldershot. Following a quick visit and consultation with the management we now have a venue that not only provides a Sunday lunch carvery but also a room in which to hold our meetings at zero cost.

Our first meeting since 'lockdown' began will be held on Sunday 24 October 2021.

### **11.3. Birmingham Branch.**

As with the other branches not a lot to report due to Covid restrictions, we managed to meet socially at different outdoor venues during the lockdown, and we have had a couple of curry nights since.

Our normal venue was lost due to the owners selling and we were forced to look for somewhere else to hold our first meeting and so first met at the onward club. We were then contacted by the new owners to say would we come back and agreed to go back in January. At the first meeting we laid on a buffet for the guys which was good.

We look forward to the next meeting which will be a social event and leave the business side until January, and a fresh start.

### **11.4. Chatham Branch.**

Lt Col (Retd) Baz Bassett presented the Chatham Branch report

Unfortunately, Covid has driven a horse and cart through our complete branch programmes restricting us to an extremely limited involvement as a complete branch. As with I am sure other branches, the only occasion was sadly at funerals, meeting in the car parks and outside foyers. There was some relaxation but there were some very occasions to bid farewells to a few of our old, bold, and dear friends.

The management committee made the effort to meet at my place under Covid rules of course and drank me out of tea and ate me out of bacon butties. These meetings were extremely useful and allowed us to review the branches events and plan for the future.

Unfortunately, as a branch Chatham's numbers are dwindling and with no sight of young blood or even dare, I say old blood it is a problem we always end up discussing. The younger generation have different priorities and commitments,

we should not get on their back about it is just the way it is in society today. All small organisations are suffering the same. Looking

at my family both Sons and daughters are working pretty well full time if it is not the children and the associated commitment to them and their interests it is the quality time, they wish to spend with them.

I must admit that even as a small branch we do have some great functions which are well supported by members and families alike. Post Covid we are now planning to reengage and get us back onto track with the Christmas lunch our first branch event, followed by our normal Valentines lunch and then the John Rock dinner in June.

Looking ahead we are considering moving our meetings to a different Day and Time or perhaps to a Sat or sun and link it in with a meal. Most meetings do not take up much time and perhaps the answer is to have a short meeting followed by a meal at the venue and hold possibly four of these a year as well as our 4 formal events. I am canvassing the members for their view prior to our AGM in April. I would like to just thank my committee for their extremely hard work over this awful period in staying connected with the members and widows and maintain the human touch with phone calls and email.

So, Mr President, Gentlemen, for me as the branch Chairman, yes, I am concerned but not too overtly and as I said we have a particularly good social life with good attendance at events, Covid permitting. But I do keep a weather eye on the future and wonder how we can deal with the inevitable lack of numbers in the future which will be the issue in some years' time. Lots of ideas and discussions on how we can make it work and I have no doubt that we will find a solution that satisfies us all.

#### **11.5. Scotland Branch**

The National Chairman presented a written report from the Scotland Branch

We at AEA Scotland are still surviving.

We commenced our meetings in July 2021 and continue to meet every 2 months alternatively. We have approx., thirty members on our books with five overseas included on average we have 17-20 members turn up at our meetings. However, at our last meeting we only had nine due to illness, carer duties and other duties. That was an exception to the rule.

Our members are scattered over Scotland from Uist, The Borders, Coldstream, Ayrshire, West Dumbartonshire, Central Scotland, Glasgow, and Edinburgh Area. Some members have a 7 hour return trip (dedication). We are fortunate not to have had any casualties due to Covid 19. Looking forward to our further continuance All the best from Scotland

#### **11.6. Wales and West Branch**

The Wales and West Branch report was presented by Mick Leather.

The Branch activities have been curtailed due to Covid. Wales is subject to different regulations to England which has prevented further meetings from taking place.

The Branch is saddened by the death of the secretary Gerry Bonner. Arthur Askey will fill the secretary's post.

The Branch plans to meet on 11<sup>th</sup> December

#### **11.7. Yorkshire Branch**

The Yorkshire Branch report was presented by Adam Frame.

Membership Numbers remain at 67 after losing Mike Pallet and Jack Braithwaite.

We still have no President to replace Mike Pallott despite several requests for volunteers. I intend to stand down as Chairman of the branch owing to my business success and much less time to dedicate myself to the branch business comprehensively. It really needs to be somebody with more time on their hands. To those ends, I will hang on until March 2022 before side stepping. I would be happy to move into the less demanding President's position in order to keep a hand on the tiller.

We are still sharing the standard bearer duties rather than having a dedicated volunteer since John Parker stood down. It is a sign of the times with older branch members. The discussion about young blood already having been mentioned in the meeting, was not brought up again!

We suspended all physical meeting activities during the Covid 19 lockdowns; hence our first meeting was Sep 21 with the next planned for November.

We have a Christmas function planned alongside 299 Para Sqn RE (V) at their Wakefield ARC. We communicate with 299 Sqn regularly via the PSAO Capt. John Thompson, ex 9 Son and York's branch member so our links and ties with 299 Sqn remain strong.

Future events, TBC include an annual dinner, Arnhem planning etc.

### **12. Election of Officers**

**12.2.** The National President, Lt Col (Retd) John Lee, announced that he would be standing down at the next AGM. The Chairman asked those attending to consider who could fill the post. It is intended to announce the new president at the OGM in April 2022. The National Chairman informed the meeting that he is up for re-election in 2022

**12.3.** The National Chairman informed the meeting that he is up for re-election in 2022 and would be happy to remain in post unless others stepped forward.

**12.4.** The National Treasurer Lt Col (Retd) Dick Brown is standing down as National Treasurer. Lt Col (Retd) 'Baz' Bassett has volunteered to take over the post. A hand over with an audit of the accounts will take place in the coming weeks.



**12.5.** The position of National Secretary remains vacant. Volunteers are required to fill this post.

**12.6.** The Chairman announced the creation of the post of '23 Parachute Engineer Regiment Liaison Officer'. Capt Marc Dorkings has kindly agreed to fill this post. Anyone requiring any information or support from the Regt must do so through Marc.

### **13. Propositions and Notices of Motion**

No propositions or notices of motion were received prior to the AGM.

There was one proposition at the AGM that Lt Col (Retd) Dick Brown be made a Life Vice President of the association in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the association over many years. This will be considered by the Executive Committee and a decision announced at the OGM in April 2022.

### **14. Remembrance Events and Services.**

The following major events will be/were attended by members of our Association this year:

#### **14.2.** Falkland Islands.

Falklands Memorial Service at Pangbourne Cancelled.

Falklands Memorial Service at Aldershot 12<sup>th</sup> June at Aldershot Military Cemetery.

#### **14.3.** Hardwick Hall, Sunday 9th May - Cancelled

#### **14.4.** Double Hills, Sunday 5th Sept.

#### **14.5.** Cromwell Lock

Sunday 26th Sept at Cromwell Lock

18<sup>th</sup> Sept at Zetland Park Grangemouth (Cancelled)

#### **14.6.** 1st Parachute Squadron Memorial at Donington. Sunday 26th Sept.

**14.7.** National Service of Remembrance at the Cenotaph 14th November - this year the association has thirty-six tickets, all of which have been allocated.

**14.8.** The first anniversary of the death of Col. Freddie Kemp, 9 Para Sqn RE and 4 Bn Para Regt reservist will be on 5th of November 2021 at 10.45 at Bayton Kidderminster DY14 9LG which coincides with unveiling and dedication of a new war memorial.

### **15. Any Other Business at National Level**

#### **15.1. AEA Constitution**

A copy of the constitution will be placed on the AEA website and will be controlled by the web master Dave Pace. Branches and individuals are free to download copies as they wish but the document becomes an uncontrolled copy when this is done.

Access is via 'Members Only' content; therefore, a username and password is required. Anyone who has forgotten/not been issued their password should contact Dave Pace directly for assistance. Please quote your AEA membership number in any contact

#### **15.2. Online Journal**

The National President gave a short presentation on the future of the Journal which will be going online after the December issue a copy of this is appended to the minutes.

Information regarding The Journal online was published in the June issue of the AEA Journal (page 39). Detailed instructions and guidance for the 'Online' Journal version will be repeated in the December 2021 issue of the Journal.

#### **15.3. Public Liability Insurance.**

Recent events connected with the memorial service at Cromwell Lock have highlighted the need for the association to have Public Liability Insurance to ensure that we are protected for events organised and run by the AEA.

The National committee will investigate the provision of this insurance, including cost, with the intention of procuring blanket cover for the AEA and the Branches.

#### **15.4. Cromwell Lock Memorial Garden**

The National Chairman informed the meeting that he had spoken with 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment with a view to getting the

memorial garden at Cromwell Lock refurbished. Although it would be difficult for the regiment to organise this formally, Marc Dorkings arranged with three volunteers from 299 Para Sqn to conduct the works subject to obtaining permission from the Canal and River Trust.

The Chairman asked those attending the meeting, in particular those representing 299 Association and the Birmingham Branch if they were agreeable to this work being carried out and received a favourable reply.

It is the Chairman's intention to call a separate 'Zoom' meeting with 299 Association, Birmingham Branch and Scotland Branch to discuss future care of the memorial.

### **15.5. Proceeds of the Raffle.**

The meeting agreed that the proceeds from the Raffle would be split evenly between BLESMA and the Blind Veterans Association.

### **15.6. AGM and GALA Ball.**

2022 Event will be hosted by the Birmingham Branch, dates, and location to be decided.

2023 Event will be hosted by the Wales and West Branch, Dates and Location to be provided.

Scotland Branch have been invited to host the 2024 AGM

299 Association have been invited to host the 2025 AGM

### **National President's Points**

#### **President's Commendations**

Due to Covid restricting association business, there are no Presidents commendations at this point.

### **National Chairman's Points**

The chairman reminded the meeting that he held the AEA subscription to 'Zoom' which enables the association to hold unlimited meetings for up to one hundred people. This is available to all branches to use. Any branch wanting to avail themselves of this service should contact the National Chairman.

### **Next Meeting National Meeting Date:**

The next National meeting will be the OGM to be held in April 2022 at a date and location to be confirmed.

### **Chairman's Closing Remarks:**

The Chairman thanked those members of the Association who attended and for participating in this Annual General meeting.

**The meeting was closed in good order at 1200 hrs.**

## **Statement of Accounts - As at 11 October 2021**

**R Brown - Treasurer**

### **ASSETS**

Cash in Hand	Nil
Cash at Bank	£7717.75
Deposit Account	£14832.35
Shop Stock	£2800.50
<b><u>TOTAL ASSETS</u></b>	<b>£25350.60</b>

### **LIABILITIES**

Newsletter	£2888.97
<b><u>TOTAL LIABILITIES</u></b>	<b>£2888.97</b>

### **WORKING CAPITAL**

Assets	£25350.60
Minus Liabilities	£2888.97
<b><u>TOTAL WORKING CAPITAL</u></b>	<b>£22461.63</b>

The above figures are subject to audit.

Points: On completion of the last addition of the Journal in December the money remaining will then be transferred to GPF.



## Membership Secretary Report

Steve (Billy) Morris MSM

### We welcome the following new members

Membership No.	Name	Units	Service Dates
1528	Mr Paul Hayhurst	9 Indep Para Sqn RE 9 Para Sqn RE	1973-1980 1982-1985
1529	Mr Tom Brown	9 Indep Para Sqn RE 59 Indep Cdo Sqn RE	1974-1978 1980-1983
1530	Mr Nigel Clark	9 Para Sqn RE	1981-1984
1531	Mr Martin R Gornell	299 Para Sqn RE	July 21-Present
1532	Mr Stan Swierzbinski	9 Indep Para Sqn RE	1973-1979
1533	Mr Geoffrey Powell	9 Indep Para Sqn RE	1958-1963

### "GENTLEMEN, WELCOME TO THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION"

### AEA Golf Tour 2022



This year's trip is to the Northeast to entice the Scottish Branch to join us. We will be doing 2 nights, 3 rounds on a DB&B basis from Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> May to Friday 13<sup>th</sup> May and includes 20% off your drinks!

Cost is £180 per head. All those interested please contact Mick Leather at: [REDACTED]

I will need a deposit of £50 to secure your place. It is open to your friends and family so bring them along for the craic!

*I look forward to seeing you all.*

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## Further Information on the "Mary Rose" Savage

### Giving Credit to Where Credit is Due - But Sadly Overlooked

The raising of the Mary Rose owed much to the skills of Royal Engineer divers but they had to solve plenty of problems in ...

### "GIVING A LIFT TO HISTORY"



THE MARY ROSE, Henry VIII's wooden flagship, is safely high and dry and is now on public display. But for "one awful moment", Lieutenant-Colonel Peter Chitty, CO of the Royal Engineers' Diving Establishment at Marchwood and one of the masterminds of the £4 million recovery project, thought he was going to be left with the "world's most expensive collection of Tudor firewood". The crunch came, literally, as the Mary Rose was being gently lifted from her watery grave. Her gunwales were already clear when - to the horror of everyone watching including millions on TV - a pin in one of the legs of the lifting frame sheared through to bring it crashing down on to the starboard stern castle.

Colonel Chitty, 53, whose two dozen sapper divers had been one of the mainstays of the recovery which involved a specially designed cradle, said: "For one awful moment I thought that my standard joke for the last two years had become a reality - the Tudor firewood".

Luckily, my military training took over and the next thought was to get my sappers cracking and put it right." And he did. Standing high up on the control deck of the huge floating crane, the Tog Mor, he was able to use the "Mark One eyeball" and the SSC TV's monitors to assure 29-year-old Captain Jon Brannam, the Royal Engineers' project officer checking in a combat support boat alongside the cradle, that no structural damage had been suffered by the Mary Rose. A further safety pin had taken the weight. The lift was still on!

It just had to be. After all, the sappers had been involved with the planning and execution of the Mary Rose recovery project since October 1980. Its approval as a 'military aid to the civil community' task meant that the resources of the Royal Engineers' Diving Establishment could be injected at all levels. They worked closely with civilian consultant engineers.

Lt-Col Chitty said of the enterprising and energetic Captain Brannam: "That officer is a brilliant engineer and a walking computer. He is highly regarded by all the professional engineers associated with the task and by the Mary Rose Trust."

But the project had not been all plain sailing or, rather diving, for the sappers. The recovery had already been plagued by technical and other problems despite the additional help of sapper divers from regimental diving teams in the UK and BAOR, and it suffered another knock earlier that year.

In March digging had begun in earnest to start freeing the hull from the resistant sediments and clay which had virtually cocooned the ship for 437 years.

The blow came when 53 of the sapper divers found themselves back with their units, 8000 miles away - in the Falklands! "Replacements were found, however, from engineer units in BAOR", said Lt-Col Chitty "and, with the agreement of the Major General Gus Sinclair, Engineer-in-Chief, the Diving Establishment's training programme went into suspended animation to allow the diving instructors and the course support divers to concentrate on the recovery."

Newly arrived diver, WO I Barry Makemson, the Senior Military Instructor, recalled "We were digging out divers from underneath flat stones!"

The race against time was well and truly on. They had to remove the last of the artefacts before the underwater lifting frame arrived on site, a frame launched by the sappers from the US Army base at Hythe and fitted with its legs at Marchwood Military Port.

Lt Col Chilly explained: "Threatened by the possibility of having to carry out the tricky underwater transfer and docking in the equinox gales, the programme was speeded up as much as possible, but it was not until the end of September that the cradle for the Mary Rose was finally completed at Marchwood and towed to site. Even then, gales forced it to run for shelter at Portsmouth harbour where she remained stormbound for several days. But, at last, she was placed on the seabed by the Royal Engineers and the final stage was reached."

Television screens told of the mishap on October 9 when, during the ship's underwater transfer in mounting tidal conditions, one of the lifting frame's supporting legs became badly bent and the transfer had to be aborted late in the evening. But fate had not finished with the project just yet.

A phone call placed to the Bracknell Met Office revealed that Force Five to Seven gales were forecast. Added to this hazard were the crippled frame and a cradle.

Lt Col Chitty takes up the story: "At 0800 hours on Sunday Prince Charles, who had personally involved himself in the events of the previous evening, called an O-Group on board the Mary Rose Trust's recovery vessel. It was the highest powered 'O Group' that I have ever attended. Besides the Prince there was ex-King Constantine and Lord Romsey. I had explained the problem and the possible engineering solutions. The Prince took the initiative and asked if we could get her up. I said we could if we treated the operation on a wartime basis...

The Prince replied: "Well, it is war. Get her up by tomorrow!"

Lt Col Chitty added: "Once a Prince says that, well, you just do it. He is, after all, our Commander-In-Chief designate."

While this was going on, the sappers had cut off the offending bent leg underwater using oxygen-cutting equipment and carried out other repairs and final preparations during the day. At 0400 hours on Monday 11 October the sapper;- they had worked through their second consecutive night and Preparing the lifting cradle - sapper divers working at Marchwood earlier this year... day - managed to secure the last main lifting strop to the cradle. Pumps were placed into the hull and just after 0900 hours the Mary Rose broke the surface for the first time in over four centuries.

The lift over, despite two anxious nail biting hours watched by the world on TV, the beer was broken open and a toast to the Mary Rose given by Brigadier Graham Fawcus, the Royal School of Mechanical Engineering Commandant.

But the supreme accolade of the whole adventure was contained in a signal received from the Mary Rose Trust. It read: "To Chitty. Please convey to Captain Brannam and his team congratulations on a job well done to the highest traditions of your Corps and of the British Army. Without your help and enterprise the Mary Rose would not have come home to Portsmouth. Many thanks from all on the Mary Rose Trust."

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# The Rhine Crossing, Rees, 23rd March, 1945

by Col. F. C. Nottingham, DSO, OBE.

The photographs show the bridges, and the sites of the ferries, which were built by the Royal Engineers under command 13 (Brit.) A.G.R.E. during the assault crossing of the R. Rhine on the front of 30th Corps on and after 2100 hrs. 23rd March 1945.



Photograph No. 1 shows a general view of the crossing site, and was taken opposite Rees, facing downstream. Rees itself is just out of the picture on the right bank of the river. The first bridge, in the foreground, is London Bridge, built by 8th GHQ. Tps, R.E. and behind it is Westminster Bridge which was constructed by 6th Army Tps., R.E. Just downstream are the sites originally chosen for the Poplar system of close support ferries, and rafts can be seen moored close to the bank.

Owing to the difficulty of clearing Rees, which town allowed the enemy good observation of our side of the river, it was necessary during the operation to order 59th GHQ. Tps., who were suffering undue casualties to personnel and equipment, to alter the sites for these ferries, and they were eventually built round the bend, near the sunken barge which can be seen in the photograph, jutting out from the left bank. The class 50/60 ferry, Gravesend, did however, manage to function at this site, although not without being damaged. It was built and operated by 5th Assault Regt., R.E. The third bridge is Lambeth Bridge, constructed by 30th Corps. Tps. R.E. and immediately behind it is Blackfriars, built by 2nd Cdn. Corps Tps., RCE. Just below Blackfriars Bridge is the site of the stormboat ferries which 6th Army Tps. operated with great success and very little trouble until the completion of the bridges made them redundant.

Of the other bridges, all except Lambeth were class 40 Bailey Pontoon. Lambeth, which was the first Bailey bridge to be erected during the crossing, was made class 15 in order to enable medium arty, (class 15 loads) to use it, rather than to ferry them over piece-meal in the Close Support ferries. This decision saved a great deal of time and enabled the guns to get over and free the bridge building area from artillery fire, which undoubtedly speeded up the construction of the remaining bridges.

The plan also included the provision of a Class 9 FBE. Bridge, Waterloo. This task was allotted to 18th GHQ. Tps. The site for this bridge was originally chosen between London and Westminster bridges, and it was to be built at the same time as Lambeth. As it was impossible to make a start on this owing to the opposition in Rees, it was eventually decided to build this bridge round the bend, downstream. In spite of the delay, it was the first bridge to be completed and can be seen, in the photograph, as a very faint line across the river just behind the sunken barge on the left bank. Traffic can be seen using the bridge. Another 50/60 class ferry, Tilbury, also operated at this point.



Photograph No. 2 was taken from the enemy (right) bank and shows Lambeth (left) and Blackfriars (right), and also the approach road which led from the home bund down to Lambeth and then upstream along the riverbank to the ferry sites. This road was called Caledonian Road and was built in Channel Track by 50th GHQ. Tps. Work was started before the assaulting troops of 51st Division actually crossed and was finished during the night 23rd/24th March. The building of this road, which was the first job which had to be done, and which was an essential to the success of the operation, caused nearly one-third of the total casualties suffered by the engineers, but it was pushed through with great determination and gallantry.

As work was impeded to a large extent at times by enemy small arms and artillery fire, the details may serve as a guide as to what can be expected, or planned for, in this sort of operation. The allotment of R.E. to the A.G.R.E. was one Assault Regt., seven Corps, Army or GHQ. Tps. one Bridge Coy, RASC and five Pioneer Companies. In addition during the early stages, the A.G.R.E. Commander had the 3rd Div., R.E. in support, on whom he could call for work on the home bank. The R.E. Coys, of the assaulting 51st Div. were retained by that Division under their own command for work in the bridgehead on the far bank.

The total number of personnel directly under command of 13 (Brit.) A.G.R.E. was about 9,500, of whom some 8,000 were engineers. The number of vehicles available for carrying bridge stores was 500, and the calculated number of loads 1,500. The turn round was 16-20 miles.

The total casualties were 155 officers and men killed and wounded.

For their share in this successful operation, eight awards were gained by the Corps, and their work was described by the Commander 30th Corps in a personal message as **"a good job magnificently done."**





# Operation PITTING Kabul - August 2021

## Major Rob Sharrock - OC 9 Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers

Operation PITTING was the UK non-combatant evacuation operation to extract the British Embassy Kabul staff, British citizens and those Afghans eligible under the Afghanistan Relocation and Assistance Programme (ARAP) from Kabul to a place of safety.

While Operation PITTING had been in the planning for many months, the deliberate nature of the plan had to evolve dynamically at this security situation rapidly changed from that which was originally anticipated. As a consequence the military courses of action for the evacuation were intimately linked to the US's own plans with a hard stop set as the 31 August 21. As the security situation continued to deteriorate throughout August 21, it became clear we were rapidly approaching a decision point to evacuate everyone in time. On 11 Aug 21, the activation order came and 23 Para Engr Regt's advance party consisting of Sgt Ross Smith from 9 Para Sqn RE deployed to Kabul with the forward elements of 2 PARA Battlegroup.

The remainder of the Sqn and wider Joint Force Engineer Group (members from 23 Para Engr Regt, 33 EOD&S Engr Regt and 1<sup>st</sup> Military Working Dogs Regiment) were hot on the activation party's heels; OC 9 Para Sqn deployed as the Engineer commander and OC 12 Para HQ & Sp Sqn deploying as the Liaison Officer to the US 82<sup>nd</sup> AB Div; an instrumental role throughout the deployment. Before the mission evolved, the original engineer force package for Op PITTING consisted of an OC, BGE, Recce Sgt, a composite troop, an EOD&S task line, with 5 Military Working Dog (MWD) Teams and a Veterinary Officer in support. The appetite for military mass was small, so we had to create the most efficient TASKORG possible whilst providing the broadest engineer capability. As the requirement for mass increased from a Battlegroup to a Brigade (minus), the Joint Force Engineer Group grew to include the CO, Regimental 2IC, the Squadron Sergeant Major, an SQMS, an additional troop (-) plus an uplift in MWD Teams. This totalled 68 Engineers, RLC, AGC (SPS) and RAVC in theatre under the Joint Force Engineer Group.

The pace of operation was intense from the moment we landed in theatre. The engineer advance party prioritised designing a defence plan for the UK assigned areas within Hamid Karzi International Airport (HKIA) and trying to acquire plant, equipment and resources from the abandoned compounds. Working to intent and knowing where to take pragmatic risk without being reckless were vital attributes to the deployment.

In true Airborne Sapper style, it wasn't long before the troop had gathered together a plant and MT fleet that would rival any ALC compound, with the pride of the fleet being a yellow JCB 3CX which became a battle winning asset throughout the deployment.



The initial priority for the troop were defensive positions around HKIA, however once 2 PARA occupied the Baron Hotel to establish the Evacuation Handling Centre (EHC), it quickly became apparent this was greater than a one company mission. Working closely with both the RAF Police and 2 PARA, the MWD Arms Explosive Search (AES) Teams were charged with searching the incoming Entitled Persons (EPs) and other Afghans under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAPs) into EHC to enhance security. They provided a level of assurance to aid with the rapid progression of processing EPs

and ARAPs at the Baron Hotel and within HKIA itself before getting on flights. AES teams were also employed alongside EOD&S in the immediate aftermath of the SV-IED to search for secondary devices to ensure the safety of the troops working in the area.

The rapid fall of Kabul to the Taliban meant there was no Afghan National Defence and Security Forces available to provide security. This led to a frenetic 72 hours where 2 PARA Battlegroup tried to own the ground around the Baron Hotel and Abbey Gate (our single route into the airport), support the security of the airfield as the US built up its combat power and control the crowds that were increasing in size and desperation every day. The Patrol (PTL) MWD Teams provided protection and visual deterrence in challenging and often emotive circumstances, helping to control crowds and provide security. The dogs provided a further level of escalation and were highly effective in the chaotic situations that the handlers often found themselves in. The PTL teams were involved in all aspects of the operation, from the EHCs to the processing facilities and the airstrip on occasions where it got overrun.

The engineer contribution throughout this phase was vital to the success of the battlegroup and brigade. Under significant time pressure and with no allocated resources, 9 Para Sqn RE had to establish a hasty block on Route Leeds in front of the Baron Hotel to help control the crowds and give 2 PARA some relief from the thousands of people wanting to be extracted to a place of safety. As the crowds grew, it became apparent that a more permanent block was required and a combined UK and US Brigade operation was launched to clear the crowds back from the Abbey Gate, remove the existing block and establish an ISO container obstacle known as 'The Chevron'. The operation consisted of five Platoons of US Marine Corps, two Companies from 2 and 3 PARA, the UK Engineer Troop and a section of US Marine Corps Engineers along with their Rough Terrain Container Handler (RTCH) to move the six ISO containers required to establish the obstacle designed by the Sqn's Battlegroup Engineer, Capt Perry Jolley.



Once 16 Air Assault Brigade had established the Chevron and had reinforced the Baron Hotel with 2 PARA BG complete and two additional companies from 3 PARA (a total of five Inf Coys), a period of relative stability followed, which allowed UK military and members of the Foreign Officer Rapid Deployment Team and Border Force personnel to focus on the main effort - the evacuation of British citizens and eligible Afghans under the ARAP scheme.



The engineer tasks continued thick and fast, consisting of force protection and deliberate obstacles to control the mass of crowds, survivability tasks to maintain the generators in HKIA and to provide shade and shelter to the crowds from the extreme conditions, establishment of a secondary Evacuation Handling Facility at the HART Compound within HKIA and lastly the nonexplosive denial of the fleet of British Embassy Civilian Armoured Vehicles which we couldn't fly back to the UK.

All the soldiers deployed as part of the Joint Force Engineer Group were outstanding throughout the operation.

They demonstrated an infectious optimism and offensive eagerness to deliver engineer effect with minimal resources, no organic plant and under difficult humanitarian conditions; additionally, as well as having tactical effect, the MWDs also provided much needed morale for soldiers, a wagging tail often enough to lift the mood in difficult situations.

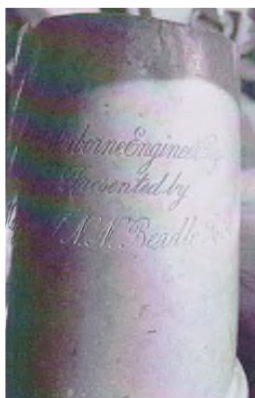
Those who deployed saw the very best and worst of humanity, but throughout the operation they maintained an outstanding level of humility and compassion to process and deal with a very complex situation. In many cases, their tactical actions and decisions had strategic effect, allowing the UK to keep open the Evacuation Handling Centre and continue to evacuate thousands of British Citizens, EPs and ARAPs to a place of safety.

They should all be very proud of their efforts during Op PITTING and their contribution to the UK's history in Afghanistan.



## Presentation Tankards

Roger Howles



A few moons ago, when the now 'Green Berets' of 131 Regt (TA) took over from the 'Maroon Machine' in Kingsbury London, we discovered several pewter presentation tankards that had been thrown in the bin. I thought someone may have knowledge of the recipients or family members who may wish to be reunited with these items. They have been in my procession and I would be delighted to pass these on to the rightful owners. You can contact me on WhatsApp [REDACTED] or email: [REDACTED]

The inscription of the left tankard reads:

**131 Airborne Engineers Regt, Presented by Major JNN Beadle R.E.T.A.**

The other tankard with a rather unique handle reads:

**Capt. T.B.Gillett 131 Indep. Para. Sqn. R.E.(V) 1967**

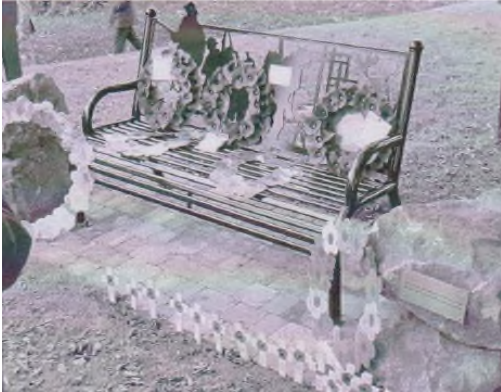


Some of the Brummies have a couple more! Just a thought we should **"Never forget where we've been as we don't**

# Colonel Freddie Kemp OBE

John Lee

At the village of Bayton, near Kidderminster in Worcestershire a short service was held on the 5<sup>th</sup> November to dedicate a new war memorial which was an inspiration of the late Col Freddie Kemp who resided in the village. The ceremony was attended by a good number of local residents, school children and also Harriet Baldwin, the local MP and the service was conducted by the local lady vicar. The AEA Standard was borne by Mick Leather and the AEA President was also able to attend amongst other representatives.



The memorial is rather unusual as it is in the form of a bench with silhouettes of soldiers forming the backrest and is guarded on both sides by two more silhouetted soldiers mourning on their arms reversed.

The opportunity to visit Col Freddie's grave in the nearby churchyard was also taken by many attendees as it has only recently received a headstone in the familiar WGC style.

All in all, a short, dignified event to dedicate a war memorial in the open which was the long held wish of Col Freddie.



**Al Kirkland, Ray (Henry) Cooper, Gus Hayles, Mick Leather, Paul Summers (Falklands Islander who joined 2 Para) & John Lee**

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## Acts of Remembrance & Gratitude



**Mary & Dick Brown at the  
Aldershot shopping centre**

**Paul Nash & Mick Underhill  
at the Bath Rugby Ground**



**The 299 Association Chairman  
Chris Shillito presenting 299's  
webmaster with a well - deserved  
silver Pegasus for his outstanding  
contribution to the Association**



**Laying a wreath at the final resting  
place of:**

**Lt Col John Rock RE**

**At Tidworth military cemetery  
11/11/21**

**By Tony Manley &  
Dave Rutter**

# Remembrance

Steve Wallis

After the disappointment of the Remembrance events being cancelled, or at least scaled down last year, 2021 saw a return to the full cycle of events.

For Mel and me this year's commemoration turned into a long weekend as we attended, firstly, the Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall on Saturday evening, followed by the parade at the Cenotaph on the Sunday morning. For both of us this was our first Festival of Remembrance having watched it many times on the television, it did not disappoint. The Royal Albert Hall is a magnificent building and a fitting venue for such a poignant event, but we were unprepared for how emotional the evening is. I will admit that my eyes got misty on several occasions. Several other AEA members attended including John and Sandy Ferry and Tim Van Der Kraan with Edwina.



On Sunday Morning the AEA contingent arrived early of Horse Guards Parade to be stunned by the news that Her Majesty the Queen would not be attending. We all feared the worst but was relieved that the problem appeared to be no more than a back strain. We wish Her Majesty a speedy recovery.

It was great to see Whitehall once again crowded with Veterans and to experience the usual banter and mutual respect between the various marching contingents. It was made all the more amusing as we formed up right next to where Paul Moore's wife, Lesley, had positioned herself to watch the march past.

The parade is always over far too quickly, and this year was a reminder to all those AEA members that you only need to be in step twice - as you march past the Cenotaph, and as you give the 'Eyes Right' at the saluting Dias prior to returning to Horse Guards.

Following the dispersal, the AEA members joined contingents from the rest of the Corps at the 'Sherlock' for some well-earned refreshment. This is always welcome and is an opportunity for some nice 'Happy Snaps' on the steps.



John Ferry and I, along with our wives, decided to revisit the Cenotaph later in the afternoon to look at all of the tributes left by the different Military associations. By this time, the memorial is cordoned off and guarded by the Police, however we were privileged to be allowed inside the cordon to get a photograph with the Royal tributes. This was an awesome moment tinged with immense pride and made better by the fact that I was accompanied by one of my oldest friends.



We completed the day by visiting the garden of remembrance at Westminster Abbey

This year I had managed to obtain 36 Tickets from the Royal British Legion, all of which were snapped up. Unfortunately, on the day only 29 AEA members were able to march, this was still our largest ever marching contingent.

The weekend was over all too quickly, and we start to prepare for next year's event. From a personal point of view, I found the weekend emotional and humbling, but most of all I felt immense pride at being a member of an awesome group of men representing the AEA at this most poignant of events.





The AEA Gathering on Horse Guards Parade immediately after the 'March Past' - followed by a quick exit down to the Sherlock Holmes for a few warmers into the bank!



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## Obituaries

### Late notifications:

**Arthur Cheesman** passed away 6 November 2021 aged 91 years

**Jack Wynne** passed away early November 2021 aged 91 years



### **Jack Braithwaite 9 March 1935 - 21 June 2021**

Jack was a man's man - if you can say that now! He was intelligent, quick witted but also a very private man. He joined the Army in January 1954 leaving after 22 years' service in June 1976 retiring as a WOIL. During his service he spent 14 years with airborne forces travelling to many parts of the world.

He had 2 great passions in his life - the Army, specifically 9 Indep Para Sqn RE, and Amateur Radio. Jack obtained his Amateur Radio Licence in the 1950s and was still active up to his death. In 1964 he qualified as a Parachute Jumping Instructor.

He was one of the elite 600 parachutists who dropped into El Gamil on **OPERATION MUSKETEER** on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1956 to help secure the Suez Canal. The 3 Troop personnel held a commemoration

dinner every 10 years, but as their numbers decreased this was later reduced to every 5 years. Jack assisted with the organisation of the final dinner at Aldershot in 2016.

Jack met and married his first wife Gaye in Aldershot where their daughter Wendy was later born. They were posted to 131 Para Engr Regt TA where he served as a SNCO Instructor with 300 Troop in Glasgow. Sadly Gaye lost her life to cancer in May 1966.

Posted to Gibraltar as a Quartermaster Sergeant he much enjoyed his time diving, fishing, cox in an Army whaling boat, amateur dramatics, and caving. Amateur Radio played a huge role in his life in Gibraltar under the call sign ZB2BC. It was in Gibraltar that he met Sally and they were married at Kings Chapel, Gibraltar on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1968. Sally was a WREN and had just completed 2 years' service on the Rock. She then returned to spend a further 2 years, finally both leaving the Rock in 1970.

His later posting to Tidworth, provided a settled period for the family before moving to Nienburg in 1972, as an SSM. The lads in the barrack block pinned up a list of the "Ten Commandments" relating to what Jack expected from them. On his departure from Germany they shaved off half his moustache, and his SSM's stick was sawn in half!

His final posting was to 39 Engineer Regiment at Waterbeach, Cambridge.

He was a member of many amateur radio groups using his call sign G3PWK and had regular meetings with them on the air and on ZOOM. His knowledge of amateur radio was immense, which he was more than happy to pass on to others. He loved being a member of the Otley Radio Club and much enjoyed their Club meetings and outings in the field.

The family have received many tributes about Jack since his death, which they are deeply grateful for. He was called a true ham and a real gentleman.





**14499880 George Henry Albert Jones - DOB 7/6/1931 - 11/10/2021**

George led a very variable life from a very young age.

His father, served in the Corps of Royal Engineers and as a SSgt was posted in 1937 to Hong Kong, with the family following later.

Taken prisoner by the Japanese in 1941, George and his brother and mother were evacuated to the Philippines. When the Japanese invaded the Philippines the family were moved on to Sydney Australia, where George did his schooling from age 10-15 years. His dad was later released from captivity and he took the family back to Britain.

Opting for a military career, George enlisted and for 3 years attended the Apprentice College at Arborfield, where he trained as a Vehicle Mechanic.

Moving on to man service George transferred from RAOC to the RE's where he later volunteered for the airborne unit 9 Para Sqn then based in Aldershot and served with them for 10 years.

His first posting after joining the Squadron was to the Canal Zone where almost eighty thousand men of the British Army were stationed guarding the Suez Canal and other assets of Great Britain. It was during this period of 3 years in the Canal Zone that he met Irene, and they later married in 1954 back in Aldershot where they spent a further 5 years with 9 Sqn.

George had quickly settled into the normal activities of the squadron, i.e. fitness training, sporting activities, infantry tactics, shooting (and a little bit of hard drinking)! Promoted to Sgt, it was in those days like waiting for 'dead man shoes' for further steps up the ladder, so time to move on. Further postings included 3 years in Germany, 3 years as a permanent staff instructor at the Junior Leaders Regt in Dover, 2 years in Cyprus then to Chattenden, Kent as a QMSI, on to Singapore for 18 months as CSM followed by his final posting of 12 months as a QMSI at the Field Engineer Wing at Chattenden.

Once demobbed George and Irene headed south to Perth, Australia, where they lived together for the past 50 years. He once stated that he never regretted any periods of his 'life'.

George also, worked for about 23 years as a 'Proofreader' on the newspaper, "The West Australian". George always early 90 people attended his final farewell, missed army life, but did belong to "Pegasus" our Airborne club. He was given a great military send-off, with ex-airborne (British) carrying his coffin, - a piper, and standard bearer were in attendance and a bugler for played the Last Post. Nearly 90 people attended his final farewell.



**Stan Pepper 18th Aug 1920 - 31st Mar 2021**

John Lee, President, AEA

Stan was born in Fulham to a large family and at a young age considered joining the army, getting food, lodgings and a uniform as well. He married Joyce and was called up for military service on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1939. He initially served in 1 Recce Regt RAC and saw service in North Africa, Palestine and Jordan.

On return to the UK he transferred to the Parachute Regiment, qualifying as a parachutist in 1943 and I understand that he was injured on exercise prior to the D Day landings and thus missed the operation. During his time in the army he contracted TB and was put on permanent release leave in 1946 with formal discharge in 1951 with service to the colours of nearly 7 years.

Stan later joined 131 Parachute Engineer Regiment (TA) as a medic and served in Aden and other areas during annual camp. He was promoted to sergeant during his time with 131 and was responsible for medical and first aid training. In 1975 Stan left 131 and joined the Army Cadet Force in which he was commissioned in April 1976.

Over the years, Stan had a varied life including work as chauffeur, bus driver, TV repair man, audiologist and latterly as a rent officer in Brent Council and the GLC. He was a very well-versed gentleman, knowledgeable in a wide range of subjects and was a very interesting companion.

After his beloved wife Joyce died Stan was admitted to the Royal Hospital, Chelsea where he lived for 21 years until his death in March 2021. He was a well-known character and fully involved himself in the many activities of the hospital. When the Margaret Thatcher Infirmary was being built, Stan volunteered to be the 'official photographer' resulting in him being hoisted in various items of equipment to enable high level pictures of the work to be made.

He was also involved for many years in attempting to persuade the MoD that some 131 personnel were eligible for the GSM as they had been on active service in Aden. However, despite all his efforts the Mod maintained that 131 were not 'officially' there, despite several members being injured and SSM Lonergan killed and buried there. Luckily this matter has now been resolved so let's hope Stan's work was not all in vain.

Always interesting to meet and talk to till the end, this intelligent, entertaining gentleman, although losing a lung to TB and told he would always be an invalid, made his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, and it is true to say Stan always found a way round life's hardships.



### **Anthony (Tony) Gilbert**

Having suffered a long illness of Dementia and lung cancer, Tony passed peacefully away at a nursing home on Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021.

He was a much loved husband to Brenda and father to Samantha, Kathryn and stepdad to Vickie. Tony joined 131 Parachute Regiment T.A. in 1960 aged just 17 years, this was just a year after his father retired from same Regiment as the Officer Commanding 302 Indep Fd Park Sqn 131 Para Engr Regt, at Rookery Way, Hendon

Having served for 7 years with 131 Indep Para Sqn (TA) who were based in London at Honey Pot Lane, Kingsbury, Tony handed in his uniform 1968.

For several years Tony attended the Ypres commemoration ceremony and was observed by John Lee back in the '90s pushing his father in a wheelchair. The following year John was able to stop and chat with them both. His father was very well known in Ypres as he attended remembrance ceremonies there for many years.

Tony's funeral service was held at West Berkshire Crematorium at 2.00 pm on Monday 29th November and thereafter at the British Legion Tilehurst Village. The request was for family flowers only.

Donations may be made to Airborne Engineers Association or the Parachute Regiment charity via Co-Op Funeral parlour Tilehurst Village Tel: 0118 9433922



### **24251465 Corporal Andrew Cooper 14/11/55 —14/8/21**

Alec Beer

The suitcase appeared first, with A. Cooper stencilled on its lid. A batch of new members had arrived and amongst them was Andy Cooper. This was Hong Kong 1974 and the Squadron was on a six month tour. Andy quickly made his mark as a steadfast addition to 1 Troop. His detached air hid an active and determined character who could always be depended upon. Nothing, it seemed, fazed him.

Andrew Cooper was born in Dumbarton on the fourteenth of November 1955 one of five children of a very close knit family. The family moved to Newton Aycliffe in County Durham for work purposes when Andy was ten years old and he always retained his Scottish accent. In January 1971 he left home for the JLR. R.E. at Dover and three years later joined the

Squadron. After a good few years in 9, he left for various postings in Germany and finished up working on and sailing the yachts of the Army Sailing Club in Kiel.

In 1987 Andy left the Army with the rank of corporal and returned to Newton Aycliffe where he worked in local factories. This never really fulfilled him, but as was Andy's way he stuck it. Then in 1993 his life changed for the better when he met Maggie and they married in '95. They enjoyed foreign holidays and later camping trips all over the UK It was a very happy marriage.

In 1993 I was sitting with a pint in a pub in Fort Augustus when glancing to the other end of the room I saw, sitting at the bar, Andy - but I couldn't be sure. It was nearly twenty years since we'd last met. Sidling up for a refill I said, "Are you Andy Cooper?" Instant recognition "Froth! You old so and so", or words to that effect. I was looking for crew to get to the other end of the Caledonian Canal: Andy with his sailing experience would have been perfect. Unfortunately Andy, who was on a walking holiday, had to return home for work a couple of days later. Had he come with me we might have carried on to the Canaries and then the Caribbean and I wouldn't have met Lindsey and Andy wouldn't have met Maggie. Anyway Andy and I had a glorious but hazy weekend and I cherish the memory.

Sadly Andy was diagnosed with cancer in 2019 and lost the battle on the fourteenth of August 2021, with his wife Maggie and brother Tommy by his side at the end. He was taken from us too soon and will be much missed. Rest in Peace, Andy, from your brothers in 9 Squadron



### **Alex (Biddy) McMillan**

One of life's real characters, Alex, more commonly known to colleagues and friends, as Biddy, passed away 6 October 2021.

His service with 9 Indep Para Sqn began in 1961 when he joined an infamous band of 3 Troop warriors. With an infectious laugh, which was more of a cross between a chuckle and a giggle and his wicked sense of humour and wit meant he was quickly accepted within the ranks of 3 Troop and the Sqn in general.

As a true 'Highlander' he was soon to introduce the Sqn personnel with his passion of the bagpipes. Perhaps at times not always appreciated within the Sqn lines in Crookham as he piped his was up and down, but he would explain that "Practice makes perfect"!

Those who served on construction tours, especially in Kenya will fondly recall that the night guard had no need to raise reveille each morning, as Biddy would have beaten them to it marching up and down 'piping' some of his favourite tunes, usually long before official reveille. This practice in particular occurred during the second construction tour in Kenya in 1968 which raised great interest for the neighbouring Masai tribesmen, who would stand in awe of this 'strange' sound.

Biddy left military service in 1969 and took up contract employment in Zambia and Rhodesia (as it was known then) before applying in 1984 for similar employment in the Falkland Islands.

His 14 month contract was finally approved in 1985 and he packed his bags which included two vital items - his bag pipes and walking boots.

In later life he and wife Pat spent several holidays abroad usually to Crete, where he would entertain the locals and fellow tourist with his piping sessions.

A truly great character who will be sadly missed by all those who had the pleasure of his company.



### **John Elliott**

Sir Donald Spiers



I first met John in 1953 when we were both serving as Parachute Engineers as members of 9 Airborne Squadron Royal Engineers in the Suez Canal Zone of Egypt. The Squadron was a part of 16 Parachute Brigade, one of the major Army units in the Canal Zone at that time. John was a Section Commander in 1 Troop of the Squadron.

Our base was at Moascar garrison near the city of Ismailia, about halfway down the Canal. The internal security situation was very bad, with a great deal of civil disobedience in Ismailia, so that guarding against incursions of our garrison was a continuing problem. The unit was classed as being on Active Service and John qualified for the General Service Medal with a clasp reading "Canal Zone".

John was very much involved with our Engineer training and led his section in building Bailey Bridges and vehicle carrying rafts. We also carried out many demolitions using plastic

explosives.

There was regular parachute continuation training, usually jumping from Valetta aircraft based at RAF Ismailia, but sometimes from the larger Hastings aircraft, which were based at RAF Fayid, further south along the canal. John and his section also took part in exercises in which they parachuted into Cyprus and Iraq. There were no reserve parachutes in those days, but fortunately the main parachute was very reliable!

In July 1954 the Squadron returned from the Canal Zone to Aldershot and soon after that John left 9 Squadron.

Over the last 25 years there have been a number of reunion lunches arranged for those of us who served in 9 Squadron in the Canal Zone and John had a 100% attendance record. One notable occasion was the 100th birthday of General Ian Lyall-Grant who had been John's Squadron Commander in both Cyprus and the Canal Zone. At these events everyone was always pleased to see John and to talk with him about old times serving together.

There is a nice intellectual game that I like to play which involves choosing just one word to describe a person. For John my word would be "Steadfast", which the Oxford English Dictionary tells me means Constant, Firm and Unwavering. That was John, a great soldier and companion who I for one will never forget.



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

## Remembering Those From Our Past



**Aldershot Branch Photograph 2011**

Those marked with \* and others from the branch have sadly passed to the final RV At the going down of the sun and in the morning, "We Will Remember Them"

**Tony Gilbert\*, Gerry Hicks\*, John Piffner, John Mason\*, Billy Morris, John Lee, Peter Myatt\*, John Smith\*,  
Bob Sullivan, Dick Brown, Tony Manley, Jimmy Hill, Dave Rutter, Wally Clift  
Brian Hubbard\*, Ralph Pedder\*, Phil Eccleston\*, Fred Gray, Col Dennis Eagan\*, Bob Wardle, Joe Stoddard\* &  
John Ferry**



**9 Indep Para Sqdn RE - Park Troop 1963**

**Sprs Sheldon, Crane, Cpl Matterface, Spr Mulligan, LCpl Woodman, Sprs, Kerry, Fisher, McBain,  
Sprs Cook, Morris, Whotton, Cpl Codling, Sprs Benson, Benny, Stabler, McCargo & Spr Welland  
Spr Smith, LCpls Runacres, Taylor, Senior, Sprs Elmer, McMillan, LCpls Guest, Cooper, Cpl Wales, LCpl Storey  
Sprs Young, Harrison, Cpl Slane, Sgt Mogg, SSgt Smith, Lt Docherty, Sgt Edmonds, Cpl Kitcher, Cpl Middlemass,  
Cpl De-Ste-Croix & Spr Whiteway**



## Association Merchandise

Shop Manager - Mrs Jeannette Rutter

	Price (£)	P&P (£)
<b>Ties</b>		
Association Ties (Pegasus Logo)	18.00	1.50
Anniversary Ties (Wings & Pegasus Logo)	18.00	1.50
9 Para Sqn Ties (Wings Logo)	18.00	1.50
Bow Ties (Wings & Pegasus Logo)	12.00	1.50
<b>Badges</b>		
Association Blazer Badge	16.50	1.50
9 Sqn Blazer Badge	16.50	1.50
Lapel Wings (Blue enamel)	3.50	1.50
<b>Clothing</b>		
Association Sweatshirts (Maroon or Blue with Logo S / M / L / XL)	17.50	3.50
Association Sweatshirts 'V' Neck (Maroon or Blue as above)	17.50	3.50
Association Polo Shirts (Maroon/ Blue with Pegasus Logo S/ M / L/XL)	14.50	3.50
Association T Shirt (Maroon or Blue with Logo S / M / L / XL)	9.00	2.00
Association Shower Proof Fleece (Maroon or Blue with 'Airborne Engineers' Logo M / L / XL)	29.00	3.50
Baseball Cap (Blue or Maroon with Pegasus & Wings Crest)	8.00	1.50
<b>Miscellaneous</b>		
Association Shield	22.00	3.50
Association Cuff Links	10.00	1.50
Pegasus Tie Clip	6.00	1.50
Ladies Long Polyester Scarf (Pegasus Logo)	14.00	1.50
Ladies Pegasus (Gold Coloured) Brooch	3.50	1.50
Fridge Magnet (Pegasus Logo)	2.50	1.00
Paper Weight (Pegasus Logo)	5.00	2.00
AEA Car Sticker (Pegasus in RE colours with website address)	2.00	60p
AEA Car Front Grill Pegasus Badge (Airborne Engineers Lettering)	12.50	1.50