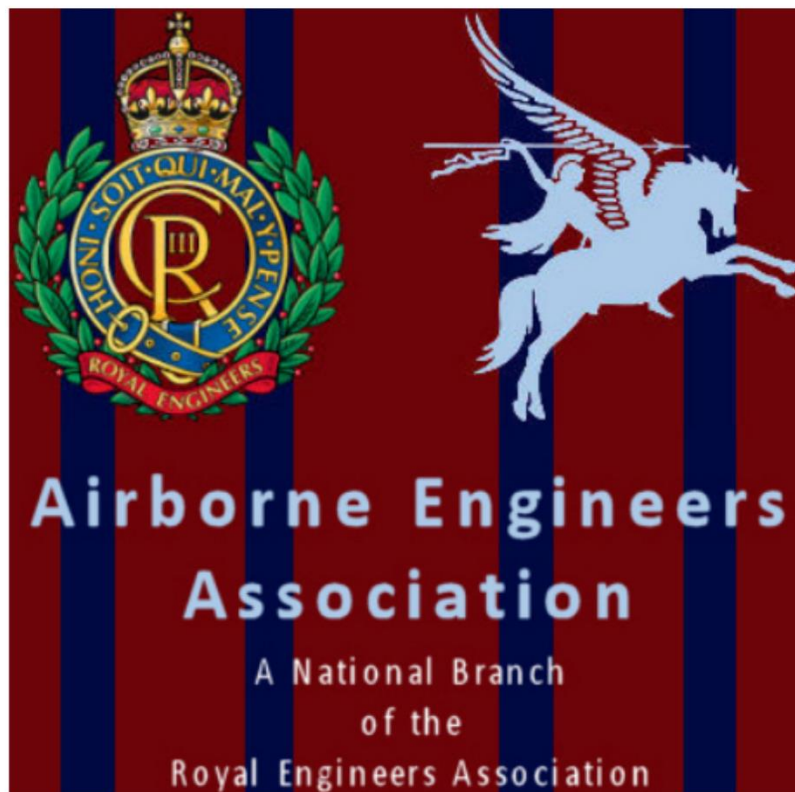




# THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS JOURNAL



# For All Airborne Sappers - Service Not Self

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

## Loose leaf insert included in this edition regarding booking for the 2026 AGM in Nottingham

### Visit our Online Shops

#### AEA Shop

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

Baseball caps and Beanies

Ties – Bow Ties – Tie Clips –  
Lapel Badges - Cufflinks



#### Clothing

T Shirts – Polo Shirts - Sweatshirts –  
Rugby Shirts - Running Vests - Jumpers

#### Micellaneous Items

Association Car Sticker –  
Association Plaque –  
Pegasus Lapel Brooch

Fleece and Softshell Jackets

**Airborne Sappers Mugs**  
Available in 444ml and 325ml

#### We'd Like Your Feedback

Let us know what you think of our products and service by leaving a review

#### 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment PRI Shop

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

#### Welcome to our new online shop

Uniform Badges  
&  
Blazer Badges

#### Micellaneous Items

Key Rings – Notebooks – Decals -  
Face Veils



#### Clothing

Jumpers – Sweatshirts – Hoodies –  
T Shirts – Polo Shirts – PT Kit

Unit Plaques

Ties – Tie Pins – Bow Ties

#### We'd Like Your Feedback

Let us know what you think of our products and  
service by leaving a review

Facebook - Shop Discussion Group - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2016356088754648>



The Airborne Engineers Association  
a National Branch of  
The Royal Engineers Association



December 2025 Issue No. 65

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## IMPORTANT INFORMATION

The AEA Treasurer's Bank Account will be closing shortly and funds will be transferred to REA (A).

There are still individuals paying Standing Orders (SO) or Direct Debits (DO) for the Journal into this account. For those still paying, please check your bank statements and cancel as soon as possible.

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## President's Update

It is with great pride that I write my first update as President of the AEA, a National Branch of the REA. As CO 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment I have had a busy few weeks, starting with many of you in Scotland at the AEA Gala Dinner Night, before finishing with a visit to 9 Para Sqn in Belize. Eighteen months into my Command tenure and another opportunity to reflect upon the Regiment....

It was a pleasure to see so many of you at the dinner, especially while hearing how many of you knew my father 'Bing' so well. While it saddens me that he passed away just before I assumed command, it gives me immense pride that his spirit and airborne ethos lives on through the many stories that you were able to share. Throughout the evening, I described the airborne spirit that still lives on through the Regiment today; while the character of conflict evolves so quickly, the determined and tenacious nature of our young soldiers and officers is as strong now as it was while my father served. Conflict in Eastern Europe means we sit in an extraordinary context to the one I experienced, even as a sub-unit commander only five years ago. We have no choice but to adapt and modernise at a rate faster than that of our enemies. So, these are exciting times for the Regiment and the Brigade, and we continue to be trusted on some of the most demanding and sensitive operations globally.

With people committed across Asia, the Middle East, Northern and Central America, and throughout Europe, we are as busy as ever. 51 Para Sqn deployed to the US with the 2 PARA Battlegroup, validated as part of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, and now hold the Regiment's most demanding Readiness profile for the UK's Global Response Force. 9 Para Sqn are in the middle of their 'Operate' year, and have deployed to Papua New Guinea, Jordan, Falkland Islands, Japan and now Belize. 70 Gurkha Para Sqn are now well integrated into the Regiment and have recently moved from Maidstone to Woodbridge. They are just about to hit their Readiness training year, starting with a deployment to Kenya under the 1 RGR Battlegroup. 12 HQ&Sp Sqn are enabling the Regiment and have more recently deployed both Recce Troop and the Dive Team to Belize. Finally, 299 Para Sqn (Reserve) provide our Reservist contribution, and have just returned from Germany as part of the Corps' largest Reservist deployment in a generation.



I will quickly highlight the fantastic work of our people. Last year, the Regiment was incredibly fortunate to jump at the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day and Op MARKET GARDEN in Arnhem. The whole experience typified our strong sense of identity and purpose as Airborne Sappers. Regular, reserve and QGE Sappers commemorated the event in style and with a sense of family spirit – a personal honour was to sit next to Bob Prosser at the memorial event in Driel.

**Bob Prosser and Lt Col David Crosbie RE CO 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment**

We consistently outperform the Brigade on All-arms P Company and our Unit Conditioning Course held in Woodbridge is proving to be highly successful. Small teams – led by young Tp Comds or JNCOs – excelling on operations, routinely validated by Defence Attaches globally. I see top student reports for our various career courses; too many to mention here. Every day I am reminded that we are fortunate to have some of the most motivated, talented and professional soldiers and officers the Corps has to offer.

Moving forward, the merger will not be easy. My Intent remains to tighten the bond between our people: Regular, Reserves and Gurkhas; soldiers and officers; and across the serving and retired community. This is not about the AEA National Branch being consumed by the REA. Instead, a single organisation that preserves the heritage, spirit and identity of our Airborne Engineers, will serve to further tighten the bonds between veterans and those serving. The merger between the AEA and REA(A) branch is creating a stronger, more cohesive organisation; one that offers both veterans and serving soldiers greater opportunities to come together socially and professionally. I look forward to seeing you all very soon.

Airborne!

CO23

## Chairman's Update

By Dave Leibrick

At this year's AGM in Falkirk, I had the Honour of taking over as AEA Chairman from my good friend Steve Walls.

I have known Steve since 1979, when I arrived as a fresh-faced young Sapper to 1 Troop, full of trepidation and not a little bit anxious. Steve's friendly demeanour and non-judgmental attitude helped make those early days slightly less daunting.

I would like to thank Steve on behalf of the Association for the way that he has filled the role of AEA Chairman for the best part of 7 years and to his good lady Mel for the steadfast support she has given to Steve and the Association. His passion and zeal for our Association have been key to driving and maintaining our ethos of 'service not self'. I definitely have some very big shoes to fill.

I am proud to be a founding member and would like to thank you all for electing me as Chairman of the AEA and I will work hard to ensure that I support the association and everyone in it.

We have an amazing institution, full of fantastic characters from all generations, who make it so special. I am sure that our recent merger with the REA will ensure a steady stream of new 'Characters' to keep our traditions and our ethos going strong. The more Airborne Sappers, the better.

I would like to pay tribute to all of the branches for organising the memorials and events, which are so important in ensuring the sacrifices of those who came and went before us are remembered and celebrated; The AGM, Hardwick Hall, Cromwell Locke, Double Hills, Donington, Falklands Service at Pangbourne, Falklands Wreath Laying at Aldershot Cemetery, Falklands Ride of Respect, the Cenotaph Parade and the annual get together in Snowdonia. These are key events in the Association calendar, and I would encourage as many members as possible to support them.

The AGM and Gala Dinner this year were organised and hosted by the Scotland Branch who did an excellent job. The location was breathtaking, and I would like to thank the branch for all of the hard work and effort that went into make the weekend such a memorable event. The trips that were laid on for the ladies (and Bob) ensured that they had a chance to visit some stunning locations and the feedback has been extremely positive.

I had the pleasure of meeting the CO of 23 Engineer Regt, Lt col David Crosbie RE (our new President) and the RSM, WO1 (RSM) Stefan Gloyn, who are both keen supporters of the AEA and are looking forward to forming strong ties between the Regiment and the Association.

The AGM and John Rock Dinner will take place in Nottingham next year and will be organised by Steve Wallis and Dave Raes. I'm sure that Steve will give an update in the not too distant future.

It has been an interesting couple of years for our Association with the Merger at the forefront. After an overwhelming vote in favour of the merger, we are forging ahead and plan to continue maintaining our ethos of camaraderie and support. I truly believe that this is the best option for the AEA, and I know that the Regiment are fully supportive of our aims and traditions. Baz Basset and Phil Taylor have worked tirelessly with their counterparts in the Regiment to ensure that the Association as we know it won't change and to ensure that the transition will be as seamless as possible. Steve Morris has been pulling out all of the stops to ensure that our membership database has been integrated accurately, which I know has been a massive challenge. John Nichols has worked with the Regimental PRI to ensure that we have the same level of excellent service as we currently have with the shop and Dave Pace has done an absolutely outstanding job of pulling everything together on the Website, at the same time as bringing

all of our past journals on line. We have the easy part, all we have to do is take the ball and run with it, but the amount of extremely hard work that has gone into making this happen needs to be applauded. So, thank you to everyone for all of your hard work on behalf of the association and apologies if I have missed anyone

Looking forward to November we have the Day of Remembrance (Cenotaph Parade) on 09 November. Although Steve Wallis won't be there this year, I would like to thank him for doing all the leg work in bringing this together and I know that myself and everyone else who is attending will be marching with pride.

In closing, Lorna and I would like to wish you all a great Christmas and a Prosperous New year and I look forward to a great year for The Association in 2026.

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## A Blast from the Past



### *9 Independent Airborne Squadron, Royal Engineers*

*Winners:--16 Independent Parachute Brigade Rifle Meeting, Canal Zone 1953, Household Brigade Cup, The Parachute Regiment Cup , The Company Shield, The Minor Units Shooting Cup.*



*Spr Gibbs      Cpl Cheshire      L/Cpl Gillespie  
Spr Norwood. Spr McGrath. Sgt Thornton, 2/Lt Brooks RE, Sgt Lazenby, L/Cpl Prosser, Spr Sheppard*

## Thanks for the Memories

By Steve Wallis

As you are all aware, at the recent AGM in Scotland I handed over the reins of the AEA Chair to my old friend Dave Leibrick. I have known Dave for over 45 years and am confident that the guidance of the association is in good hands.

It is just less than 7 years since I took over as Chairman from John Ferry, much has happened in that time.

Under the ownership of Dave Pace, the journal has become an online publication. Dave does a fantastic job of producing this twice a year, chasing up branches and the Regiment for articles to include. Having stood down as Chairman I intend to support Dave with the Journal to ensure that what Association members do is communicated far and wide.

After years of sterling service from Dave and Jeannette Rutter the Association shop has thrived under Jon Nichols ably assisted by Dave Pace. With the recent addition of 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment PRI, we now have a very professional and well run online platform which provides a wide range of Merchandise for the Association and the Regiment.

By far the biggest change has been the decision to merge with the REA Airborne Branch and for the Association to become a National Branch of the REA. This was always a delicate subject but was one which needed to be addressed if the association was to survive. Ultimately the overwhelming vote in favour of the merger has enabled the National Committee to proceed with the merger with the full support of the membership.

With respect to the branches, the Association is in a strong place. We have a new branch in Wales and the West as well as two new Social Branches in the East Midlands and at Woodbridge. It is also encouraging to see that the Chatham Branch, which had taken the decision to close, is now considering reforming as a social branch.

I have many people to thank, too many to list here but chief amongst them is John Lee who was the Association President for much of my period as Chairman. John was always a steady influence and was there with help and advice whenever it was needed. I would also like to thank John Ferry, Baz Bassett and Bobby Matthews for all of the help and advice over the years, and finally I must mention the power behind the throne. Melanie has supported me all of the way, she has travelled up and down the country to very many events, always with a smile on her face and willing to pitch in when needed.

During our tenure, Melanie and I have managed to visit all of the Association Branches, it has been a pleasure for us both to meet up with so many members on their local patch and to experience hospitality at various functions throughout the year.

After 7 years it was time to hand over and wish Dave and Lorna all the best for their period at the helm, and I look back on my period as chairman with pride and with fond memories of the people that make up the association.

From Melanie and I to all of you, Have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New year and we hope to see you for the AGM in Nottingham in 2026.

## More from Days Gone By



Exercise Bar Frost November 1959

Rear - Favor, Garraghty, Baldwin, Mulligan, Farrier, Gray  
Front - Wesson



Maj DC Murray MC  
OC 1st Parachute Sqn RE 1943-1945



Maj Paul Dickison  
OC 9 Independent Parachute Sqn RE 1967--69

## An Introduction to the AEA

The following document (on pages 11-29) was written by Steve Wallis and is intended for issue to all new AEA Members. It gives information on how we started as an Association, our aims and objectives, Branches, events, memorials, online shops, website, the AEA Journal and contacts



# The Airborne Engineers Association

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A NATIONAL BRANCH OF THE REA

Service Not Self

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**The AEA & 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment**

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**Supported Events**

- The National Service of Remembrance at the Cenotaph
- Hardwick Hall
- Double Hills Memorial Service
- The 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron RE – Memorials in Donington, Lincolnshire
- The Falklands Campaign 1982 – 9 Parachute Squadron Memorials
- Cromwell Lock

**Contact Us**

# THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION

A National Branch of the REA

## Introduction

The Airborne Engineers Association (AEA) is a National Branch of the of the Royal Engineers Association, it has its own Constitution to ensure that everything is legal, formal, and abiding, to include an AGM each year,

Key objectives of the Airborne Engineers Association are.

- To maintain Contact between former and current members of the Corps of Royal Engineers to foster mutual support
- To provide a focus for social and other gatherings of members of the Association
- To provide assistance to members of the Association who require access to welfare support.
- To preserve the memory and traditions of airborne units of the Corps of Royal Engineers

Life membership is free to serving and ex-members of the Corps of Royal Engineers although an annual subscription may be required for membership of the sub-branches.

The Association currently has an Executive Committee, an Advisory Committee and six branches, 299 Association Hull, Aldershot, Birmingham, Scotland, Wales & West, and Yorkshire. There are also three 'Social Branches – Chatham, East Midlands, and Woodbridge.

Contacts for each Branch can be found on the AEA website at <https://www.airbornesappers.org.uk/contactus.html>

## History

The AEA was formed in 1989 due to an incident that happened to the Squadron Duty Officer, Captain Joe Houlston during Airborne Forces weekend.

Whilst working late in Rhine Barracks, Joe was locking up the front door, when he noticed three elderly gentlemen standing by the Falklands memorial plinth. 'Bugger' he thought, 'now I am going to be harassed by some Parachute Regiment, 'golden oldies' who are probably lost! He walked down the steps and noticed they were wearing Corps ties and asked if they need help.

They asked about the plinth, and he explained and when asked they told him who they were. They were ex-airborne engineers from the very early days of parachuting. One had even been on the Tragino Aqueduct raid, the very first Airborne Operation in the Army.

Capt Houlston then decided to take them up to the Squadron offices and show them the memorabilia on the walls and stored in the training wing. They were a walking history on the formation of Airborne and Parachuting Operations.

As a result of this chance meeting, Joe decided the next day to talk it through with other Officers and Senior NCOs in the Squadron, with a view to forming an Association.

Initially the idea was that veteran and serving Airborne Sappers could come together a few times a year, have a beer or two and reminisce on past events, before our history just passes away.

This meeting was originally met with a muted response, but after explaining what happened to him over the Airborne Forces weekend, those gathered quickly agreed that we should have an Association to represent Sappers who had served in Airborne units.

So, the Association was formed unofficially, with a basic 'Mission statement' and organisational committee. During this meeting, the group decided on the title 'Airborne Engineers Association' in the initial stages, rather than Parachute Engineers, due to the historical links with Airborne Forces and decided on a motto: 'Service Not Self.'

In 2024 a national ballot was held on the question of whether the Association should remain independent or join the REA as a National branch. The result was an overwhelming 'yes' to the merger.

## **Aims and Objectives of the association**

The aims and objectives of the Association are:

- To have an Association where both 'Past & Present' members of Airborne Engineer Units can meet and socialise, thereby fostering mutual relationships.
- To help members of the Association who require access to welfare support.
- To preserve the memory and traditions of airborne units of the Corps of Royal Engineers.
- To provide a focus for social and other gatherings of members of the Association with their wives and partners.
- To attend as many memorial services as possible throughout the country and overseas involving past Airborne Operations.
- To publish twice a year a Journal, with future events, historical sections, and general notices.
- To raise charity monies.

## **Membership**

Although the title of the Association states '*Airborne Engineers*', the founding members unanimously voted to include all personnel who have served, or are still serving, on the strength of any Airborne Engineer Unit, and other units with an official military Parachute and Airborne role, e.g. Members of the Corps serving with Special Forces, this includes all personnel posted into those units be they RAOC, REME, RAPC and ACC, rather than just members of the Corps.

Membership may also be given to any person who in the opinion of the Executive Committee has rendered special service to the Airborne Engineers.

## Branches

### The National Branch

The National Branch is the Governing Executive of the AEA and consists of the elected National Officers of the Association.



AEA Members at the Annual Gala Dinner

Ad Hoc meetings are held as required.

**Time.** Timings vary but are advertised in advance.

**Current Meeting Attendance.** Meetings are open to all members of the AEA.

#### Activities.

The John Rock Dinner held on the Saturday Night of the Annual Reunion Weekend in October

The Fergie Semple Golf Tournament held on the Thursday of the Annual Reunion Weekend.

**Contact:** the AEA National Secretary, Mike Robertson [MichaelJ.Robertson@outlook.com](mailto:MichaelJ.Robertson@outlook.com)

### 299 Association (Hull)

**Meetings:** 1st Friday of every month 20:00hrs (unless otherwise stated)

**Location:** The Minerva Public House, Hull

**Activities:** Former Commando and Airborne Sapper's meet monthly. We discuss what has been happening amongst our members with a few refreshments after the meeting.



Members of the 299 Association at the Reunion Weekend in Hull

We usually plan a trip to Arnhem every year. With various other activities throughout the year, organised by the members.

**Contact:** Secretary Dave Woollas  
[dave.hotstepscountry@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:dave.hotstepscountry@hotmail.co.uk)

## Aldershot Branch

**Meetings:** usually the second Sunday (depending on Bank holidays) April, June, September, and December. Meetings commence at 1200 hours lasting approx. 1 hour.

**Location:** The Brewers Fayre (Monkey Puzzle) at Cove, Southwood. For those wishing to attend, a carvery is on hand which has been very popular with the majority of members and their wives/partners.

**Activities:** For the past 2 years the branch has held a Spring lunch in February at the Bush Hotel in Farnham. This function has proved to be very popular by the Branch members and guests.

**Contact:** Dave Ford email: [fordd13@googlemail.com](mailto:fordd13@googlemail.com)



Dave Rutter and others of the Aldershot Branch

## Birmingham Branch

**Meetings.** 1st Monday of each month from April 2025. Meeting starts at 19:00hrs but you can get a drink from the bar prior to the meeting.

**Location.** The Family Tree Social Club. B37 6QT

**Current Meeting Attendance.** Around **15 to 20** members attend monthly meetings. We also have branch members who live out of the district but stay connected.

**Activities.** Annual Branch Dinner (Christmas). Regular meetings for meals out. Breakfast Club. Military Visits. Arnhem Visits. Military Commemoration or Services Attendance. Remembrance Day (Cenotaph). Supporting PRA events.

**Contact:** AEA Birmingham Branch Secretary,

Steve Brown on [stevebrown4@hotmail.com](mailto:stevebrown4@hotmail.com) or 07702597546.

## Scotland Branch



Members of the Scotland Branch at the 25th Anniversary Dinner at the Guards Club in Edinburgh

**Meetings:** 1pm on the third Sunday of the odd numbered months - i.e. January, March, May, July, September, and November.

**Location:** Royal British Legion in Rodney Street in Edinburgh.

**Activities:** The RBL has several bars, one of which is open to us from 12:30hrs and this bar generally stays open from the close of the formal meeting at approximately 14:00hrs until about 16:30hrs. Pies and/or sausage rolls are available at the conclusion of the meeting.

In April we meet for a liquid lunch to remember John Lonergan, our SSM who was killed in Aden in 1965.

In June we have a little parade at the graveside of Cpl Scott Wilson of 9 Sqn who lost his life in the Falklands and are sometimes joined by his relatives and comrades based in the South.

September brings the commemoration of the Cromwell Lock tragedy in 1975 when we have a parade, service, and lunch.

We are not all gloom and doom; we generally have an annual lunch with wives where like the above drink is taken.

**Contact:** Branch Secretary Gil Nicol [gilbertandmyra@gmail.com](mailto:gilbertandmyra@gmail.com)

## Yorkshire & Lancashire Branch

**Meetings:** 1st Saturday of March, June, and November

**Location:** Wakefield ARC, Bridlington, Wakefield ARC

**Activities:** Each meeting has food and a bar where likeminded veterans can meet. The Branch holds a Christmas function during the first week of December. Each year we plan a trip to Arnhem.

**Contact:** Ring or email: Phil Taylor +44 7904 953995. [earthmoverpdt@aol.com](mailto:earthmoverpdt@aol.com)

## Social Branches

A social Branch is an informal branch of the AEA that meets on a regular basis but does not have the usual Branch Officers (President, Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer) nor does it hold 'minuted' meetings. The loose organisation of the Branch is controlled through social media, usually WhatsApp, which is used to co-ordinate members and arrange social gatherings for a 'Pie and a Pint.' Anyone can set up a social branch in an area that has no other representation, it is as simple as setting up the group, inviting members, and informing the AEA National Committee.

Currently there are four social branches of the AEA.

### Chatham Branch

The Chatham Branch has recently converted from a formal Branch to a social branch. Membership is open to any serving or ex serving Airborne Sappers from the Kent region. The co-ordinator for the branch is Tim Van Der Kraan

e-mail: [Timothy\\_Vanderkraan@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:Timothy_Vanderkraan@yahoo.co.uk)

### East Midlands Branch

The East Midlands Social Branch is centred on Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, and Leicestershire although the Branch also has members from Northants and Lincs.

This is a newly formed Branch and aims to hold social events in the East Midlands every two months.

The co-ordinator for the Branch is Steve Wallis who can be contacted on

[Stephen.wallis57@ntlworld.com](mailto:Stephen.wallis57@ntlworld.com)

### Wales and The West Branch

**Meetings:** 2nd Saturday of February, May, July, and November

**Location:** The Hereford Welsh Social Club [1 Hinton Road, Hereford HR2 6BL](#) .

We also plan to hold 1 of the above meetings per year in Wales.



Members of the Wales and West Branch at the Inaugural meeting in Hereford

**Activities:** Each meeting has a bar where we meet and chew the cud. The Branch meets for informal meals (usually a curry) as and when the branch can make it.

We have a small walking group. We meet when work commitments allow.

**Contact:** John Askey email: [john.askey@gmail.com](mailto:john.askey@gmail.com)

### Woodbridge Branch

The Woodbridge Social Branch is newly formed and is based in and around the Woodbridge Area of Suffolk. It has close links with 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment.

Contact for the Branch is Phil Askey e-mail: [Philip.Askey202@mod.gov.uk](mailto:Philip.Askey202@mod.gov.uk)

## National and Branch Standards

The AEA has access to several National and Branch Standards that can be made available to AEA Members for Memorial Service, Funerals etc.

### AEA National Standards



There are two 'National Standards' one for the North of the Country and one for the South. Members wishing to use one of the standards should contact the National Secretary. The National Standard is carried at numerous events throughout the year including The Freedom of Woodbridge Parade, Cromwell Lock, 1<sup>st</sup> Para Sqn Memorial service and Hardwick Hall. It is also available, on request, for AEA members to use at events such as Funerals of AEA Members. The person requesting the standard is responsible for collecting and returning the standard and for its safe keeping.

Steve Gabbitas carrying the AEA National Standard at Hardwick Hall

### REA (Airborne) Standard

The REA(Airborne) Standard is held at 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment in Woodbridge. Wherever possible, this standard will be paraded alongside the AEA Standard at events such as the Freedom of Woodbridge Parade.

### 299 Association Standard

299 Association has its own Standard. Persons wishing to use this standard should contact the secretary of the 299 Association.

### Branch Standards

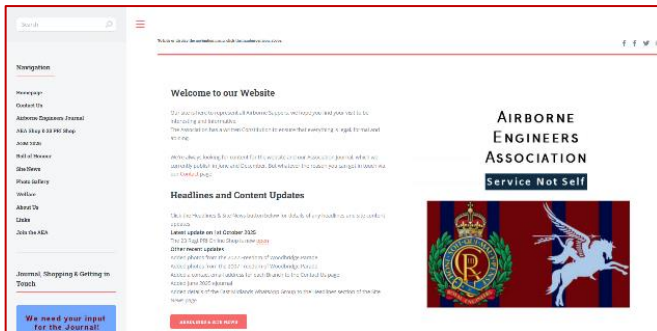
The Birmingham Branch is the only branch to have its own Branch Standard. Persons wishing to use this standard should contact the secretary of the Birmingham Branch.

## The AEA Website

The Association has had its own web site since about 2006, primarily as a means to share information and help with the recruitment of new members.

There have been a few design and content changes over the years, not least our very successful online shop.

The latest, much cleaner, simpler design was launched in March 2025, but its primary purpose remains the same.



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

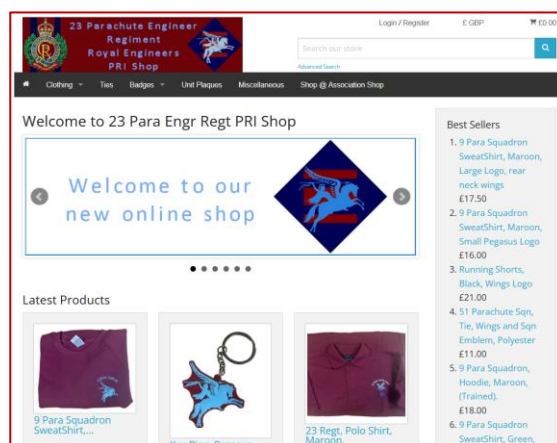
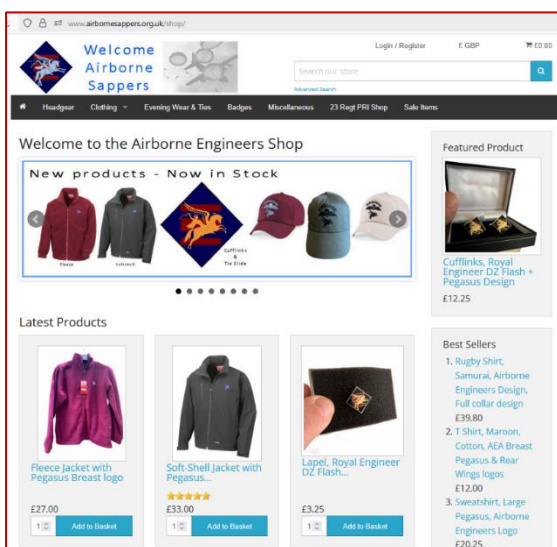
<https://www.aea.org.uk/>

## The AEA Shop and 23 PARACHUTE Engineer Regiment PRI

The Association has had a shop for many years, but in 2022 it was decided we should move with the times and setup an online shop.

The AEA shop has been very successful in raising funds, and helping the Association reach far afield, so far, as well as the UK, we have shipped orders to AEA members in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, France, and Guam

We are also host the 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment PRI, which makes a wider product range available to our veterans, including many Squadron specific items. As well as boosting profits for the Regiment's PRI and further enhancing ties between Veteran and serving Sappers.



The AEA shop and PRI can be accessed using the link below, from the AEA Website or using the appropriate QR code.

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

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



## The Journal

The association produces an 'Airborne Engineers Association Journal.' Currently there are two editions per year. The Journal is free to all members and is distributed to all Branches, posted on the AEA website and Facebook Page, and e-mailed to all members that we have contact details for.

For many years, the Journal has been a major source of information and a means to stay connected, as well as providing an extensive archive of what the association has been up to.

The Journal is intended to advertise future events and provide information via historical sections and general notices. Over the years the Journal has been produced in different formats

- Newsletter A5 booklet containing contact details, minutes, articles, events, and black and white photos. Dates back to the mid-90s and published every four months until April 2000.
- Journal A4 magazine containing contact details, minutes, articles, events, and black and white photos, first published in August 2000 and sent via post every four months until December 2021.
- E-Journal Since June 2022 a PDF version has been sent out via email containing contact details, minutes, articles, events, black and white, and colour photos.

The Journal has been a great asset to the Association, but remember, it depends on you for its content, let us keep it going.

## The AEA and 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment

The Association aims to maintain close links with 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment. The Commanding Officer of the Regiment is the Association President, and the National Committee consists of both serving soldiers and veterans.

In recent years, AEA members have been invited to take part in the Freedom of Woodbridge parade and also attended the VE Day 80 celebrations at Rock Barracks.



Officers of the Regiment with Gen Sir Peter Wall and Association Standard Bearers following the Freedom of Woodbridge parade



The CO and RSM attend the annual 'John Rock' dinner held during the reunion weekend. This event is open to all serving members of the Regiment and it is always good to see serving soldiers swapping stories with the AEA Members.

Members of the AEA with serving members of 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment at the John Rock Dinner

It is hoped that the AEA and the Regiment can maintain their close relationship, providing AEA members with the levels of friendship and camaraderie associated with being an Airborne Engineer.



The 'Regiment' and AEA members at Rock Barracks

## Social Media

The Association has a National Facebook page which can be found at

[Airborne Engineers Association National Page](#)

Membership of this group is open to anyone who has served with an Airborne Engineer unit. This is a private page and membership is by invitation.

## Supported Events

### The National Service of Remembrance at the Cenotaph

Each year the association bids for an allocation of places for the National service of remembrance at the Cenotaph in London. This is a Veterans parade and is not open to serving soldiers.



Currently the AEA is allocated 42 places on the parade. We are invited to apply for these places in June of each year and have to confirm names and details by August. Tickets are sent, electronically, shortly before the parade.

Tickets are allocated as follows.

- Each Branch is allocated 3 spaces.
- Remaining spaces are offered to members of the Association.
- Any spaces not taken up by a specific date are offered to the wider Airborne Engineers community who may not be members of the Association.

#### Members of the Association at the Cenotaph

Following the parade, Airborne Engineers congregate at the 'Sherlock Holmes' pub just off Trafalgar square and socialise with the wider RE community.



Members of the Association gather at the 'Sherlock' following the parade.'

## Hardwick Hall

Following Winston Churchill's call to establish a corps of parachute troops on 22nd June 1940, parachute training commenced at RAF Ringway near Manchester. Number 2 Commando, the fledgling parachute unit was posted to Knutsford in Cheshire. On 31st August 1941, the decision was made to form the 1st Parachute Brigade under Brigadier Richard Gale. This was to be located at Hardwick Camp near Chesterfield in Derbyshire. Hardwick Hall became the new nucleus for parachute training and physical selection for airborne forces.



Steve Wallis with Tom Hicks, one of the last survivors of the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron with Hardwick Hall in the background

On 15th December 1941 the 2nd and 3rd Parachute Battalions formed at Hardwick with No 1 Air Troop Royal engineers and a skeleton Signals Squadron. At the same time, the 11th SAS Battalion that evolved from No 2 Commando remained stationed at Knutsford. The units at Hardwick selected men from volunteers across the Army through a toughening course combined with pre-jump training.

### The Formation of the Parachute Depot 1942-4

When the 1st Parachute Brigade moved from Hardwick to the Bulford area in Wiltshire an Airborne Forces Depot was formed at Hardwick from the units left behind.

It started as an unofficial establishment but was created as a properly organized unit, training and holding recruits before they went to the Parachute Training School, as well as rehabilitating the temporary unfit from injuries.

On 16th May 1987, a Commemorative Plaque was placed on the site to recognise its significance during the formative phase of Airborne Forces.



A commemoration service to remember the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Depot is held at the plaque on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in May each year. The service is attended by members of the Airborne Fraternity including Airborne Engineers.

Standard Bearers at the Airborne Forces Memorial in the grounds of Hardwick Hall

### Double Hills Memorial Service



#### **The Double Hills Memorial**

An annual service takes place at the Double Hills memorial at Poulton near Bristol. This is the site of a Glider Crash on the way to the battle of Arnhem. The 21 members of 9<sup>th</sup> Field Company (Airborne) and two Glider Pilots became the first fatalities of Operation Market Garden.



#### **Peter Yeates (With Cap)**

Mr Peter Yeates, an Ex Royal Navy Rating, was responsible for organising the first Double Hills memorial service. Many years later he is still organising the service although he has recently decided to scale back the event. Peter is an Honorary member of the AEA and has completed a Parachute Descent from the Balloon.

The memorial service takes place on the first Sunday in September and is attended by Local dignitaries, marching contingents from 9 Parachute Squadron RE and the Glider Pilot Regiment, members of the AEA and the local civilian population. Following the service there is a march past through the village.

## The 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron RE – Memorials in Donington, Lincolnshire

### The Arnhem Oak, The Arnhem Altar, the Memorial Stone, and Charlie's Bench

The 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron RE was based in the village of Donington, Lincolnshire from December 1943 to September 1944. Since 1949 veterans of The Squadron gathered for an annual Reunion Dinner and Memorial Service over the last weekend in September.

A Squadron Memorial Altar was created in the south transept of the church in 2000. This was consecrated by the Archdeacon of Lincoln, The Venerable Arthur Hawes, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September in the same year.

In 1960, a Donington resident, Major AJ Sudlow, brought home an oak sapling that he had retrieved from the 1944 battle area near the Hartenstein Hotel in Oosterbeek. He nursed it for ten years then offered it to Eric Booth, a Squadron veteran, who had settled locally. Eric arranged for it to be planted in the



churchyard of *St Mary and the Holy Rood* to serve as a memorial for the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron RE. The Bishop of Lincoln, the Right Reverend K Riches, officiated at the planting on the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 1970 and it continues to serve as a fitting tribute to the “Hearts of Oak” that it commemorates.

In 2012 a Memorial Stone was commissioned and placed in front of the Arnhem Oak. It was dedicated, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2012, by the Reverend John Moon who had officiated at the annual Squadron Memorial Service in the church for over fifty years.

WO1 (GSM) John Ferry in front of the memorial to the 1st Parachute Squadron RE at the Church of St Mary and the Holy Rood at Donington

In 2022 Andrew “Charlie” McColgan, a former Sapper in 9 Parachute Squadron generously donated a bench for the use of those who wish to spend moments of quiet reflection in the Churchyard, close to the Memorial Stone. “Charlie” and another ex-9 Parachute Squadron Sapper, Dave Raes, installed the bench which was dedicated on Sunday 23rd September 2022 in the presence of friends, families, and villagers.



Charlie's Bench



**Standard Bearers in front of the Arnhem Oak and memorial stone**

With the passing of the veterans, the Altar, the Oak, the Stone, and the Bench are reminders of a very gallant group of men, and they serve as a touching focus for the annual Remembrance gatherings which continue to be held on the last Sunday of September each year.

## **The Falklands Campaign 1982 – 9 Parachute Squadron Memorials**

### **Pangbourne Chapel**

The Falkland Islands Memorial Chapel at Pangbourne College stands as a permanent and 'living' memorial to commemorate the lives and sacrifice of all those who died in the South Atlantic in 1982 and the courage of the thousands of Servicemen and women who served with them to protect the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands.



**The Falklands Island Memorial Chapel**

It was formally opened by HM Queen Elizabeth II in March 2000. For many years the annual Remembrance service, on the Sunday closest to 14<sup>th</sup> June, has been well-attended by men who served in what was at the time, 4 Troop 9 Parachute Squadron RE. Other Sappers

also attend and make the Corps representation the largest of any minor unit that took part in the Campaign. Long may this continue.

### **Squadron Wreath Laying – Aldershot Military Cemetery**

Every year, on the Saturday closest to the 14<sup>th</sup> of June, ex-9 Parachute Squadron veterans of the Falklands Campaign in 1982 gather for an informal, 'family' laying of wreaths at the Falklands Memorial Stone in Aldershot Military Cemetery.

The veterans are joined by other ex-Squadron members and representatives of the Scots Guards, the Welsh Guards and others with whom the Squadron served in 1982.



**Members of 9 Para Sqn RE 'Class of 82' and others**

It is not a 'Parade' and there is no religious ceremony. It is merely a gathering of friends who wish to pay their respects to comrades who did not return.

## **Cromwell Lock**

On the 28th of September 1975 ten members of 131 Indep Para Sqn RE(V) were sadly drowned at Cromwell Lock whilst participating in Ex Trent Chase, a waterman-ship training exercise involving all Troops of the squadron.



**The Granite Memorial Stone at Cromwell Lock**

Those who died were from 300 Tp, based at Falkirk in Scotland and there was only one survivor from the crew.

A granite stone slab in a small, enclosed area was erected shortly after the tragedy, and a bronze plaque records the names of those lost. The memorial has in recent years been regularly maintained by AEA members with initial ground works carried out by 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment



**The Parade Forms up at Cromwell Lock**

For many years, an annual memorial service to remember the casualties has been held as close to the date as possible. This service is open to all interested persons, including the bereaved family members, serving and ex-members of 131 Sqn and the local PRA branches, and a short service is conducted, normally by a local vicar.



Members of 131 Para Sqn RE at Cromwell Lock

## Contact Us

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## Remembrance Day In Stavanger, Norway



For Remembrance Day 2025 six AEA members and Squadron Falklands veterans, made the journey to Stavanger, Norway, to pay respects to those who fell in Operation FRESHMAN on 19/20 November 1942.

Readers will recall that there was an urgent need to attack the German source of Heavy Water Production. Heavy water was a vital element in the moderation of the Fission reaction which was destined to be the core of the Atom bomb. The Heavy Water was produced at a hydro-electric plant, in virtually inaccessible mountains about 140 miles west of Oslo, at Vemork/Rjukan. Bombing was ruled out as being too inaccurate and ineffective. Sabotage by locals would have brought about disastrous repercussions on the local Community. The location of the target was too far

inland for a Commando insertion from the sea. By mid-October 1942 it had been decided that a demolition force of Royal Engineers offered the best chance of success. Parachute delivery threatened wide dispersion and a consequent time delay as men and equipment were gathered together. Glider delivery was decided upon.

Fifty volunteers from 9 Field Company (Airborne) and 261 Field Park Company (Airborne) stepped forward. From these, two glider parties, each of 15 men, were selected. After a brutal physical and technical compressed training course, two gliders, towed by Halifax bombers, flew from Skitten airfield in the far north of Scotland on the evening of 19th November.



It was the longest glider tow attempted to that date, the Norwegian winter had arrived early and, as it turned out, cloud covered the LZ on the Hardangervidda and the ground to air beacon contact with a previously inserted ground party, failed to work. The tow ropes iced up then broke and the gliders crash landed in widely separated, remote areas of southwestern Norway. One of the towing aircraft also crashed, killing all on board. In glider A, both pilots and six sappers were killed in the landing. Four severely wounded were tortured and killed. Their bodies were dumped in the sea outside of Stavanger fjord. The remaining 5 men were held until 19th January 1943 when they, also, were executed.

In glider B, the two pilots and a sapper were killed in the landing. The fourteen survivors were shot later the same day. They now lie in Egenes Cemetery, Stavanger.

Our 2025 veterans party visited the crash site of Glider B, various sites where the survivors were held and, finally, the site of their execution. It was a sobering, reflective time.



On Remembrance Sunday we attended the ceremony at Eiganes Cemetery and paid our respects to the fallen.

Throughout the visit we were guided by Bruce Tocher and his charming wife, Joyce. What fonts of knowledge they were and what superb hosts, we remain immensely in their debt. Bruce is an acknowledged expert on Operation FRESHMAN. What a privilege it was to have had exposure to his archive and in-depth knowledge of all aspects of Operation FRESHMAN.

Our party consisted of: John Foran, Chris 'Puggy' North, Paul Moore, Jasper Harratt, Charlie McColgan and Chris Davies. We were enlightened, awed and much humbled by the experience.



## AEA President's Award – Dr Bruce Tocher

### Citation

Dr Bruce Tocher is a retired geologist from Forfar who lives in Norway. Some years' ago he became aware of Operation FRESHMAN, which was the first attempt to destroy Hitler's Heavy Water production at the Hydro factory at Rjukan, Norway. Thirty men of 9 Field Company (Airborne) and 261 Field Park Company RE, together with four pilots, were despatched in two gliders on the night of 19/20 November 1942. It was a gallant attempt, but the Winter weather prevailed against the force. Both gliders and one tow aircraft crashed some distance from the target. Those men who were not killed in the crash landings were executed by the Gestapo.

In over five years of detailed research Bruce has uncovered a wealth of detail about Operation FRESHMAN whilst writing a new book on the subject. Of particular note is the work that he has done in tracing the families of those who took part in the operation. He has hosted representatives of many of the families during their visits to the crash sites and memorials in Norway and, to date, he has managed to track down all but three of the families of those gallant men.

Thanks to his unrelenting research and a number of presentations, both in person and online, Bruce has done an enormous service to Airborne Engineers. First and foremost, he has brought to light a good deal of hitherto unknown information about this audacious and ambitious operation. In doing so he has illuminated the courage and determination of the men who volunteered for it, fully understanding that, even if they achieved their aim, the chances of escaping capture or death in its aftermath were virtually nil. Bruce was instrumental in having the FRESHMAN Memorial at the site of the former RAF Skitten, in Caithness refurbished. He has also lost no opportunity to put into the public eye the unique characteristics and courage of Airborne Royal Engineers that were forged in WWII and which prevail to this day.

In recognition of the immense service that Bruce Tocher has rendered to the memory of those who took part in Operation FRESHMAN, to their families and to Airborne Engineers, past and present, it is strongly recommended that he be awarded the Airborne Engineers Association President's Award.



During his visit to Stavanger, Norway, Col Chris Davies took the opportunity to present Dr Bruce Tocher with the citation for his AEA President's award.

The official certificate will be given to Bruce in due course

Well done Bruce, a very well deserved award!

# Double Hills Arnhem Remembrance

By Peter Yeates

Sunday 7th September 2025 - Remembering 21 Sappers of the 'Shiny 9th' and two Glider Pilots, who all died in Double Hills meadow on Sunday 17th September 1944 - The very first casualties of Operation Market Garden.



## A Day Transformed by Storms

This year, severe weather made the memorial field unsafe. Until the morning itself the ground had held firm, but once 4x4s began moving in, the sodden meadow gave way. Despite careful preparation - flags flying, signs ready, H&S and insurance in place - conditions forced a change of plan.

At the very last minute, the Holy Trinity Paulton Church Team, led by Rev. Adam Pitt, kindly opened their doors. With little time, they prepared the church as a place of welcome. At 2pm, the service began as planned, but in a new setting.

The church atmosphere brought a quiet reverence. Over thirty wreaths were laid on the altar, echoing the tradition of the meadow. Among them was the important one from Colonel John Lee, past President of the AEA, who as ever yearly stands with us, some, rain or shine.

The Welsh anthem hymn, shown on the screens, was especially meaningful for the loyal thirty Welsh veteran Royal Engineers present. Visitors, villagers, and today's serving soldiers of 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment shared in remembrance together. The 9<sup>th</sup> Company Relatives still so prominent at Double Hills and partaking with Poems in the service was Sapper John Fernyhough's Granddaughter Becks Austin with her whole family present.

## Careful Planning, Seamless Adaptation



Much credit must go to SSM Steve Richards and Troop Sergeant Tim Boyden, whose work behind the scenes was outstanding. The sudden change indoors was no reflection on their efforts, the preparation from the Regiment was in my opinion, the best yet. POC's/PME's, security, travel from Woodbridge, RV's at Paulton and on site, all helped me so much.

## The New Corten Statues: Standing Guard

The Double Hills Memorial, flanked by Barrett Steel-donated Corten figures, photographed between showers on Remembrance Double Hills Sunday 2025.

One proud sight reestablished again. Standing proud now at Double Hills are the new Barrett Steel-donated Corten statues of a Sapper and a Glider Pilot. Though their official

dedication will be in 2026 now, they already speak powerfully of remembrance.

For your information, Barrett Steel Ltd, long a supporter of Double Hills, also supplied more than 100 tonnes of steel for the new Lancaster Bomber Memorial in Lincolnshire - a striking and stupendous tribute to the unsung heroes of Bomber Command, now standing high above the countryside. Their contribution to both memorials is a reminder that remembrance is built not only in words and ceremony, but in lasting works of strength and steel.

## Veterans on Parade: The Airborne Forces Riders

Another highlight was the presence of the Airborne Forces Riders, led by George Firth — a Falklands veteran and veteran of 9 Parachute Squadron RE. Their turnout, alongside other airborne veterans, was warmly welcomed. They brought a visible reminder that remembrance is carried forward not just in ceremony, but in living fellowship. Their presence bridged past and present, Falklands and Arnhem, and was much appreciated by all who gathered.

## Tradition, Succession, and Spirit

Kelly and Sean Chambers of the AEA again gave great support in the church. The day also marked a handover of sorts, with narration for the first time taken on by Peter Yeates, Senior Grandson Lance, who followed in well-trodden

footsteps. With memories of Lance Withers' past contributions, the succession looks assured, and the tradition secure. At long last we might have a team to enable Double Hills to continue for another 46 years.

### A Different Kind of Double Hills

Some remarked that this service recalled another held in Holy Trinity - the 35th anniversary of the Falklands War, when veterans of that campaign joined serving members of 9 Parachute Squadron RE. That day was memorable; this year's had a similar quality.

Different from the open field, but no less meaningful, Double Hills 2025 was a reminder that remembrance adapts and endures.

### Looking Ahead to 2026

The 47th Double Hills Remembrance will be held on Sunday 6th September 2026, when the new statues will be officially unveiled. Work to bring in new volunteers is already bearing fruit, ensuring the service continues strongly into its next chapter.

For now, thanks are due to all: to 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment, to the AEA, to the veterans, and to the people of Paulton. Together they made sure that, even in stormy weather, the remembrance was carried on with dignity and depth.

Front cover of the 46th Double Hills Remembrance Service programme, 7th September 2025.



## The Double Hills at Weston Arnhem Remembrance Service

By Peter Yeates

The Double Hills at Weston Arnhem Remembrance Service for the 23 airborne soldiers took place on 28th September at Milton Road Cemetery, Weston-Super-Mare. This annual act of remembrance at the graves is the natural later “follow-up” to the Double Hills Memorial Service at Paulton, marking the sacrifice of 21 men of 9 Field Company, Royal Engineers (Airborne), together with two Army Air Corps Glider Pilots, who were the first casualties of Operation Market Garden.

The commemoration began at the Cross of Sacrifice in the upper part of the cemetery. On a smaller but equally significant scale to Paulton, the service followed the familiar order of remembrance: the reading of the names, followed by the laying of wreaths on behalf of the Army Air Corps, the Royal British Legion, the Bristol Royal Engineers’ Association, the Wales and West Branch Airborne Engineers Association, the Double Hills Memorial at Paulton, the family of Sapper Fernyhough, the Weston-Super-Mare Branch of the Royal British Legion, and in memory of Sappers Fred Davis and John Fernyhough.



Led by the Royal British Legion Parade Marshall John Gallop, the standards and guests then processed to the War Graves Section of the cemetery. Here the service reached its different and most poignant moment: cadets of the Air Training Corps and Army Cadets, moving with precision and dignity, laid tributes at each of the

23 graves. Row by row, they stepped forward smartly and together, ensuring that every man was honoured in turn and by name.

Prayers were then offered at the graveside, before the Exhortation was spoken, the Last Post and Reveille sounded, and the Kohima Epitaph read. A final blessing was given, closing the ceremony in reverent silence.

The Milton Road Cemetery service stands as a fitting complement to the Double Hills Memorial at Paulton. While Double Hills remembers the tragedy in the Somerset fields where the glider came down, Weston-Super-Mare guards the final resting place of those who perished. Together, the two sites form an unbroken chain of remembrance, ensuring that the sacrifice of September 1944 is never forgotten.



## Double Hills 2025

By John Lee



Owing to the bad weather forecast this year's service was held in Holy Trinity Church, Paulton instead of at the memorial. With the inclement weather this was a shame as it was planned to dedicate two new silhouette statues which have replaced the two original statues which have started to show their age. These new statues are made in a non-degradable Corten Steel and were cut out with modern laser equipment and will certainly last for another 46 years.

This year the service was narrated by Lance Withers on behalf of the new 'DH Team on the Block' and followed the normal pattern of service we have held for many years. It was

pleasing to see the church full, with standing room only and the service was well supported by the locals as it has always been.



A detachment from 9 Parachute Squadron RE represented the Royal Engineers but this year there was no detachment from the Army Air Corps. Standards from various organisations were carried, the AEA one by John Ferry, and the Riders of Respect and the Wales and West Branch AEA were represented.

Our old friend, Peter Yeates, called out the names of the wreath layers and wreaths were laid at the altar after which the Rt Hon Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg narrated a Double Hills "A Finale for DH 24".

Refreshments were available at Paulton Rovers Football Club after the service where old friendships were renewed in the traditional manner.

All in all a successful event despite having to be held inside.

## A New Link to Double Hills and Arnhem

By Peter Yeates

Dear Friends - so chuffed with my gift, history is so fascinating, and my interest never ceases to thrill and excite.

A remarkable piece of history has just found its way to me, an original Glider Pilot oxygen and communication mask, believed to have belonged to 1st Pilot Len Gardner or 2nd Pilot Fraser, from Glider RJ 113, Chalk No. 389.



This moving artefact was presented to me by a highly respected Dutch Arnhem historian, an authority on the Royal Engineers and Glider operations at Arnhem. He tells me it was recovered from the wreckage of that ill-fated glider, and though it later surfaced in the collectors' market, I presume, its provenance remains credible and sound.



Many of you will recall our local hero, the late Glider Pilot Staff Sergeant Bill Higgs, wounded at Arnhem, co-founder of Double Hills with me, and husband to marvellous Barbara Higgs of Steeple Ashton, and a

wonderful family connected with my family in later Wiltshire history.

Bill, much loved and remembered, was once photographed wearing this very *type C* oxygen mask after taking a Horsa glider to over 10,000 feet, an early and daring flight indeed. You'll remember the special regard Keevil Village has for us all, and a ceremony is held annually at the Memorial Bill Higgs unveiled so long ago to mark the connection of the village with the Royal Air Force and Airborne Forces.

Our good friend Mike Knight, son of Sapper Maurice Knight (HQRE with CRE Myers) and a stalwart supporter of Double Hills, confirms that these masks were issued from 1944 onwards. Mike Knight and family has an enormous collection of RE Airborne artefacts, a very authentic valuable 9th Fd Coy RE Jeep - Peter Bould listed above owns - has the original 'Bridge Too Far' Jeep - that General Urquhart used in his inaugural visit 1979 to DH - and you can spot it several times in the film



So, friends — this is my new and quite extraordinary gift. What do you think? After all these years, history still turns up at our doorstep, quietly reminding us that the Arnhem story goes on, layer after layer, still as compelling as ever. Tell me what you think. With the 'tun up' of the torn and burnt picture of the 18 months old Baby Valerie Fernough recent return to Mrs Valerie's (Austin now) and with Husband Larry and Valerie's children so involved with the DH and Weston Super Mare DH graves event, this history is gaining momentum not diminishing.



As I approach my ninetieth year, I can't help but reflect that I too am something of an artefact now, one of the last of the National Servicemen who didn't stay in the UK but served 'It ain't half hot Mum' overseas in the Far East, returning home from Hong Kong in 1957 after service in the Royal Navy Gunboat Flotilla, the very twilight of Empire. And in the history of the established Airborne Engineers Association, who since 1980 has been at the forefront of making sure DH continues, it is interesting now that many of the older Sappers who founded the AEA are now my age.

So I invite your thoughts on this marvellous discovery, and on how our shared story continues. With new friends and new 'family associated' custodians stepping forward, the Double Hills legacy endures.

Our next Service will be the 47th Anniversary, Sunday 6 September 2026, and I hope to see many familiar faces there. In the meantime, have a look at this artefact alongside that newly-discovered archive to be found on You Tube film showing Glider 'Sheila' (Chalk No. 389) taking off from Keevil — the name *hauntingly chalked* on her fuselage, a farewell from Len Gardner to his wife. A *final flight*, yet somehow, nothing in this brave story of Arnhem truly ends.

With warm regards and lasting friendship,  
Peter Yeates

## Cromwell Lock 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Memorial

By Craig Gadd, Vice Chairman 299 Association RE

Cromwell Lock has always been part of my history whilst serving at 131 Independent Commando Squadron. I was familiar with what happened on that fateful night, 28<sup>th</sup> September 1975, whilst I was serving as quite a few of the guys back then, were still serving also, and would recite what happened on that night and the aftermath of the tragedy. A few of the guys are still involved with the association today.

299 Association and the Birmingham branch have spent the last few years keeping the memorial garden weed free and looking respectable all year round on a formal rota, although we have always done this for as long as I can remember. However, this year was a big one, and we wanted to make sure that the families felt that the 10 young Sappers and loved ones that perished that night would never be forgotten. So, 299 Association and the Birmingham Branch have spent the last year planning the 50<sup>th</sup> Memorial service hoping for a maximum attendance for the families attending. It was a lot of hard work back and forth and planning an event with a lot of different agencies and bodies, but it was worth all the hard work that we had put in.

It was great to see so many of the family members attending, especially from the Smith family who had brought 15 members and Jimmy Black's sister, Catriona. I managed to speak Catriona briefly at the service and she thanked us all for never forgetting their loved ones. I also managed to speak to Janey Duchart (nee Smith) Terry's wife and their son at the brewery after the service. As you can imagine all the family members were all very emotional but were all so proud of everyone turning up to remember their loved ones.

It was a great turn out from serving personal of 131 Commando Sqn RE, 299 Para Sqn RE, the Airborne Engineers Association and Airborne Forces Riders, along with many veterans and formal guests, with numbers around 200 there to remember the 10 sappers. We had Nottinghamshire's Deputy Lord lieutenant, 299 Para Sqn Honorary Colonel Al Murray, various Lord mayors and councillors from the different councils in attendance and representatives from local police unit that had attended on the that fateful night. The deputy commander, 3 UK Div for the reserves, Brigadier Fraser-Hitchen who read abstracts from letters sent from His Majesty the King and His Excellency Lieutenant General Sir John Lorimer Lt Governor of the Isle of Man and Chairman of the Parachute and Airborne Forces charity. The brigadier's words of comfort pitched perfectly for the service and how the army never forgets their soldiers. There were also words of reflection from Col (Retd), Bill Pagan MBE, MStJ, TD, DL FRSA. Former Capt, Chris Shillito TD, who was in one of the other boats that night, read out the 10 Sappers names that had perished. People had literally travelled from all over the country for the service. Afterwards we went to the local brewery the Milestone for some light refreshments. They had put on a special barrel for us 'Sappers Memorial Brew' that went down very well.

All in all, it was a very good day considering the occasion and the weather played its part too.

There are so many people to thank for making the day memorable for the families and remembering the 10 sappers. But I would just like to thank all of you that made it all come together as this was such an important day for so many.



*Sapper Norman Bennett (29)*  
*Sapper James Black (18)*  
*Sapper Raymond Buchanan (20)*  
*Sapper Peter Evenden (19)*  
*Sapper Stuart Evenden (22)*

*Sapper Ian Mercer (17)*  
*Sapper Alexander O'Brien (18)*  
*Sapper Terry Smith (20)*  
*Sapper Ronald Temprell (26)*  
*Sapper Joseph Walker (21)*



Brigadier Fraser-Hitchen & Craig Gadd



WO2 (SSM) Craig Heppenstall, Al Murray & Craig Gadd



The specially produced Sapper's Memorial Brew



299 Association Members



Some of the many who gathered to remember and pay their respects

## AEA Scotland Branch, 50th Anniversary of the River Trent Tragedy

By Andy Nelson, AEA Scotland Branch Chairman.



On the 24th of February this year the planning of the 50th anniversary of the River Trent tragedy to commemorate our 10 lost airborne brothers/Sappers began. Gil Nicol, Alex Cockburn and myself were the nominated committee to carry out this task. Also involved was the local Royal British Legion branch whose Chairman, Alan Lochrie, was the main contact. As we carry out this service every year the local R.B.L. are always involved.

As the months passed we had been putting out on social media asking for any family members/relatives to contact us so that they could be kept up to speed regards the commemoration serviced did have success in making contact with only one family member, Wendy Mercer.

During this period the committee had a member Gil Nicol have an unforeseen accident (fall) that ended up with a stay in hospital and a long period of convalescence, that dropped us down to only 2 branch committee members and Alan. We were fortunate in eventually having some dignitaries say that they would be attending the service, those being Lt Col Charles Walker the Lord Lieutenant of Stirling and Falkirk, the Lord Provost Robert Bisset, the Veterans Champion Margaret Anslow and local Councillors. This was really appreciated by the committee as a lot of diary appointments had to be juggled to allow those dignitaries to attend. We also, through the assistance of Gil Nicol had Chris Withers an ex-military padre who is also a good friend of Gil's attend the service and carry out the religious side of the service i.e. the "Airborne Prayer" and bible readings etc. As Alex and myself live locally, we carried out cleaning duties on the cairn itself a few days before the service date.

A special thanks must also be given to the local Council as we had put in a request for the area around the cairn to be tidied up and the grass cut and also the flags at the cenotaph to be flown at half mast, all this was carried out as requested and the area on the day was immaculate as can be seen in the attached photographs.

As the year progressed, with the assistance of the R.B.L. we started to have veteran associations begin to contact us regards the timings etc. of the service. We had veteran associations from the East and West of Scotland wanting to attend i.e. P.R.A. A&SH K.O.S.B. etc. and this was gratefully received. We had 12 standards on parade on the day and one in particular was special, the local R.B.L. branch had been awarded new Kings Colours, and they requested if it could be paraded for the first time at our service, of course we said yes.

On the day we could not have asked for a better day, the weather was kind to us and the turnout was overwhelming with many of the local community attending, this is due to the fact that those 10 sappers were all local lads and known to the community. Also the attendance of family members/relations was a surprise as I said earlier that I



had only one family member contact me. This has now been rectified as after the service I now have made contact with some of the families who attended on the day, and they will be contacted regards future upcoming services. We also had the usual youth associations involved on the day i.e. Navy, Marines, Army and R.A.F. cadets.

We are trying to have these youngsters more involved in this commemoration service so they can then take on this task when we are no longer able to carry out this duty ourselves. We will be pursuing this next year with having them help out on caring for the cairn once all the usual formalities/permissions/ logistics etc. are finalised.

A few special mentions must be made to a few special people. We had an order of service booklet made up by myself and Gordon McLeod. I sent Gordon a design for the booklet and Gordon with the assistance of some of his younger family members produced the booklet to a very high standard considering what they had to work with. Also we had a professional florist i.e. John Carter's wife Catherine, supply us with the

large Para wings wreath on behalf of the Branch, and also two family wreaths which were well accepted by the family members.

After the service we retired to the R.B.L. club for refreshments, a raffle was held and a total of £200 was collected, this was then presented to Charlie McColgan and his team of helpers for their sterling work for the Ukrainian people at our National AGM Gala dinner on Sat 18<sup>th</sup> October in the Inchyra hotel.

"We Will Remember Them"

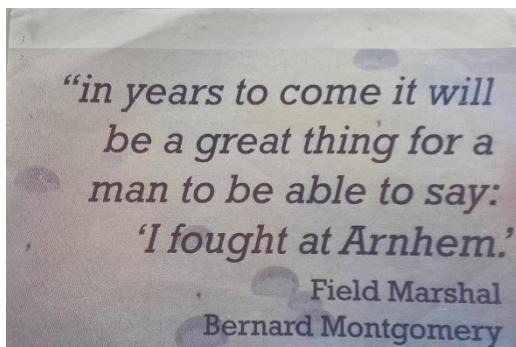


On a personal note I would just like to thank the following Branch members for their assistance in making the 50th anniversary up here in Scotland, one that will be remembered for a very long time, namely, Alex Cockburn, Gil Nicol and Gordon McLeod.

## 1 Parachute Squadron RE Memorial Service

28<sup>th</sup> September 2025

Some photos from the memorial service in the village of Donington, to remember the men of 1 Parachute Squadron RE who took part in the battle of Arnhem as part of Operation Market Garden









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## Photos from Mike Holdsworth

Photos taken at the Remembrance Day service in 2023 in Meriden with Birmingham Branch AEA Standard



Mike (on left in 1<sup>st</sup> photo) former 131 Para and Cdo with Mark (Paddy) Donaghy former 9 Sqn

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## Scott Wilson Commemoration Service

AEA Scotland Branch members and PRA members, family and friends, attended the commemoration service at Drum Terrace cemetery in Edinburgh at the grave of Cpl Scott Wilson, a member of 9 Para Sqn who was sadly KIA on Mt Longdon during the Falklands conflict in 1982. Our branch pays our respects every year at Scott's grave on the day he was killed. We then retire to the Guards club to toast his memory and service to the crown.



## AEA Annual Arnhem Commemoration Trip 2025

Tim van der Kraan, AEA Chatham Social Branch

September's Diary began with the AEA Annual Arnhem Commemoration Trip, jointly organised and planned by Phil Taylor (Chairman AEA Yorkshire Branch) and the Association's Dutch friends Ed van der Laan & Ton Oomens.

Ed, along with Ton, had worked very hard in negotiating a great deal at the Euro Parcs de Hooge Veluwe and the hire of two Minibuses for the duration of the trip.

Initially planned for a party of 16, the first hurdle to overcome was to get everyone to Arnhem. Like the planning which went into the 'Market' phase of Operation Market Garden, members had to travel from different parts of the UK involving various modes of transport.

Like any military operation 'A plan is only as good as the First Contact with the enemy'. The initial plan was for both Ed & Ton, to drive the Minibuses, however, Ton, was unable to do this. This meant we needed a driver for the second Minibus and as any good Airborne Sapper does when required, Ron Mason, (AEA Birmingham Branch) stepped forward and volunteered to drive the second Minibus.

### Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> September

Those who travelled as foot passengers on the overnight ferry from Hull were picked up by Ed, from Rotterdam Euro Port in the Minibus. They were taken to Euro Parcs de Hooge Veluwe. The remainder of the group travelled either by car or flew to the Netherlands.

By early evening the majority of the group had arrived and settled into their respective accommodation, apart from two, who had been blown off course by delayed flights. We RV'd in the



Parcs Restaurant to replenish our needs (mostly liquid refreshments) talking through the programme for the period of the Trip, amongst other things. This meant digging in for the night and the intake of liquid refreshment increased.

As the evening progressed, we found ourselves sharing the Parc with many other Airborne Brothers, mainly the Airborne Forces Riders. Within their numbers were Ex 9 Sqn, some of whom I'd not seen since my Sqn Days. This led to more liquid refreshments.

### Friday 19<sup>th</sup> September

Ed arranged a Continental Breakfast in a box for each of us. The contents would have kept us going for the remainder of the trip. However, this was to be repeated each morning.

First visit of the day was Oosterbeek and the Commemoration at Needle Monument. This was followed with a visit to the Airborne Museum Hartenstein. The Museum had recently undergone an extensive extension. In Dutch Law you cannot extend either up or to the side of an existing building. This meant excavating down, adding another floor level. During this time, they came across a number of artifacts from the Battle for Arnhem.

Then onto the Arnhem, Oosterbeek War Cemetery. This allowed us to spend some time walking freely around the cemetery, without the vast attendance which would be there on Sunday. A Service of Internment was being held for Arnhem Veterans, whose final wish was to have their Ashes Interred. They could now be at rest with their fallen Airborne Brother's from the Battle for Arnhem.

We were very pleased to be joined by Ton, for the remainder of the day.



Moving onto to LZ-S Wolfheze (Airdrop & new Glider Pilot Monument) where Ed, gave us a very constructive briefing about LZ-S & Reconnaissance Route. Renkum was then the location to have lunch and liquid replenishment.

We said our 'goodbyes' to Ton, before heading back to the Parc's Restaurant for the evening.

### **Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> September**

We met up with Oroely, Ed's wife, for the first time. Oroely, remained with us for the weekend. With introductions over we were off to Ginkel Heath to watch the Annual Drop of Paratroopers from Various Nations onto the DZ. We had the opportunity to browse the many stands, displays and intake of refreshments.

Back to Oosterbeek for the Annual WWII Military Vehicle & Reenactment Parade. Until now the weather had been kind to us but then the heavens opened up. Fortunately thanks to exceptional planning by Ed, we found ourselves in a Restaurant.

Once the deluge had ceased, Ed, for those that wanted, took us for a walk along the route leading to the Oude Kerk Oosterbeek, a Church (some parts of which dated back to the 10<sup>th</sup> Century), not far from the North Bank of the *Neder-Rijn* 'Lower Rhine'. Over on the South Bank is the village of Driel.



The Church is also adjacent to the house which belonged to Kate ter Horst which became a Casualty Clearing Station during the Battle

The route was the same route used by those Airborne Troops from the Battle who were able to make the evacuation. Operation Berlin was the Code Name for the evacuation over the period of 25/26 September, ironically, the same Code Name which was used by the British for the withdrawal from Gallipoli in 1916.

*Oude Kerk Oosterbeek*, possibly being the last place for many to catch up on much needed rest, food and a cigarette, before attempting the last few hundred yards to the Riverbank and the crossing of the *Neder-Rijn* 'Lower Rhine'. This was by either assault boats manned by both British & Canadian Sappers or attempting an arduous and for some, ill-fated, swim in the freezing & tidal water.

The route led by Ed, included the Hotel de Tafelberg, used by Field Marshal Walter Model as his HQ.



Having RV'd back at the Minibuses we made our way to Driel, for the Annual Memorial Service, which is always well attended. The Memorial Commemorates the role of the British & Canadian Sappers who participated in Operation Berlin by making multiple trips in their small assault boats whilst supported by other units. In one night and in heavy rain they managed to rescue some 2,400 Airborne Troops. The Canadian's lost seven Sappers & 14 wounded.

I was honoured to be asked to lay a Wreath on behalf of the Airborne Engineers Association.

Ed had planned to have a BBQ at the Parc to round off what had been a most enjoyable, informative & successful Arnhem Commemoration Trip. Unfortunately, this had to be curtailed due to the weather. Instead, we had a fantastic Buffet meal in the Restaurant. We spent the rest of the evening discussing the trip and life in general, whilst taking on more liquid refreshments.

### **Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> September**

Our final day of the Trip sadly arrived, which meant packing up our cases and handing back our Accommodation. Then, off to the Annual Airborne Memorial Service at the Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery. You can't but help to shed a tear, as the Dutch school children walked into the cemetery, each clutching their bunches of colourful flowers to be carefully laid on the graves, of the fallen Paratroopers before them. *'Every man an Emperor'*

With the Service over and the vast majority of those attending dispersed, this left only a few who wanted to spend some time paying their respects to a family member or friend. We gathered as a group to Pay our Respects, by laying a Cross and Wreath at Norman Butterworth & Harold Padfield's grave.

The time now came for us to say our goodbyes to members of the Birmingham Branch. Ed took the remainder to the Train Station, enabling us to catch various trains for our journeys back to the UK. We said our goodbyes to Ed and Oroely, thanking her for her pleasant company. With, the shake of a hand, we thanked Ed, with both gratitude & thanks for the continuous hard work from himself and Ton, which enabled us to have a most enjoyable & memorable Trip.

*Bedankt, Ed, en Ton, voor al jullie harde werk, dat zoals altijd zeer gewaardeerd wordt. Ik kijk ernaar uit jullie volgend jaar te zien.*

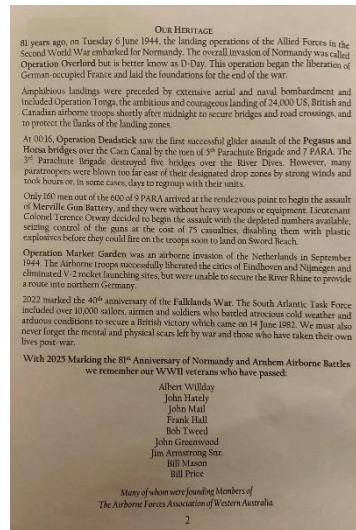
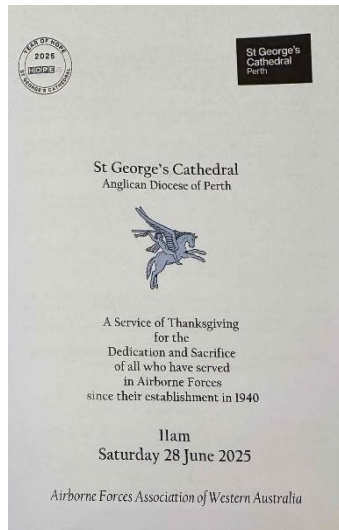
*Translated to English - Thanks, Ed and Ton, for all your hard work, which is, as always, greatly appreciated. I look forward to seeing you next year.*

# Airborne Forces Association of Western Australia (AFAWA)

By Eddie Carnegie

You can visit the AFAWA Facebook Group at <https://www.facebook.com/airborneforces.org/>

Here are some photos from a Service of Thanksgiving for all those who served in Airborne Forces, held in Perth Australia in June 2025





## From Wally Gee via Facebook

Just finished my first shift selling poppies here in Ocean Grove Australia. Thought it might be a bit quiet as today is a Holiday, Melbourne Cup Day. But we had a good morning. On again on Thursday. Hope sales are going well in the UK.



And another one of Wally taken somewhat earlier



Wally (on the right) in Cyprus, 1956

## From 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment

### Op FIRIC by LCpl Rogers

Op FIRIC (Falkland Islands Roulement Infantry Company) is a British Army commitment to provide security and support for the Falkland Islands by deploying a company-level unit on rotation. This involves rotating infantry battalions for tours of the Falklands to conduct exercises, integrate with other military assets, and work with the Falkland Islands Defense Force. <https://falklands.gov.fk/defenceforce/history>

During Operation FIRIC, my deployment with a section of engineers from 9 Parachute Squadron RE, attached to A Company, 3 PARA, has been a formative experience. Integrated into 1 Platoon and distributed among the PARA sections, our primary responsibilities were multifaceted. We conducted Quick Reaction Force (QRF) duties, undertook patrols throughout the Falkland Islands, and executed Live Firing Tactical Training (LFTT). Patrolling the Falkland Islands provided valuable insights into the region and offered opportunities to engage with the local population. The LFTT exercises were particularly beneficial, significantly enhancing my proficiency in section and platoon-level offensive maneuvers. Serving as a Section 2iC within a PARA section fostered increased confidence in collaborating with diverse units and reinforced my skill set. This role allowed me to understand the importance of teamwork under pressure, a skill crucial for future leadership positions.

In the weeks leading up to the final exercise, I was assigned the task of commanding the construction of trench systems to support trench warfare training during the culminating attack phase. Using my skills as a Plant Operator Mechanic (POM), and my leadership skills being a JNCO, I assumed the role of IC for our Engineer section. With nearly two weeks allocated for the project, I collaborated closely with the OC of A Company, conducting thorough reconnaissance to determine optimal trench layouts, and briefing my superior on my findings. Securing a 360 excavator, which I operated, we began excavating the trenches. My intent was to best simulate trenches being used in conflicts today to get the best and most realistic training value. The challenging Falklands environment, characterized by adverse weather and a high-water table, demanded adaptability and skill. Despite these obstacles, we successfully completed the task to the satisfaction of the OC. This initial experience as an IC significantly enhanced my leadership and teamwork abilities. The small team size allowed for focused attention on individual tasks, enabling targeted guidance based on each member's strengths and weaknesses. This approach facilitated smooth operations despite the challenging conditions, teaching me the importance of tailored support in achieving team goals.

Overall, my tenure as an IC was highly rewarding, fostering personal growth in confidence, knowledge, and leadership. It also honed my ability to assess and manage the diverse capabilities within a team, contributing to professional development. I believe that this task and leadership responsibility has positively progressed me toward becoming a future section commander, and I hope to be given further taskings in the future. The experience underscored the importance of adaptability, teamwork, and decisive leadership in overcoming environmental and logistical challenges. My time in Operation FIRIC not only reinforced my technical skills but also instilled a deeper understanding of the dynamics of military operations and the significance of each role within a cohesive unit.

- LCpl Rogers

## The Future of 105mm Light Gun Pits in Contemporary Warfare



The employment of 105mm Light Gun pits is undergoing significant transformation in response to the demands of modern conflict. The proliferation of unmanned aerial systems (UAS), persistent surveillance, and precision fires has rendered traditional doctrinal methods of pit construction increasingly impractical.

A full doctrinal gun pit for the 105mm Light Gun requires approximately 6–8 hours to excavate, followed by an additional 2–3 hours for raveling and finishing. In a contested battlespace, such durations are untenable; prolonged use of heavy machinery in

the open is almost certain to attract enemy detection and subsequent engagement.

Practical experience within the Royal Engineers has demonstrated the complexity of these excavations, which involve precise measurements, angled walls, and specialised construction techniques. However, recent trials with 7th Parachute Regiment Royal Horse Artillery (7 RHA) at the Sennybridge Training Area suggest that doctrine may need to adapt. Each battery implemented simplified gun pit designs, deliberately reducing complexity to expedite the process. These modifications halved excavation times to 3–4 hours, significantly reducing exposure to surveillance and enabling artillery assets to become operational far sooner.

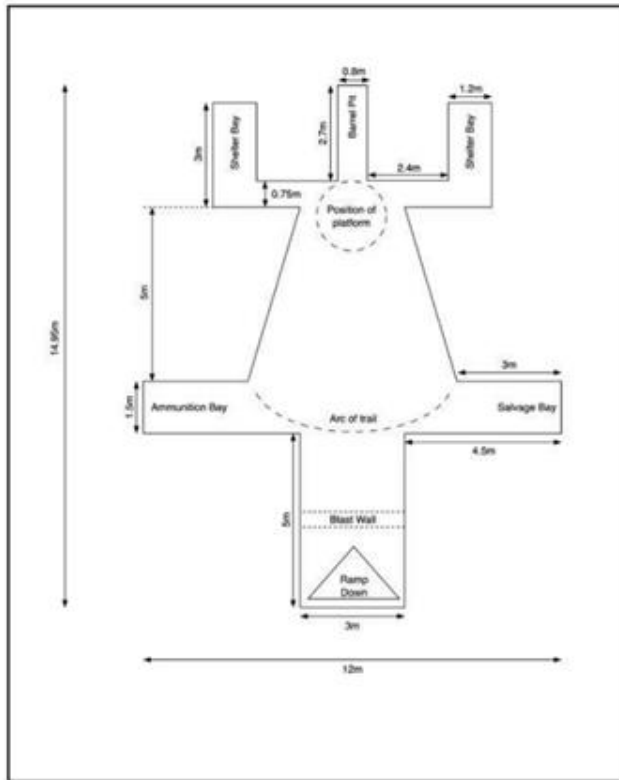


While this approach offers clear tactical advantages, it also entails compromises. Reduced pit dimensions limit available space for ammunition storage and salvage bays. One mitigation strategy involves relocating such bays 30–50 metres away from the primary gun position, thereby maintaining accessibility without increasing excavation time.

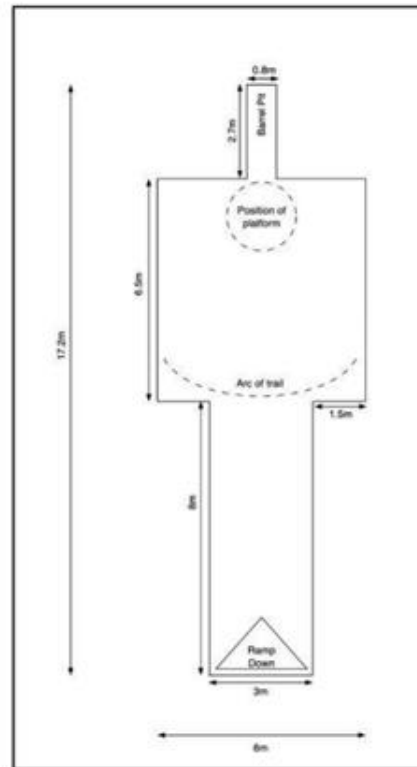


To conclude, the evidence indicates that existing doctrine should be revised to incorporate streamlined excavation methods. These methods better align with the realities of modern surveillance-heavy battlefields, reducing exposure risks to both Royal Engineer personnel and artillery units. Furthermore, the effectiveness of such improvised positions has been demonstrated in both UK training environments and active conflicts, notably in Ukraine. The imperative is clear: doctrine must evolve to prioritise survivability, speed, and operational effectiveness in the employment of the 105mm Light Gun.





105 Gun Pit from the Pam



Improved 105 Gun Pit

## AEA Constitution

### Introduction: The Rewritten Rules of the AEA (National Branch of the REA)

By Phil Taylor

For those with chronic insomnia, I've completed the rewrite of the rules following the merger of the AEA with the REA(A). These new rules are based on the original version written by Joe Houlston, who said, "Phil, no need to reinvent the wheel." So I haven't.

The language has been updated into more modern, straightforward English, hopefully clearer and more succinct, while ensuring the AEA retains its distinctive Airborne ethos. Relevant sections of the REA rules have been incorporated, but with greater autonomy now passed down from AEA Central to the Branches. While recognising that rules are for the guidance of the wise, "must" has been replaced with "should"

Every member with a working email address was sent a link to this copy of the Rules, which were formally adopted at the AGM on 18 October 2025. Any future amendments will be recorded in the Change log and reviewed annually at the AGM. Comments should be directed to the Vice President, AEA, contact details can be found in this Journal.

As Amended by Council in October 2025

Rules of the Airborne Engineers Association (AEA) a National Branch of the Royal Engineers Association (REA)

#### RULES OF THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION (AEA)

*National Branch of the Royal Engineers Association (REA) as at 19 October 2025*

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### 1. Formation

- (a) The Airborne Engineers Association (AEA), a National Branch of the REA, was formed on 18 October 2025 following a merger of the Royal Engineers Association Airborne REA(A) branch and the AEA.
- (b) The AEA, a national branch of the REA (hereafter known as AEA), is governed by Rules approved by the AEA Council. For any areas not covered by AEA rules, members should refer to the REA rules.

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### 2. Motto and Aims

- (a) **Motto** – The motto of the AEA is "SERVICE NOT SELF."
  - (b) **Aims** – The aims of the AEA are:
    - i. To promote and maintain contact between former and current members of airborne units of the Corps of Royal Engineers, by fostering esprit de corps and a spirit of comradeship and service.
    - ii. To promote and maintain friendly and welcoming contact between all members of the AEA and all members of the Royal Engineers Association (REA).
    - iii. To provide a focus for social and other gatherings of members of the AEA.
    - iv. To provide assistance to members of the AEA who require access to welfare or benevolence.
    - v. To maintain an awareness of airborne traditions in units of the Corps and act as a link between serving and retired members of the Corps.
-

### 3. AEA National Branch of REA Organisation

- (a) The AEA shall consist of a Council, Branches, and Social Branches. The following branches are in place:
- Aldershot
  - Birmingham
  - Scotland
  - Yorkshire & Lancashire
  - 299 Association Hull
  - Wales and West
  - Woodbridge Social
  - Chatham Social
  - East Midlands Social
  - Central Admin Branch

Social Branches are groups of AEA Members who meet regularly but do not have a committee and branch structure. To be recognized by the AEA and be informed of AEA/REA activity, Social Branches must have an admin/point of contact. REA members who solely belong to a Social Branch can vote at the AGM and sit on AEA committees.

- (b) **The AEA General Council** – Is a hybrid of serving soldiers and veteran volunteers. There is no restriction on how long a veteran can serve on the council. All council members are to be re-elected at each AGM, except posts tied to Regimental appointments. The RSM is normally the Group Secretary, Treasurer, and Chairman in our structure; his responsibilities are divided into three posts.
- (c) **Patron** – The Association shall have a Patron to whom the appropriate invitation shall be extended by the General Council.
- (d) **The President and Group Director**, by default, is CO 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment.
- (e) **Vice President and Deputy Group Director** – Veteran Volunteer
- (f) **Chairman** – Veteran Volunteer
- (g) **Secretary** – Veteran Volunteer
- (h) **Treasurer** – Veteran Volunteer or Officer 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment
- (i) **Membership Secretary for Regular Soldiers** – Default RSM 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment
- (j) **Membership Secretary Veterans** – Veteran Volunteer
- (k) **REA Operations Committee Representative**
- (l) **IT and Website Manager Veteran Volunteer**
- (m) **Editor of the AEA Journal** – Veteran Volunteer Supported by Regimental Media Officer
- (n) **Shop Manager- Veteran Volunteer**
- (o) **23 Regt PRI Shop Manager** – Regular soldier
- (p) **Welfare Veteran Volunteer**
- (q) **Archivist and Property Member** Veteran volunteer supported if required by Adjt 23 Para Engr Regt.
- (r) Branch Representative – Each branch is entitled to provide a representative to the council.
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#### 4. Powers and Duties of the General Council

Should any duly elected member of the Council be unable to perform his/her duties for six months or more, he/she shall resign, and the Council shall appoint a replacement in his/her place. Such an appointee shall serve until the next AGM, but a retiring appointee, being eligible, may stand for re-election. In furtherance of the stated objects of AEA, the General Council shall have the following powers:

- i. To raise money for the furtherance of the Aims of the AEA.
- ii. To make grants, gifts, or donations to AEA members in particular need, provided such sum is a maximum of £500 and shall be considered exceptional, not regular support. to pay expenses.
- iii. To make payments to branches to support recruiting, engagement, and esprit de corps activities.
- iv. To pay any member of the Council and any member of the Executive Committee of an authorized Branch reasonable out-of-pocket expenses incurred personally when engaged on activities in furtherance of the aims of the AEA.
- v. The General committee is able to approve transactions up to £1000.00. At least 1 Committee members to authorize transaction in addition to the Chairman and Treasurer.

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#### 5. Branches

(a) All AEA Branches are to comply with the Rules of the AEA and any directives issued by the Council in furtherance of its powers and duties.

(b) **Branch Committee (BC) of a Branch.** The following is recommended but not mandatory branch committee, all elected or re-elected by the Branch in general meeting:

Branch President  
Branch Chairman  
Branch Secretary/ Membership secretary  
Branch Treasurer  
Welfare Member  
Entertainment Member

(c) **General Council (GC) and Branch Committees (BC)** Should be guided by the following rules:

- i. The GC and BC shall meet whenever its Chairman deems necessary.
- ii. The BC shall comply with directives from the GC and shall be responsible to the GC for executing policies laid down by the GC.
- iii. The BC shall have the power to raise its own annual subscription from its members.
- iv. The BC must have three voting members present to form a quorum. In the event of equality of votes, the Chairman shall have a second or casting vote.
- v. The GC and BC may elect a person to be a Family or Friend Member (includes Honorary Members).

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#### 6. Minutes/Action Notes

The BC and GC Secretary shall record all resolutions and procedures within four weeks of the meeting. The BC shall forward their minutes to the GC and all branches.

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## 7. Voting

- (a) Every resolution at General Council, and Branch meetings shall be decided by a simple majority of votes of those present and entitled to vote.
  - (b) In the event of equality of votes, the Chairman shall have a second or casting vote.
  - (c) The Council shall have the power to call for a national vote of all registered members should the need arise, particularly for motions altering fundamentally the objects or ethos of the AEA.
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## 8. Rules of the AEA

- (a) The rules are to be published on the AEA website by the Secretary of the General Committee. All new members are to be signposted to the rules by the Branch Secretary on joining the AEA. By joining the AEA, you agree to follow General Data protection Regulation GDPR.
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## 9. Accounts

- (a) The AEA General Treasurer and each Branch Treasurer shall keep books of accounts. Accounts are to close 31 December and Balance Sheet shall be submitted on the REA website by the January 31. Accounts may be called for audit in February by the Charity Commission auditors.
  - (b) **Annual Accounts** – At each AGM, an audited income, expenditure account and a balance sheet, recording account) as at that meeting shall be presented.
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## 10. Subscriptions

- (a) There is no annual subscription or joining fee for the AEA or REA.
  - (b) **Legacies & Donations** – Donations can be made online via the REA website. Donations are to be earmarked for the AEA account, and the AEA Treasurer is to be notified.
  - (c) Any member whose Branch annual subscription has expired shall not be eligible to vote at Branch meetings. This is at the discretion of the Branch Chairman.
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## 11. Membership Categories

There are three categories of membership:

- (a) **Life Membership** – All new Life Members are to be allocated to a branch. Any person who has served in an Airborne Engineer unit, or any member of the Corps who has served on the posted strength of a Special Forces unit. The Council reserves the power to veto an application if it considers it in the best interests of the AEA.
  - (b) **Family & Friend Membership** Includes Honorary Membership. Open to parents, children (over 18), partners, siblings, and friends of former and serving Sappers. Family members may be subject to different costs for centrally funded events. Family and Friend members are approved by a branch vote.
  - (c) **All Arms Membership** Veterans and serving members of any arm or service (including Cadet Force Instructors) are eligible. All Arms members are approved by a branch vote.
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## 12. Commendations and Honours

- (a) **President's Commendation** – May be presented annually to any AEA member giving particularly meritorious service. Nominations may be made by any member. The President may be assisted by two Council members. Nominations must reach the General Secretary by 15 August each year.
- (b) **REA Badges of Merit and Chief Royal Engineers Commendation** – AEA members are eligible to be awarded (see REA rules 18.01 Rules of the Royal Engineers association version dated 13 Feb 24).

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## 13. Breach of Rules Procedure

- (a) The Association at national and branch level may investigate suspected breaches of AEA rules.
- (b) Rules are binding; acceptance of membership indicates willingness to abide by them. Membership may be ceased by individual resignation or expulsion. Expelled members may only rejoin by resolution of the GC.

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## 14. Frequency and Types of Meetings

- (a) **AEA Annual General Meeting (AGM)** – Held annually, normally in October. Business includes receiving accounts, reports, election of Council members, and review rule amendments.
- (b) **REA Annual General Meeting** All members of the Association are entitled to attend REA General Meetings. Each AEA Branch and a member of the General Committee is entitled to nominate one of its members as a delegate to General Meetings of the REA, with full voting powers (Branch Delegates). See Rules of the REA para 11.14 Version 13 Feb 2024
- (c) **Special General Meeting (SGM)** – May be requisitioned by the President or Chairman, with 14 clear days' notice. Majority of eligible members must vote in favour for a resolution to pass.
- (d) **Ordinary General Meeting (OGM)** – May be convened by the GC or BC for members to discuss matters concerning their Branch.

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## 15. Official Announcements

All official announcements of the AEA shall be distributed to members with current email addresses, posted on the website, and may be included in the Airborne Engineers Journal.

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## 16. Regulations

The Council may make Regulations for the day-to-day running of the AEA, consistent with these Rules. Due notice is 30 days after promulgation.

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## 17. Dress Code

Rules of Dress for Standard Bearers

Dress Code for AEA Standard Bearers – see REA Annex A to Reg rules 2018 version 13 Feb 24.

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## 18. Closures of the AEA or an AEA Branch

In accordance with REA rules, on closure branch funds will be returned to the AEA account of the REA (see REA Rules 17.05, 2018 version 13). On closure the AEA central Account funds will be returned to the REA.

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## Annex A to Airborne Engineers Association Constitution

Duties of the General Council Members and Branch Council Members

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### 1. President / Group Director

- (a) Be an ambassador for the AEA/REA to represent their group on national matters.
  - (b) Ensure effective administration of the group.
  - (c) Decide on members to be put forward for the REA Badges of Merit and to endorse applications with their recommendation
  - (d) Award AEA Presidents /Group Director's Commendation and certificate to members doing particularly good work for the benefit of the group.
  - (e) Confirm in writing, the poor state of worn-out branch standards and the need for a new one, when they are to be replaced due to its poor condition.
  - (f) The President / Group Director are expected to visit Branches at least once during their tenure.
- 

### 2. Vice President/ Deputy Group Director

- (a) Review REA rules prior to AGM and prepare a report on any changes affecting the AEA as a National Branch of the REA.
  - (b) Support the President Group Director in discharging the duties above.
  - (c) Deputies for the President /Group Director (in such matters as AGM meetings where necessary)
  - (d) Provide continuity (in such matters as Badges of Merit and Group Directors Commendations)
  - (e) Represent the group at REA meetings where the nominated AEA member is not available.
- 

### 3. Branch President

- (a) The Branch President has both a representational and encouraging function. The incumbent should be a person able to counsel the Chair and Branch committee as necessary in the execution of their duties.
  - (b) The President is a voting member of a branch they should open and close the Branch meeting.
  - (c) Succession Planning: Discuss potential Branch President candidates with the Branch committee. The retiring President establishes the willingness of the President designated to serve and accept the duties involved.
-

#### **4. Chairman**

- (a) To keep order at meetings.
  - (b) To ensure the agenda and motions before the meetings are adequately discussed in the time available.
  - (c) To give rulings when necessary and ensure the business is conducted in accordance with the rules, including REA rules.
  - (d) To ensure discussion is as wide as possible with everyone given an opportunity to speak.
- 

#### **5. Branch /General Secretary**

- (a) To record the minutes of all Association meetings.
  - (b) To deal with correspondence concerning all matters affecting the Association.
  - (c) To manage the routine organisation and administration of the Association.
- 

#### **6. General Council Treasurer**

- (a) To monitor and submit funds and payment invoices to the AEA central account held by the REA.
  - (b) To support Branches where required to ensure accounts close each 31 December, and an annual balance sheet is submitted by 31 January each year.
  - (c) To be responsible to the General Council for the efficient administration of sales from the Association Shop and for transferring profit from such sales to the funds of the Association.
- 

#### **7. Branch Treasurer**

- (a) The Branch Treasurer is to administer the financial management of the Branch, ensuring the accounts are presented in a clear way at the branch meetings.
  - (b) The Branch Treasurer must always bring to the attention of the branch the financial implications of any decision they are considering. Where Branch Funds are held centrally monitor and submit funds and payment invoices to the AEA central account held by the REA.
  - (c) To receive from the Branch Secretary or Membership Secretary all membership subscriptions and to ensure that all monies received are banked at the earliest opportunity, entered into the ledger/cashbook and that supporting documents are filed and safeguarded.
  - (d) To ensure that all cheques are signed by at least two of the authorized signatories, one of whom shall be the Treasurer, and that they are clearly endorsed 'A/C.' All Branch expenditure is to be authorised and minuted during branch meetings.
  - (e) If the Branch uses Internet banking these transactions must also be checked prior to a Branch meeting by the Treasurer and at least one other Branch member.
  - (f) Branches are not to use a Petty Cash system.
  - (g) To ensure accounts close each 31 December, and an annual balance sheet is submitted online by 31 January each year to the REA. Supply Charity commission auditors with end of year account if requested.
  - (h) Branches should aim to hold no more than 3K. Where a branch account is held centrally there is no restriction on the amount it holds as the audit process is carried out by REA central.
-

## **8. Membership Secretaries**

- (a) Canvassing of potential members.
  - (b) Support REA Membership Secretary in processing applications and registering members.
  - (c) Request and cross-reference Branch list with REA lists.
  - (d) Where eligibility is in doubt, consult Branch members for guidance.
- 

## **9. Editor of the Association Journal**

- (a) To collate articles and contributions for the journal and prepare them for publication. Authors are solely responsible for accuracy; the Editor ensures content does not cause offence or conflict with the Association's traditions. Uncertainties are to be referred to the general Committee.
  - (b) To engage a printer and liaise in all matters relating to preparation or arrange distribution of an e-copy online.
  - (c) To arrange the distribution of the Journal according to the frequency agreed with the Executive Committee.
  - (d) To control the sale of advertising space in the Journal.
  - (e) Maintain the front cover of the Journal and offer any proposed changes to the Executive Committee for approval.
  - (f) To have an awareness of any potential copyright infringements included in Journal content.
- 

## **10. Archivist and Property Member**

- a. To record, collate, arrange storage, and disseminate items related to the history of the Association or Airborne units of the Royal Engineers
  - b. To make relevant documents available for historical research and control access to prevent loss.
  - c. To inform the AGM of donations to the Association during the previous year.
  - d. To inform members of the Association's history and Airborne Engineers' operations via articles and displays.
  - e. In the event of the Association's demise, arrange safe depositing of all historical documents with an appropriate museum or library, with first choice, the RE Museum Brompton and second choice 23 Para Engr Regt
  - f. The Archivist may recruit a deputy to share the responsibilities of recording and collating history.
- 

## **11. Branch Entertainments Member**

- a. To co-ordinate the planning and running of social events for members' benefit and enjoyment.
  - b. To control the financial accounts of social events.
  - c. To provide the social event statement of accounts as required to the Treasurer.
-

## **12. Welfare Advisor**

- a. To co-ordinate all matters relating to welfare within the Association and its branches.
  - b. To act as the point of contact for members regarding welfare.
  - c. To liaise with external agencies on behalf of the AEA in matters of welfare.
- 

## **13. AEA Shop Manager and 23 Regt PRI Shop Manager**

- a. Maintain and secure all shop stock.
  - b. Liaise with suppliers to ensure stock remains fresh and supports the objects of the Association.
  - c. Ensure all monies are accounted for and banked promptly.
  - d. The shop stock and monies will be audited at least once per year by a member appointed by the Chairman.
- 

## **14. IT Member**

- a. Edit, maintain, and administer the AEA website.
  - b. Ensure the AEA site supports the aims and constitution of the AEA and is engaging for visitors.
  - c. Redirect enquiries received via the website to the appropriate AEA member.
  - d. Liaise with service providers and maintain payments via the Treasurer to ensure the site remains stable, secure, and operational.
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## **19. Change Log**

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## AGM Minutes



*Airborne Engineers Association  
Registered Charity Number 1009201*

*President: Lt Col David Crosbie RFE  
Chairman: Dave Leibrick – Tel: 07722 256742  
Email: daveleibrick@outlook.com  
Secretary: Mike Robertson BEM – Tel: 07958 650592  
Email: michaelj.robertson@outlook.com*



# MINUTES OF THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

## 18 OCTOBER 2025

### 1. OPENING

- 1.1 The Chairman opened the meeting and thanked the Scotland Branch for their hard working in organising the AGM and gala dinner.
- 1.2 The Chairman stated that an attendance form was being circulated and requested that all present complete the form.
- 1.3 Formal apologies were received from the following: Mike Robertson; Dave Pace; Jon Nichols; Bobby Matthews; Graig Gadd (who attended via phone): and Capt Marc Dorkings.
- 1.4 The Chairman gave the Exhortation and lead the minute silence in memory of fallen comrades.

### 2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

- 2.1 The minutes of previous AGM and OGM meetings have been produced, circulated, and included on the website.
- 2.2 There were no comments from the floor, so the Chairman asked for a proposer and seconder that the minutes as recorded be accepted.

Proposer: Paul Moore      Seconder: Tony Caswell      Vote: Carried

### 3. ELECTION OF OFFICERS & PRESIDENT & CHAIRMAN HANDOVER

- 3.1 During the OGM Dave Leibrick was voted in as the new Chairman of the Association. The Chairmanship of the AEA was officially handed over to Dave who continued to run the meeting. A vote of thanks was held to say thank you to Steve Wallis for his seven year of service.
- 3.2 Phil Taylor ran through the new organisational structure, which consists of:

1. President and Group Director - CO 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment, default appointment
2. Vice President - Veteran volunteer (Phil Taylor)
3. Chairman - Veteran volunteer (Dave Leibrick)
4. Secretary - Veteran volunteer (Mike Robertson)
5. Treasurer - RAO 23 Para Engr Regt (Regiment to take on for one year while looking for a veteran)
6. Membership Secretary - Serving soldier, RSM 23 Para Engr Regt - Veterans, Billy Morris
7. REA Operations Committee - Paul Moore
8. IT and Website Manager - Dave Pace
9. Editor, AEA Journal - Steve Wallis
10. Shop Manager - Jon Nichols
11. 23 Para Engr Regt PRI - RSM's Clerk
12. Welfare Point of Contact - Paul Moore
13. Archivist and Property - Baz Bassett (Archives remain at the Corps Museum. Nick Wilson and Baz will oversee the process. If memorabilia are not required by the museum, it will be offered to 23 Para Engr Regt POC Adjt.)

There was one question from the floor regarding Nick Gibson who will continue in his present role regarding digital archive material.

The Chairman asked for a proposer and seconder that the structure as recorded be accepted.

Proposer: Frank Ryan      Seconder: John Askey      Vote: Carried

Following the vote the Chairman welcomed the CO and RSM of 23 Para Engr Regt, who will be representing serving members, to the meeting.

#### **4. REA/AEA MERGER**

- 4.1 The meeting was briefed on key points from the Merger Transition Document. The Updated Document is attached for reference.

#### **5. REVISION TO THE CONSTITUTION**

- 5.1 The new constitution was explained and discussed. A breakdown of questions, which includes questions forwarded by members who could not attend the AGM, is enclosed. The Rules of the AEA, a national branch of the REA dated 18th October 2025, will be uploaded onto the AEA website.

The Chairman asked for a proposer and seconder that the revision to the constitution as recorded be accepted.

Proposer: Steve Wallis      Seconder: Tom Dunne      Vote: Carried

## 6. TREASURERS REPORT.

- 6.1 The associations treasurer, Lt Col (Retd) Bob Matthews, provided a written summary of accounts. The report, read out by the meeting secretary, is attached to these minutes.

Total Assets are £19,910.12 which includes £4,596.96 in shop stock.

The Chairman asked for a proposer and seconder that the Treasurers Report as recorded be accepted.

Proposer: Mick Leather                      Seconder: Paul Moore  
Vote: Carried

- 6.2 Phil Taylor briefed that with the merger we would have circa. £26,000 in the central fund which is very heathy. However, since Capt. Tom and the misappropriation of funds incident, the charity commission are very looking more closely at Military charities. The larger the sums held the more questions are raised by the auditors. As an organisation we should spend more to benefit members.

The following Bids were discussed and agreed they are listed here for completeness:

- £2,000 was voted for recruiting, retention, and Esprit de Corp to be paid from central account to each Branch account.
- £650 voted to Yorkshire Branch for Normandy 2026 trip to offset transport, wreaths etc.. All Members of AEA will be eligible to join trip and will be allocated on a first to pay deposit basis.
- £50 allocated to Yorkshire branch to refund Ed Van der Lan for the 2 wreaths he purchased for Arnhem 2025 trip.
- £3,000 was voted to support the John Rock Dinner and AGM Nottingham 2026.

Standing Minutes: The following were discussed and agreed.

- AEA Outstanding Achievement/Performance Award of £100 presented each Gala dinner to a member of 23 Para Engr Regt. The individual to be selected by CO, RSM, and Vice President AEA. Next requirement for payment Oct 2026.
- Payment of PME for Cromwell Lock circa £350. This will be required every 5 years. Next requirement for payment 2030. This may also be subject to a funding bid to the REA.
- Annual payment of £250 to organisers of the Double Hills service. Next required payment Aug 2026.

The Chairman asked for a proposer and seconder that the applications for funding as recorded be accepted.

Proposer: Tim Van Der Kraan                      Seconder: Keith Coventry    Vote: Carried

## 7. ASSOCIATION SHOP REPORT

- 7.1 The Association's shop report was prepared by JB Nichols and outlined by the meeting Secretary and is attached to these minutes.

• Total income as at 6 <sup>th</sup> Oct 2025	£1,100.49
• Total expenses from income	£183.23
• Payment to bank	£917.26
• Stock costs from sales	£413.69
• Leaving available funds	£503.57
• Stock held by shop	£4,511.58

The Chairman asked for a proposer and seconder that the Association Shop Report as recorded be accepted.

Proposer: Mick Walker                      Seconder: Tony Dalton                      Vote: Carried

## **8. JOURNAL - EDITORS & WEBMASTERS REPORT**

- 8.1 The Journal and Webmasters report was prepared by Dave Pace and presented by Steve Wallis. A copy of the report is attached to these minutes. In particular, the amount of work that has gone into linking the AEA website to that of the REA and 23 PRI was noted. A vote of thanks was held to recognise the amount of work that Dave Pace and Jon Nichols had put in.

The issue of copyrights for pictures was raised and should be noted by anyone considering contributing an article for the Journal. The AEA had been informed that we are in breach of copyright on a photo used in one particular article. Following discussions with the company raising the issue it was agreed to pay £101. Following discussions in the meeting, it was agreed that in future, should this issue arise again, the Association will refuse to communicate with the company in question.

The Chairman asked for a proposer and seconder that the Journal Editors and Webmasters Report as recorded be accepted.

Proposer: Gil Nicol                      Seconder: Mike Blackmore                      Vote: Carried

## **9. MEMBERSHIP REPORT**

- 9.1 The National Membership Secretary Billy Morris (who has been in post for 21 years!) outlined the process of merging the AEA and REA databases for veterans and serving soldiers, into one membership database and bringing new AEA members on board. Dave Pace and Anne Richardson have been particularly helpful in the process.

Total Membership pre-merger	- 1577
Less those departed to the final DZ	- 497
Membership Total	- 1080

However, we only have email addresses for 516 of which 312 voted in the merger vote. It is in everyone's interest to ensure their details are correct and that the branch secretaries have up-to-date email addresses.

## **10. WELFARE LIAISONS OFFICERS REPORT**

- 10.1 The Welfare Officers report was presented by Maj (Retd) Paul Moore. It was stated that there had been two welfare issues during the year. Both are progressing well, and Paul remains on standby to provide further assistance should any be required. The report is attached to these minutes for reference.

## **11. PRESIDENTS AWARDS/COMMENDATIONS**

- 11.1 No details were given during the meeting as the awards will be announced during the gala dinner. However, for the record the following received Presidents Commendations:

- Gordon McLeod - Scotland Branch
- Bruce Tocher - for his ongoing research into Operation Freshman

The Chairman stated that if any member wishes to nominate anyone for consideration for a President's award/commendation, the nomination should be sent to the National Secretary for the President's deliberation.

## **12. BRANCH REPORTS**

12.1 A number of Branch reports were received and delivered by members of the branch. Where possible these are attached to these minutes.

12.2 The CO of 23 mentioned the possibility of the regiment hosting an airborne forces day in 2026. Comments from the floor welcomed the possibility but requested that the date did not clash with the airborne forces weekend held in Aldershot. It was also suggested that the AEA may wish to pay for a curry lunch/dinner for any veteran attending.

### **Afternote:**

Branch reports should be succinct and follow a consistent structure. At present, each branch produces their own report without any guidance, resulting in varied formats and unnecessary time spent preparing them. To streamline this process, branches are requested to submit their report for the OGM and AGM at least one week before each meeting to the National Secretary, using the following headings and format:

1. Number of active members - an active member is defined as someone who has responded to branch emails or attended a branch event within the past year.
2. Amount available in branch funds.
3. Number of meetings held per year.
4. One significant branch event of the year; and
5. One point of interest or useful practice that may benefit members of other branches.

## **13. 23 PARACHUTE ENGINEER REGIMENT UPDATE**

13.1 The Regimental update was delivered by the CO and RSM of the regiment during the gala dinner.

## **14. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES**

14.1 There were no matters arising from the previous minutes.

## **15. ITEMS FROM MEMBERS**

15.1 Paul Moore spoke about the Airborne Riders Association regarding their structure and member numbers. Paul also spoke about upcoming events, and particularly the possibility of attending an airborne force's day in Woodbridge.

15.2 It was suggested that the AGM should be transmitted, via a Zoom call, for all those unable to attend the meeting in person. This will be investigated for the next meeting by the national secretary.

15.3 It was mentioned that Charlie McColgan, together with Chris North, had made over 20 trips to Ukraine, delivering much appreciated supplies and on one occasion a complete working ambulance!

## **16. MAJOR REMEMBRANCE EVENTS AND SERVICES**

16.1 The Chairman reviewed a number of major events attended by members of the AEA in the past 12 months. These included:

- VE Day celebration at 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment RE at Woodbridge - 8<sup>th</sup> May
- Falklands Service of Remembrance, the Falklands Chapel, Pangbourne School - 15th June.
- Squadron Falklands wreath laying at Aldershot Military Cemetery - Saturday 14th June meeting at 10.30hrs.tbc
- Hardwick Hall - Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> May.
- Double Hills - Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> Sept.

- Cromwell Lock - Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> Sept (50<sup>th</sup> anniversary).
- 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron RE remembrance service - Donnington 28<sup>th</sup> September.
- Falklands Ride of Respect 7-8 June.
- National Service of Remembrance at the Cenotaph Sunday 9 November. It is anticipated that the AEA will be awarded a good number of places.

16.2 The following event will be attended by members of the Association between now and the end of the year:

- The National Service of Remembrance at the Cenotaph, Sunday 9th November.

## **17. AGM AND GALA BALL**

17.1 A vote of thanks was held to thank the Scotland Branch for organising and hosting the 2025 AGM and gala ball.

17.2 Mick Ellery gave an overview of the timings for the weekend's arrangements.

17.3 The 2026 John Rock Dinner and AGM will be hosted by the East Midlands Social Branch. Steve Wallis briefed the meeting on the event which will mark the merger of the AEA and REA (A). The application proforma will be distributed in hard copy with the next AEA Journal.

## **18. ANY OTHER BUSINESS AT NATIONAL LEVEL**

18.1 There was no other business at a national level to discuss.

## **19. NATIONAL PRESIDENTS' POINTS**

19.1 The RSM mentioned that if a representative from the regiment would be appreciated at a former airborne engineers' funeral, then he should be contacted. While it cannot be guaranteed that anyone will be available the regiment will do its best to accommodate the request.

## **20. NEXT MEETING DATE**

20.1 An OGM will be held mid-April 2026, the exact date to be confirmed.

20.2 As previously mentioned the 2026 John Rock Dinner and AGM will be hosted by the East Midlands Social Branch - date TBC.

## **21. CHAIRMANS' CLOSING REMARKS**

21.1 The Chairman thanked everyone for attending the AGM and for their participation and looked forward to seeing everyone at the 2026 meeting.

21.2 The Chairman closed the meeting at 12:17.

## Branch Reports

### 299 Association – Branch Report October 2025



A quiet year for the 299 Association thus so far

May is our AGM and annual photo, we had a great turn out from members and members further afield who always make a special effort for the AGM. We also had some guests from 299 Para Squadron, keeping our links strong with the Sqn. We also give any presentations that are due and this year we presented the Les Ransom Shield, to Pete Robson, Pete is one of our stalwarts and supports everything in what we do at the association.

We also sent a maintenance crew to the Cromwell Lock Monument to maintain the memorial garden.

June, Attended the funeral of a 299 Association member Robert Meachen unexpectedly died of a heart attack.

July,

Again our turn to maintain the Cromwell Lock memorial garden and monument. Painted the metal fence surrounding the monument and pointed up the paving stones to help reduce the weeds growing through and cut the grass.

August,

Saw our monthly meeting with NTR

September,

Wednesday before the Memorial Service at Cromwell, five of 299 stalwarts attended Cromwell Lock for the finishing touches and garden maintenance were made just before the 50th Anniversary.

Attended the 50th Anniversary at Cromwell Lock tragedy which was our main event for the year. A lot of hard work had been put in, to make sure that the ten young Sappers will never be forgotten by this association. It was great to have acknowledgment from His Majesty King of the event and His Excellency Lt General, Sir John Lorimer chairman of the Parachute and Airborne Force charity and Governor of the Isle of Man. Also in attendance was the most senior airborne soldier for the reserves, Deputy Commander 3 UK Division, Brigadier Adam Fraser-Hitchen reading an extract from the Generals letter, words of comfort he had sent to the 299 Vice Chairman for the families of the fallen.

We had a fantastic turnout from the men of 299 Association. Along with serving member of 299 Para Sqn RE and 131 Cdo Sqn RE. A great turn out by all, great to show the families in attendance, that their loved ones will never be forgotten.

Although 299 didn't have an annual trip this year. Our Vice Chairman Craig Gadd went to Arnhem with the Airborne Forces Riders. He took part in several events and services laying flowers, crosses and wreaths across a 100 graves throughout Arnhem by the riders and not just at Oosterbeek War Cemetery and Driel.

This year we have lost

- Ole Nelson- Girtchen.
- Dave Harvey.
- Bob Meachen.
- Mick Halliday.
- John (Willy) Harrison
- Alan Cross

The last three all within a week or so.

**"May they all Rest In Peace"**

**Craig**

**Vice chairman, 299 Association RE**

## AEA Aldershot Branch Report 2025 for AGM

1. The Branch continues to have a healthy membership of 29. Unfortunately, not all members are able to attend the Branch meetings, but all remain committed to supporting the Branch whenever possible.
2. The Branch unfortunately said goodbye to Ray Coleman who passed away earlier in the year and who was a loyal supporter of the Association.
3. A spring lunch was held in February at the Bush Hotel in Farnham. This is proving to be a very popular event, organised, and generously supported, by Chris Davies. The provisional date for next year is Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2026.
4. Tony Manley has recently become an “in pensioner” at the Royal Hospital Chelsea. Tony, together with Paul Sinclair (4 Troop during the Falklands campaign) have agreed to host a visit by the Aldershot Branch to the Hospital in 2026.
5. The South Coast Ramblers continue with their monthly walks with a hard core of walkers and small number of lunch “guests” attending.
6. An election of officers was held in early April with Sir Donald Spiers and Dick Brown agreeing to continue in the roles as President and Chairman respectively. Dave Rutter decided to step down as Secretary/Treasurer. Dave Ford was elected as the new Secretary/Treasurer. A sincere vote of thanks was extended to Dave Rutter for his long and extensive service to the Aldershot Branch.
7. The annual service at the Aldershot military cemetery, organised by Chris Davies, to remember those who lost their lives during the Falklands war took place
8. Chris Davies organised a visit to the Aldershot Military Museum. Unfortunately, given the history of the military in Aldershot, was very disappointing.

## Chatham AEA Update

As you are aware the decision to close the Chatham Branch was not taken easily. The members had discussed and debated the decision for over two years. As always, all factors were taken into consideration. I personally wanted to thank the members of the branch for their support over the many years in supporting the AEA. I also wanted to add mine and the Cttee’s thanks to the honorary branch members and most of all to the Widows and wives of past and present members, who have given outstanding support. I am sure those who have attended the branches events over the years will agree that it was always great fun to attend and you were always made welcome.

The very last Duty which the AEA Chatham Branch was to carry out was, to present the Kent Surry Sussex Air Ambulance Charity a Cheque for £ 1,245.68.

This was only possible due to both generosity & support of its members, families and friends over the 28 years since THE Branch was formed.

But what of the future? The key to the Chatham members is to try to retain contact with all. Although not a formal branch, it was discussed that Tim V D K would continue to act as the POC for the members and liaise with the Secretary AEA and membership secretary. Mike Tindle will hold a list of the widows and Baz Bassett is happy to assist as liaison with the National Branch. Between Tim and Baz, it is hoped that members in the Medway area can be kept informed and also represented with their views.

It is appreciated that the amalgamation will throw up a number of changes, and it is hoped that using, Tim and Baz in posts we can continue to inform Chatham members of the way ahead. Until the new AEA/REA(A) system is running smoothly it is hoped that Tim and Baz can update the group of individuals and advise members as necessary until the new posts are bedded in. How the branch operates socially is still being planned as to the way ahead.

I am delighted that the amalgamation of Airborne Sappers under the REA has been a success, and I know from speaking to the Chatham members, they are delighted in being part of the complete process. My apologies for being unable to attend the AGM and dinner but I wish the members a successful evening and I wish you all the very best.

Baz

## AEA Birmingham Branch Report for AGM

By Steve Brown

**First of all, Steve Brown sends his apologies for not attending this AGM.**

### **1. MEETINGS.**

The branch has a potential membership of 45 with around 15 to 22 members attending monthly meetings.

The meeting venue is always welcoming and will allow the branch to try different timings to try and retain members which is obviously our prime concern. Last winter the branch trialled breakfast/lunch time meetings where members could partake in a breakfast prior to the meeting start time of 12:00hrs. These meetings proved popular and gave a chance for members who are reluctant to drive in the darker months a chance to attend meetings.

The Branch held its AGM in April 2025 which was well supported but like other branches members are reluctant to take on any of the key committee posts, so it falls on the few existing branch committee members to take the load. Some of the current committee members hold several posts on the committee which is not ideal and puts pressure on these individuals.

Recruitment of new members remains difficult as with most branches and with an aging membership this is a concern along with some members being in poor health.

The AEA-REA(A) merger has been debated heavily at meetings.

### **2. BRANCH SOCIAL EVENTS.**

The branch continues, on a regular basis, to have a social side to include wives or partners, meeting up for restaurant meals including family members. The branch Breakfast Club, which is held regularly and allows a more informal atmosphere.

The Branch held its Christmas Dinner on the 7<sup>th</sup> December 2024 which was another branch success and well attended but would be better if more branch members came along.

A branch trip to the Birmingham Tattoo has been booked for February 2026 with good interest from members. The main event for the Branch is the Annual Dinner which this has been forward slightly and will be on Saturday 29th November 2025 which should see the year out on another positive and festive note and open to all AEA members.

### **3. MEMORIAL SERVICES.**

Branch members continue to support Airborne and PRA events and Services with members attending Hardwick Hall in May, PRA service at NMA in July and Double Hills in September.

This year however, the Birmingham Branch and 299 Association have been very busy with organising and the planning of the 50th Cromwell Lock Anniversary which was on Sunday 28th September 2025 and proved to be a poignant but very successful Memorial Service.

There was an excellent attendance for the 50th anniversary commemoration of the Cromwell Lock Disaster. On the day there were Family members of the Sappers who died, AEA Members, AEA Birmingham branch, 299 Association, elements of 131 Commando Squadron and 299 Parachute Squadron, The Airborne Riders, ex-members of 131 Squadron from far and wide, both Maroon and Green Berets, along with many Standards and too many more to name. It was estimated that there were between 150 – 200 attending.

The following dignitaries attended, The Lord Lieutenant of Nottingham's representative, Mayor of Newark Barbara Corrigan, Brigadier Adam Fraser-Hitchen (Deputy Commander (Reserves) 3rd (UK) Division), Col (Retd) Bill Pagan

MBE, MStJ, TD, DL, FRSA. Wing Commander Nigel Branston, and the Reverend Georgie Hadley gave the service. Unfortunately, Col (Retd) John Lee was unable to attend due to his wife becoming ill.

A big thanks to all of the organising committee **Mike Holdsworth Eamon Smith Craig Gadd Chris Shillito Tom Smith Tom Dunne Mick Williams, John Phillips and Steve Brown**, apologies if anyone has been omitted.

The Birmingham branch and 299 Association continue to maintain the garden and memorial at Cromwell Lock in good condition.

The memorial to those who perished stands as a permanent tribute just in front of Cromwell Lock, ensuring their sacrifice is never forgotten.

Branch Members are attending the Remembrance Parade at the Cenotaph in November with the AEA contingent. Some of our members have independently attended the 80th anniversary at Arnhem this year and some members travelled with the Yorkshire branch.

#### **4. WELFARE.**

Over the last 12 months the branch has lost members, **Gordon Page, Brian Fosbury, John Duckenfield and Doug Twiss**. Member **Mike Coleman's wife, Dorothy** passed away in February. Member **Derek Yeo's wife, Kath** passed away in September. **Paul Lightwood** who was not a member but served in 131 Regiment in the sixties passed away in September 2025.

#### **AEA – Scotland Branch Report-October 2025**

1. Andy Nelson assumed the Branch chairmanship at our Branch AGM in November 2024.
2. Some of us gathered in April to mark the 60th anniversary of the death (KIA) of our WWII John Lonergan in what was then Aden. A few who served with John and were present at the action in which he was killed attended. Unfortunately, our stalwart member Gil Nicol fell outside afterwards trying to avoid a child capering about and this resulted in him being hospitalised and generally being put out of action for a good while.
3. June saw us parading at Leith cemetery at the grave of Scott Wilson. Scott was an Edinburgh born corporal in 9 Sqn and was killed in the Falklands and the parade for him is becoming increasingly popular with his ex-comrades.
4. We enjoyed an annual lunch with our partners at the Guards Club in Edinburgh. The meal was very good as was the venue given that it is next door to Haymarket Station, which meant that people from out of the capital could attend without fear of the police on the return journey.
5. Given that Gil was hors de combat Andy stepped in to organise the Grangemouth end of the Cromwell Lock commemoration. One or two who normally attend went down to the scene of the tragedy where 10 Sappers based in Grangemouth perished.
6. They were remembered in speeches by the Chairman, the Lord Lieutenant, Provost of Falkirk District Council and our Padre. This being the 50th anniversary the parade was very well attended, Standards were on parade along with representatives from the District Council, Army & Navy and RAF cadets and members of the local RBL. A fuller report will appear in December's Journal.
7. Our normal activities continued in harness with the foregoing, but it would be remiss of me not to mention the effort put in primarily by Mike Ellery in organising this AGM. Well done.

Regards

Mick Walker Secretary, AEA Scotland

## Wales and West Branch update. AGM 2025



1. Branch Members - 73 on the books.
  - a. Many of those shown on the database do not respond to emails, letters or attend meetings (No change from Last Year). From this year, anyone who has not paid subs will not receive any future contact from the branch
  - b. We hope to attract more members once the Merger has had chance to bed in
2. Meetings:
  - a. Meetings are taking place on a quarterly basis subject to availability
  - b. The last meeting was held on 13 September with 6 in attendance
  - c. The next meeting will be held on 13 Dec 25.
  - d. Our last meeting was held in Wales later to take the pressure off those who have to travel far. We hope to expand further in 2026
3. Charity:
  - a. The current branch charity is the Herefordshire Veterans support Centre.
  - b. The branch has a whip round after each meeting which they use to buy refreshments for veterans who visit the centre.
4. Welfare:
  - a. Pat Neal continues to receive treatment for his cancer. He is now being treated with Immunotherapy and appears to be doing well
5. AGM:
  - a. Several Members from the branch will be attending the AGM in Falkirk



## Annual Report – Yorkshire Branch 2025

1. In Memory of Joe Houlston  
This year we sadly lost our AEA Member Number One, Joe Houlston, after a courageous fight with cancer. The AEA came together to ensure Joe's final wishes for a full military service were honoured. CO 23 Engr Regt was presented with Joe's Book. "Born to be a Soldier"  
Our thanks go to Ian Rosenburge, Steve Wallis, and John Ferry, who ensured it was a truly Airborne affair. Like Bill Rudd, Joe will be greatly missed by the Yorkshire Branch and by all who served alongside him. We also lost Jim Mellors – with thanks to Tomo, who did a great job ensuring an Airborne presence – as well as Frank Small (Brid), and the very lovely Sheila Prosser.
2. Host Unit  
Once again, we continue to be well hosted by 299 Para Sqn RE in Wakefield. Their ongoing support is very much appreciated.
3. Arnhem 2025 and Looking Ahead  
This year, 16 members from three branches made the organised trip to Arnhem, once again expertly guided by Ed Van Der Lan.  
Ed secured us a 20% discount on the EuroParcs block booking, a great deal on minibus hire, and arranged an excellent BBQ buffet (which the Airborne Riders helped to finish off!).  
Looking ahead, the Yorkshire Branch will lead a trip to Normandy in June 2026, with Ed kindly volunteering to guide the tour. The plan is for around five days, focusing on the 6th Airborne Division, including Pegasus Bridge, Horsea Bridge, and the Merville Battery.  
In 2027, we plan to return to Arnhem.
4. Branch Meetings  
We hold three meetings each year – two in Wakefield and one in Bridlington – on the first Saturday of March, June, and November.  
This coming 6th June marks 20 years of 299 Para Sqn being based in Wakefield, and the branch will be proudly involved in those celebrations.

5. Membership  
Active membership remains our main challenge. There's no simple answer, but numbers remain steady. Growth would, of course, be ideal, though age and distance now make travel to meetings difficult for some, including our long-standing Geordie group.
6. Branch Name  
Some of you may have noticed on the REA website that we are now listed as the Yorkshire and Lancashire Branch.  
This actually makes good sense, reflecting our broader recruiting area across both counties. I'm not entirely sure who made the change — as secretary, chairman, and treasurer, it was probably me! In any case, the branch remains in safe hands.

## Statement of Accounts

As at 02 Oct 2025

<u>AIRBORNE ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION</u>	
<u>STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS</u>	
<u>AS AT 02 OCT 2025</u>	
<u>ASSETS</u>	
Cash in Hand	Nil
Cash at Bank	£ 15313.16
Deposit Account	Closed and transferred to current account.
Shop Stock	£ 4596.96 as at 31 Aug 25
<b><u>TOTAL ASSETS</u></b>	<b><u>£ 19910.12</u></b>
<u>LIABILITIES</u>	
	Nil
<b><u>TOTAL LIABILITIES</u></b>	<b><u>Nil</u></b>
<u>WORKING CAPITAL</u>	
Assets	£19910.12
Minus Liabilities	£0.00
<b><u>TOTAL WORKING CAPITAL</u></b>	<b><u>£19910.12</u></b>
Points:	
Audit completed on the 02 OCT 25	
Signed:	Signed:
	
R J Matthews	M R Bassett BEM

## AEA Shop Report – October 2025

This year's Association shop report for 2025 to date is as follows:

In line with this pie chart taken from the shop accounts records (PSB)

Total income as at 6th Oct 2025	£1,100.49
Total expenses from income	£183.23
Payments to bank	£917.26
Stock costs from sales	£413.69
Leaving available funds to association	£503.57
Stock cost held by the shop for sales	£4,511.58

Further matters relating to shop(s)

1. New stock intake has been suspended for the last few months due to the merger of AEA and REA Airborne branch. The shop structure and future stock will need to be analysed, and ideas passed to members via various means of communication. An update on this matter will be broadcast in the new year 2026

2. Further to that point, the shop manager Jon Nichols (apologies for absence / daughter's wedding took priority) and the webmaster Dave Pace have now achieved the establishment of a Regt online PRI shop. This shop can be accessed alongside the AEA shop link on the Association website.
3. Finally, Jon Nichols, shop manager, who has put in a stint of some three years, is now appealing for a replacement to take over the running of the AEA shop in the new year 2026. He is looking to plan for retirement and feels the time he dedicates to the shop needs to be used for that exercise. Please submit any interests to the Chairman in the first instance.

Jon thanks the committee and in particular Dave Pace for their/his massive support to achieve his shop goals. There ends the shop report...

Thank you all ..... Jon Nichols, Shop Manager.

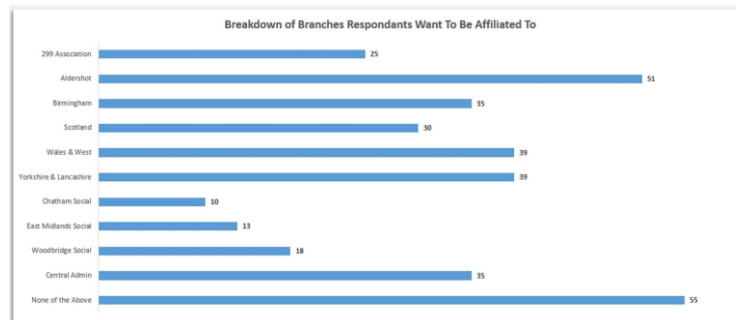
## Membership Report AEA Reunion 2025

Mr. President, Chairman ladies and gentlemen, what a year this has been regarding the whole of our direction and move forward, in the right direction I feel.

Membership list and keeping track has always been the Achilles heel since I took over the membership secretary role back in 2004, 21 years ago.

With this new merger and the transitioning of regular, veterans, and others into one group has been a challenge. This process has been a joint effort, with Ann Richardson the REA Membership Secretary based out of Brompton Barracks, and our own Web master Dave Pace who between them have kept the process ticking along. If they were here now, I would be personally patting them both on the back for the commitment and time dedication to get us this far.

What we wanted to do was to have everyone under one banner, with membership split into the relevant branches this would then hopefully enable the newer Airborne brothers to be part of the branch ethos that we all know. The chart relates to respondents to the merger questionnaire, as well as in responses to any Facebook or WhatsApp posts. It gives a breakdown of Members preferred Branch affiliation. This total is 350



Those who specified "None of the Above" i.e. they didn't express a preference/existing affiliation to any Branch, will be moved to the Central Admin Branch We won't know true figures until Ann has finished processing all of the individual Member details as it is likely there were some who have applied directly through the REA website Membership pages.

As far as Total membership goes Pre-merger questionnaire distribution the membership database shows 1,577 members listed of which 497 are deceased, leaving 1,080 members.

Of those 1,080 members we only had 516 valid email addresses, which were used to distribute the merger questionnaire.

We still have AEA membership listing 1080 members, but it's the having the correct up to date details.

From those 516 questionnaires invites we received 312 responses. These details have been passed onto Ann for membership processing. Though many have had their REA membership details confirmed, the process is ongoing.

What will happen moving forward is that Ann Richardson will be sending all new merger members straight to the relevant branches secretaries so they can reach out and welcome in new members.

I will be distributing lapel badges and car stickers out to the branches to hold and issue out to those members who turn up to the branches. This will act as a welcome gift and being part of the club.

This whole process will take some time, like turning round an oil tanker, but what matters is, we will still be going and going.

At the back of the room, on the table is my current directory. Please take time this morning to check and make any amendments to your records on the white paper sheets provided.

Billy Morris MSM Membership Secretary AEA. 18/10/25

## Airborne Engineers Association Welfare Representative Report

06 October 2025

In the last year, I have only been informed of two cases that have required any form of intervention from myself. The first case I made contact by email and text on the understanding that I had been made aware that the individual had health problems and that I was standing by to offer assistance if required. I did not receive a reply and respecting their privacy, took it that there was nothing further for me to do for that individual at this time.

The second, more recent case involves an individual recently made homeless through a relationship breakdown. I made contact with him, and he in turn informed me that his local SSAFA branch had allocated a caseworker and he also had been in touch with a local homelessness charity. (St Petrock) I made contact with the charity who informed me that they hoped to be able to house the individual following a short period in hospital. I made it clear that AEA were on standby to assist in some way including sharing costs if necessary. In the meanwhile, the British Airborne Forces Club had been made aware of the individual and his circumstances and made a donation direct to the individual of around £1200. I am in constant contact with the individual and while his situation remains precarious at this time, he is due to move into permanent accommodation on 23rd October and will be assisted by SSAFA with brown and white goods. I have made it clear that AEA/REA(A) remain on standby if needed.

This brings me to a couple of points that we should be mindful of. It is all very well having a welfare officer as a point of contact, but in reality, any individual in need is often best served by the Service Associations and charities located closest to them. Certainly, in the case of the large Service charities such as SSAFA/RBL etc, their trained caseworkers are the best people to deal directly with the individual, and they also have direct links to the fund paying Service associations.

The AEA welfare officer does not other than perhaps the REA. He can merely act as a conduit for messages and perhaps act as an immediate representative for the individual which might help to speed up verification of service. It was very kind of BAFC to help our colleague recently, especially as it was all done on the 'old boy net', at very short notice and all very informally. However, by doing so it may have prejudiced the casework already in place with SSAFA or the civilian charity because if that individual has received a sum of cash, the charities are well within their rights to deny further financial assistance because of it. This may not always be the case, however the risk is there. For this reason, it is the norm for the service charitable associations to never make cash donations, but to assist in purchasing the equipment or material needed to assist the person at that time. No matter how much we want to help, we must be careful that we support our people with the assistance they need in the correct manner through REA(A) and not just throw cash at a problem in a hasty bid to be seen to be doing something. That concludes my report.

Paul Moore REA(A) Welfare Representative

## AEA Website and Journal Report

### Website

- We have now linked our “Join the AEA” page <https://www.airbornesappers.org.uk/jointheaea.html> with the REA Membership Application page. From here you can join online <https://members.reahq.org.uk/Membership-Application> or if already a member you can edit your details <https://members.reahq.org.uk/User-Login?returnurl=%2fUpdate-My-Details>
- Due to our development of the 23 Regt PRI Shop, we had to urgently free up some server space, to do this we deleted the previous site from the server and moved the newly designed AEA website from development to live. However, there were some areas of the site not completed. I’m working through those to get everything up to date. Namely:
  - The addition of photos in the Photo Gallery. Where you see a light red button as the photo album title, that collection of photos is complete.
  - Obituaries in the Roll of Honour
- It is still my intention to digitise old issues of the Journal. Many of them are complete, where you see a PDF icon on the Airborne Engineers Journal page. I will (hopefully) have more time to address this once the 23 Regt PRI Shop is live and we’re happy the processes are working.
- In our hosted web domain, we now have our website, the AEA Shop and the 23 Regiment PRI Shop, therefore it has been necessary to increase our hosted web space allocation from 5GB at £103 exc. VAT to 10GB at £175 exc. VAT. This will ensure we have sufficient space for content additions to the website and both shops, related background files and backups.

### Journal

- We plan to publish the December issue of the Journal in a printed magazine format to be posted to all members who have provided us with their postal address. If in doubt as to whether we have your postal address, please get in touch with Dave Pace, contact details below.
- The AEA/REA merger questionnaire is still open, if you have not yet completed it you can do so at <https://www.airbornesappers.org.uk/aeareadatabasequestionnaire.html>  
This link takes you to a page on the AEA website, where you can find some additional information and a link to the questionnaire.  
The purpose of this exercise is to ensure we have your up to date details, including but not limited to, contact information, your permission for receipt of future communications, GDPR compliance and your current or preferred Branch affiliation. This information will enable your REA membership to be processed.
- As always, the content of the Journal comes from our members, we hope you will keep this in mind, if you feel something would be of interest please get in touch: Dave Pace by phone, 07977 282620 or email, [contactaeawebmaster@gmail.com](mailto:contactaeawebmaster@gmail.com)
  - Steve Wallis by email, [stephen.wallis57@ntlworld.com](mailto:stephen.wallis57@ntlworld.com)
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It may be possible for us to get permission from the owner to use copyright material for use in the Journal, however, if we can’t use a photograph or article because of copyright restrictions or refusal of permission, it will still be possible to provide access to it via a link in the Journal or on the AEA website. If in doubt, please contact Dave Pace via the details above.

## Merger Transition Summary Prepared for AGM

Updated as of 20 of Oct 25

Serial	Subject	Action Required	Lead	Remarks	Red, Amber Green (RAG) Status
(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(f)	
1a	Legal and Governance Framework	The merger of the two charities will require a Transfer Agreement with the Charity commission	Ken Kirk	Not critical action lies with Ken Kirk REA Controller	
1b		The AEA Constitution has been updated, to ensure that the AEA's distinct identity is maintained within the REA structure.	Phil T	New constitution has been E mailed to Members for comment. To be voted on at this meeting.	GREEN 18 OCT 25?
1c		How we vote on expenditure and how much the Exec committee can authorise is be detailed in rewrite.	Bob/Mark	Up to £1000. Can be spent by the Committee. Amounts above £1000 to be authorised by vote at OGM or AGM.	
2	Financial Arrangements	The AEA's national branch fund, approximately £15,000, +stock of 4 k and the REA(A) branch fund approximately £6,800 will be transferred to a designated REA account and ringfenced for the AEA's exclusive use. This amount is on the high side when	Bobby/Mark	ACTION IMPORTANT AEA accounts will shut as at 31 Dec 25 In line with REA accounts. By the 31 of Jan 26 treasurers are to submit the online summery sheet to HQREA. Phil T will do Yorkshire Branch and be available to help any treasurers. As will Mark Dorkings Changeover of Central Account Treasurers Between 31 Dec 25 and 31 Jan 26 . Branch treasurers will need to be registered with the REA, contact details etc. This will be taken from Steves Brochure. REA will carry out annual training on zoom for Treasurers there is also a comprehensive treasurers guide on the REA web site.	GREEN 1 <sup>ST</sup> FEB 2026?
3	Membership and Subscriptions	All current members of the AEA will automatically become members of the REA, with grandfather rights maintained. A membership list has been submitted to REA (Ann Richardson) Only those with live email or in date address can be forwarded. No cost for those transferring irrespective of Day Pay Scheme. There are now 3 Cat of AEA Member Life member see rules para 11, Life Membership, Family and Friends, All Arms Membership.	Billy Morris and Dave Pace RSM 23	For those AEA members who have lost touch and details are out of date they can log into the AEA web site click on join that will take them to REA joining form that will have drop down menu to join AEA National Branch. Change over date for REA(A) to AEA a national branch of the REA is The October AGM. Honorary members will be held as Friends and Families Non-RE will be held as All Arms Member. To minimise waste AEA member Badges will be issued to new members that attend branch or gala functions. Action Billy	GREEN OCT 18 25?

Serial	Subject	Action Required	Lead	Remarks	Red, Amber Green (RAG) Status
4	Structure	<p>The New Structure Patron – General Sir Peter Wall GCB, CBE, DL, CO</p> <p>President- CO 23 Para Engr Regt. Is also Group Director</p> <p>Vice President (Veteran) – Phil T</p> <p>National Chairman (Veteran) Dave Liebrick</p> <p>Welfare Advisor and REA</p> <p>Management board rep REA</p> <p>National Branch (Veteran). (Paul Moore</p> <p>Secretary Mike Robertson</p> <p>Veteran</p> <p>Treasurer Mark Dorkings. Taking over from Bob Mathews by 31 Jan 2. . Mark Dorkings Handing over to RAO Dept tbc</p> <p>Membership Secretary Regular -For Serving Soldier RSM tied to his post.</p> <p>Membership Secretary Veteran – Billy Morris continue veterans and liaise with RSM direct.</p> <p>Editor of the Journal -Dave Pace additional support needed Deputy Editor Steve Wallis</p> <p>Regimental Media Officer. IO.</p> <p>Representative of branches: Each Branch have option to vote a representative to the AEA council.</p> <p>Archive - Baz Bassett</p>		<p>Paul Moore has agreed to be Management rep. The commitment is now 3 times a year 2 on Zoom and one in person. Paul can fall back to any committee member to attend if he is unavailable.</p> <p>RSM “Stef Gloyn “</p> <p>Scotland ,Hull, and Birmingham Branches don’t have a Representative on AEA council. Going forward branch representatives are important so ensure Central make decisions with input from all branches.</p>	GREEN 18 OCT 25
5a	OPPORTUNITYS	Funding has been authorised from REA to print and distribute an AEA journal in December		Number of copies will depend on Number of members with up-to-date address held by REA admin.+ Copies for each Regt	Nearly Green Dave is working closely with REA.
5b		Sapper Magazine have agreed to publish a Merger Article.		Steve W	
5c		<p>Dave Pace and Jon Nicols have got an excellent on-line platform for the shop. Jon has now put the Regt’s Stock on our Platform and is providing support to Regt to provide a one stop shop for Airborne. With the Advantage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Regt PRI will sell More.</li> <li>· Association sale more.</li> <li>· Veteran and Regulars working together</li> </ul>		Everything is in place RSM Stef is supporting	
5d		Social Groups for areas that can’t sustain a branch No funds are held, and minutes are not required. One person sets up a FB page /WhatsApp group and sends out RV details		Now groups in : Nottingham -Steve Wallis Woodbridge – Phil Askey Chatham -Tim Van der Krann Scotland Branch TBC	
5e		Opportunity for new members following Questionnaire.		The questionnaire has highlighted members who are in the AEA but not in a branch. Branch secretary’s now have a breakdown of those that responded to the questionnaire, and which branch they wanted to join.	GREEN 14 OCT 26 ?
5f		Regt keen to mark merger and felt that Gala 26 in Nottingham area		Steve Wallis will Run the 26 Galla and will require	

Serial	Subject	Action Required	Lead	Remarks	Red, Amber Green (RAG) Status
		would be a great opportunity invite Patron, Al Murray, all Subunit OC/SSMs		additional funding as this will mark the NEW AEA a national branch of the REA. Official Guest to be invited: Sir Peter Wall Alister Dickenson Al Murry Paying Guests All 23 Para Regt OCs and SSMs. And of course any serving Soldier who is an AEA the national branch or REA member	
5h		Increased connection with Regt.		14 AEA members attended VE social event at the Regt. CO RSM SSM 51 Par Sqn fully engaged. Online Shop in place.	
6g		Commendations - is it intended that the AEA President's Commendations are continued when the REA have their own awards?		Committee will keep Both as one may be more appropriate than the other	In rules rewrite.

## Remembering WO1 JA Martin

WO1 Martin served in the Royal Engineers as a Boy Soldier, in 3 Parachute Squadron, 9 Independent Parachute Squadron, 131 Parachute Engineer Regiment and 302, 301 and 300 Parachute Squadrons. 21 years' service with the Airborne Engineers.

John Allan Martin, who died in a car accident on 10th July 1966, was born on 12th August 1924. He enlisted into the Royal Engineers as a boy at Chatham in March 1939.

Shortly after entering man service in September 1942, he volunteered for Airborne Forces and joined the 3rd Parachute Squadron. On D-Day, 1944, he parachuted with the Squadron into Normandy. He was with the Squadron in the Ardennes "Battle of the Bulge" at the end of 1944 and in the Rhine parachute operation early in 1945.

After the war, still with the 3rd Parachute Squadron, he took part in operations in Java and Palestine. By the time the 6th Airborne Division was disbanded in 1948 he had been promoted Corporal in the Squadron. On this disbandment he became a founder member, in its present form, of the 9th Independent Parachute Squadron, the strongest element of which came from the 3rd Parachute Squadron. He remained with the 9th Squadron until 1956 seeing service in Cyprus and Egypt from 1951 to 1954, and in Cyprus in 1956 when he was S.Q.M.S. prior to the Suez operation. When he left the Squadron to join 131 Parachute Engineer Regiment (T.A.) as a permanent staff instructor, he had been virtually in the same parachute engineer squadron for fourteen years and risen in rank from Sapper to Staff-Sergeant.

As P.S.I. to 302 and later 300 Parachute Squadrons (T.A.) from 1956 to 1961 he was promoted to Warrant Officer and became an assistant parachute jumping instructor.

For the next three years he served for the first time outside Airborne Forces, first as the S.S.M. of 43 Field Park Squadron in Germany, and later as the R.Q.M.S. of the 3rd Divisional Royal Engineers.

In 1964 he returned to the T.A. as the P.S.I. 301 Parachute Squadron, and in 1965 was promoted WO1, to become the R.S.M. of 131 Parachute Regiment until his death.

"Wimp" Martin will be remembered by many for his loyal and devoted twenty-seven years' service to the Corps. Of twenty-four years man service he spent twenty-one in Airborne Forces which must be a record or near record in the Royal Engineers. His comradeship, sportsmanship, leadership and sense of duty earned many friends and great respect. His ability as a soldier and an excellent games player will long be remembered.

He was buried at the Military Cemetery, Aldershot, with full military honours on 15th July 1966. The Rev. K. Kelly (late Chaplain to 131 Parachute Engineer Regiment) and the Rev. J. McNaughton (a serving Airborne Forces chaplain) conducted the service. The eight Warrant Officer and Senior N.C.O. pall bearers from 131 Parachute Engineer Regiment (TA) and 9th Independent Parachute Squadron were commanded by WO2 Linham (9 Squadron SSM). The escort and firing party were also from 9 Squadron. Among the many present were: —

Two brothers and two sisters and their families. Brigadier Sir Mark Henniker (Honorary Colonel of the Regiment). Brigadier G. R. Flood (Commander 44 Parachute Brigade (T.A.)), Lt Col ACR Hughes (representing the Chief Engineer, Eastern Command), Colonel RF Semple (late Commanding Officer of the Regiment), Commanding Officer and Officers, 131 Parachute Engineer Regiment (TA), Officer Commanding and Officers 9th Independent Parachute Squadron RE Many serving and ex-Warrant Officers and Senior NCO's, several of whom had served with RSM Martin from boy service and several more who had been with him in parachute operations during the war.

## Obituaries

### Capt Joe Houlston

## AEA Founding Member, Airborne Leader, and Friend

By Lt Col (Retd) Phil Taylor, extracted from “Born to Be a Soldier” by Joe Houlston

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### Editor’s Note

Capt Joe Houlston’s career spanned decades, from his early days in Dover to operations across Aden, Belize, Rhodesia, and Northern Ireland. As one of the founding members of the Airborne Engineers Association, his influence extended far beyond his own generation of soldiers. In this feature, Lt Col (Retd) Phil Taylor reflects on Joe’s life and leadership, drawing from Joe’s own words in *Born to Be a Soldier*.

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### Early Years in Oldham

Capt Joe Houlston’s story begins in Oldham, where he grew up as one of seven children. At the age of fifteen, he entered the Junior Leaders Regiment at Dover a turning point that introduced him to a life of discipline, purpose, and opportunity.

Compared to his two-up, two-down home with six siblings in Oldham, Dover was sheer luxury: hot and cold running water, sinks in the rooms, mirrors on the walls, and gleaming brass work you could see your face in. However, it didn’t take long for Joe to learn who was responsible for keeping it that clean.

School hadn’t been easy, but Dover reversed that. He earned his O-levels, and that success became the launchpad for his degree later in life. Boxing was almost compulsory, and although Joe wasn’t exactly a fan, his irritating habit of winning made him the Army Junior Boxing Champion — not bad for a reluctant fighter.

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### Finding Purpose — Nienburg to 9 Para

Early postings brought him to Nienburg, a unit he later described candidly as “full of alcoholic misfits and weirdos,” where the leadership left much to be desired. Seeking greater challenge and purpose, he set his sights on 9 Parachute Squadron, embarking on a demanding selection.

Joe’s selection was marked by both risk and resilience. On his final night in Nienburg, Joe put himself under pressure, running from two RMPs and falling out of a tree landing in camp. He limped his way into 9 Parachute selection, and luckily for him, they liked that he’d had a scrape with the RMP, and they needed a barman for the Officers’ Mess... with a limp.

Part of the Para selection process included “milling,” a toe-to-toe boxing match to test aggression. Joe’s reputation preceded him, so to even the odds, he was put against two opponents. When that didn’t work, they blindfolded him. Even then, he held his own.

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## Aden and the Making of a Leader

Houlston's next assignment was in Aden for a year, where he encountered the chaos of a colonial conflict. He learned that when the QM tells you to go and get welding kit, you found some. The intensity of the environment honed his decision-making under pressure and strengthened his commitment to leading by example.

Back to Aldershot from the searing heat and chaos of Aden, Joe fully embraced the 9 Parachute Squadron ethos: work hard, play harder. He picked up an evening job behind the bar at the main NAAFI, making a little extra money by collecting unfinished drinks, decanting them, and selling them out the back. It didn't last he was let go for the drinks hustle.

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## Kenya, Family, and the Return to Service

A subsequent posting to Kenya combined professional challenge with moments of humour, from sharing a latrine with a baboon to mistaking a water buffalo for a cow. Yet even in lighter moments, Houlston reflected on the demands of separation from his wife, Cath, and left the Army only to return six months later with Cath's clear encouragement.

Joe found that "work forces in Civvy Street" lacked structure, honesty, and integrity. *"All for one, and bugger anyone else."* Not exactly a culture that matched a man who already had those values in buckets.

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## Northern Ireland, Integrity, and Leadership

Promoted to Corporal upon his return, Houlston deployed to Northern Ireland. Leading teams to construct forward patrol bases in highly volatile areas, he insisted on accompanying his own stores wagons, ensuring no task fell on others that he would not undertake himself.

Then came a Belize tour, and the unit got the mid-tour blues, so Joe decided to throw himself a big birthday party. At the end of the night, he let on it wasn't actually his birthday, but it was a brilliant night, and no one seemed to care. Then it was back to Ripon and off to Northern Ireland.

One of Joe's memorable moments came during a civil rights march, where he found himself face to face with none other than Bernadette Devlin. Joe was in charge of a roadblock just a roll of barbed wire and his section and Devlin were at the head of the crowd. She demanded to pass. Joe calmly said no.

After a long period of furious abuse hurled in his direction, she turned to one of Joe's men and asked, "What do you call your boss?" He replied, "Sir." That got a good laugh from the section, and with that, Devlin turned and led the crowd away.

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## From Germany to 9 Para — The High Point

His career progressed in Germany, where he encountered an initial culture of complacency among troops. Houlston quickly reshaped attitudes through personal example, instilling a sense of discipline, pride, and operational readiness. Under his guidance, the troop achieved notable successes, including completing the Nijmegen Marches as a Regimental first and winning the Regimental Rig competition.

Then came another tour in Northern Ireland a very tricky time in the infantry role. The threat was constant, but Joe's troop made a real impact. His troop took credit for tracking down a sniper cell and uncovering a bomb-making factory. He turned a beer-swilling, aimless troop into a tight unit and he brought them all home.

With promotion to Staff Sergeant came the posting Joe had always wanted: 9 Parachute Squadron. For Joe, it was the most demanding, rewarding, and exciting period of his military life.

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## Belize, Jamaica, and Rhodesia

It started fast straight into the Firemen's Strike. Then came Belize, where Joe's troop was allocated to Salamanca, a remote post near the Guatemalan border. Six months later, Salamanca was unrecognisable rebuilt with new shower blocks, a proper kitchen, and decent accommodation.

He thrived on chaos. From chasing a DoE rep off-site with a sledgehammer to being sent to hurricane-struck Jamaica ("Send our top man"), Joe's ability to restore order and morale was unmatched.

Then came Rhodesia, on the brink of transformation. Alongside Capt Peter Wall, Joe helped oversee the transition to democracy and even investigated the murder of a white priest amid deep political tension. When the ballots closed, Rhodesia became Zimbabwe and Joe had helped midwife a nation into being.

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## The Later Years — From WO1 to Commission

Back to Northern Ireland, he led a convoy into Crossmaglen one of the most dangerous areas in the province. His leadership was calm under pressure, his humour intact.

Promotion to Warrant Officer brought a new chapter as instructor at the RSME, SSM in Maidstone, then WO1. He reformed sleepy units, ran the first EOD course in Abu Dhabi, and continued to lead from the front.

Commissioned as Admin Officer in 9 Para Sqn, he reunited with his old friend Pete Kershaw. During handover, Pete told him, *"Joe, you don't have to prove anything to anyone. You've already done that."* From that moment, Joe's leadership became quieter, steadier built on confidence, not competition.

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## Founding the Airborne Engineers Association

Beyond operational achievements, Houlston recognised a need for enduring connections among Airborne Engineers after service. On his initiative, he founded the Airborne Engineers Association (AEA). He wrote the constitution himself, and it has remained intact until this year's merger — a testament to his clarity and purpose.

The Association now has over 500 active members worldwide and Joe is Membership No. 1.

Even after stepping back from full-time service, he continued through the Territorial Army, mentoring new generations and representing the Army with quiet dignity in times of family tragedy. These Visiting Officer roles reflected his lifelong commitment to compassion and service.

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## Legacy and Leadership

Capt Joe Houlston's impact is reflected in the memories of those he led. Former colleagues and subordinates remember him as a mentor a leader who demanded excellence yet provided guidance, and a man of unwavering integrity.

*"Joe was my Troop Staff Sergeant. I would be honoured to carry Joe on his final journey."  
"He changed the whole course, brought structure and purpose, and prepared soldiers for the toughest challenges. His recruitment talks were legendary."*

These sentiments echo across the Royal Engineers community: Joe Houlston left every unit, every troop, and every individual better than he found them.

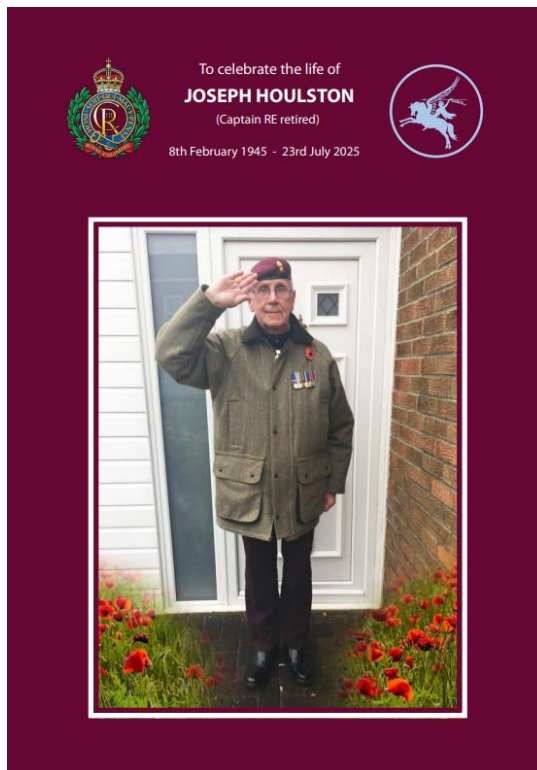
Capt Joe Houlston's race was run with courage, skill, and integrity. His memory endures, not in medals or ceremonies alone, but in the hearts and lives of all who were fortunate to serve alongside him.


He was more than an Airborne leader he was a founding pillar of a community that still carries his standards forward. His story reminds us that leadership is measured not by rank, but by the legacy you leave in others.


### **Stand down, Capt Houlston — your legacy carries on.**

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Lt Col (Retd) Phil Taylor was fortunate to have Capt Joe Houlston as his first Troop Sergeant. More recently, both were active members of the Yorkshire branch of the AEA, where Joe continued to provide invaluable mentoring and guidance.







◇◇◇

We gather on this day Thursday 7th of August, at the Holy Trinity Church in High Usworth to celebrate the life of Joseph Houlston. Devoted husband to Kathleen, loving father to Jason and Howard, and proud father-in-law to Linsey and Joanna.

As we come together in remembrance, we give thanks for a life well lived, for kindness shown and received, songs sung, laughter shared and for the quiet strength that guided and supported many of those around him.


The main service to be held at 1.15pm followed by the committal at Birtley Crematorium at 2.30pm.

Casket carried by his comrades of the Airborne Engineers Association.

Service conducted by the Reverend Bethany McNeeley.

Junior Leader to Captain - Joseph Houlston was born to be a soldier. He wore the maroon Beret with quiet pride, not merely as a paratrooper, but as a Royal Engineer who earned it through grit and determination.

A Para Sapper. One of the esteemed 9 Para Sappers.





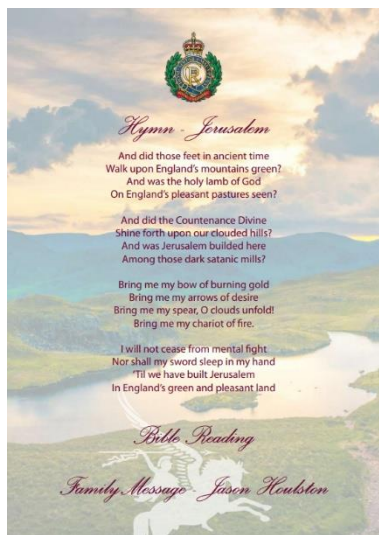
*Guard of Honour*

Provided by members of the Airborne Engineers Association, Royal Engineers Association and Army Reserve.  
Standard carried by Steve Wallis (Chairman of the AEA)

*Entry to Church*

Piper - JJ Ferry : 'WINGS' - The Corps March of the Royal Engineers

*Introduction & Opening Prayer*

*Hymn - Jerusalem*

And did those feet in ancient time  
Walk upon England's mountains green?  
And was the holy lamb of God  
On England's pleasant pastures seen?

And did the Courtenance Divine  
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?  
And was Jerusalem builded here  
Among those dark satanic mills?

Bring me my bow of burning gold  
Bring me my arrows of desire  
Bring me my spear, O clouds unfold  
Bring me my chariot of fire.

I will not cease from mental fight  
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand  
'Til we have built Jerusalem  
In England's green and pleasant land

*Bible Reading*

*Family Message - Jason Houlston*

*Eulogy - Lt Col (Retd) Phillip Taylor*

*Hymn - Guide me o thou great redeemer*

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,  
pilgrim through this barren land.  
I am weak, but thou art mighty,  
hold me with thy powerful hand.  
    (Bread of heaven)  
feed me now and evermore


Open now the crystal fountain  
whence the healing stream doth flow.  
    Let the fiery cloudy pillar  
lead me all my journey through,  
    Strong deliverer  
Be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,  
Bid my anxious fears subside,  
Death of death and hell's destruction  
Land me safe on Canaan's side,  
    Songs and praises  
I will ever give to thee.

*Commendation & Prayers*

*The Lord's Prayer*

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;  
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.



*Reading - Howard Houlston*

*Hymn - Onward Christian Soldiers*

Onward, Christian Soldiers, marching as to war,  
With the Cross of Jesus going on before,  
Christ the royal Master leads against the foe,  
Forward into battle, see, his banners go:

(Chorus) Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,  
With the cross of Jesus going on before.

At the sign of triumph, Satan's host doth flee,  
On then, Christian soldiers, on to victory,  
Hell's foundations quiver at the shout of praise,  
Brothers, lift your voices, loud your anthems raise: (Chorus)

Like a mighty army, moves the Church of God,  
Brothers, we are treading, where the saints have trod,  
We are not divided, All one body we,  
One in hope and doctrine, one in charity: (Chorus)

Onward, then, ye people, join our happy throng,  
Blend with ours your voices, in the triumph song:  
Glory, laud and honour, unto Christ the King,  
This, through countless ages, men and angels sing: (Chorus)

*Commendation & Farewell*

*Exit Church*

Piper : Flowers of the forest

## *The Committal*

The service will now continue at Birtley Crematorium,  
Windsor Road, Birtley, DH3 1PQ for the committal. All are welcome to attend.

*Piper* - Chris Urwin  
*Standard Bearer* - Dave Small  
*Committal and Exhortation* - Jim Hall

## *Our Thanks*

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to everyone for the kind messages of sympathy and the floral tributes we have received.

A special thank you to the members of the AEA, REA, and the Army Reserve for all their efforts. Our respect and admiration go out to you all. We are especially grateful to Phil Taylor and Jimmy Hall for their guidance and support.



Please join us after the cremation at the Washington Arms, The Green,  
Washington, NE38 7AB. We would love to offer you refreshments and to  
continue to share memories of Joe's auspicious life.

**DONATIONS** : Are welcome as you leave the church and will be presented to  
MacMillan Cancer Support and Saint Bedes Hospice, QE Hospital, Gateshead

*Thank you to everyone who contributed to this edition of the Journal.*

*Your input is most welcome and much appreciated*

The next edition is scheduled for publication in June 2026

Deadline for receipt of content 15<sup>th</sup> May

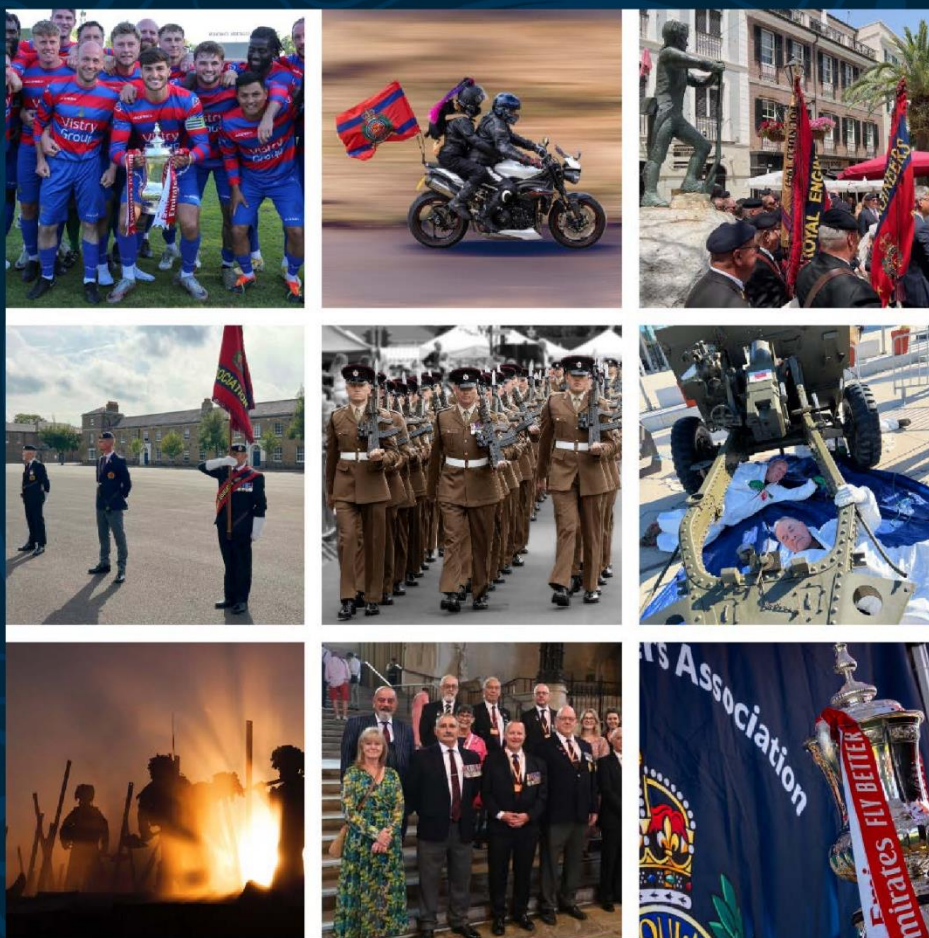
Let's keep it going from strength to strength



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