



THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS JOURNAL



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The Airborne Engineer

April 2001 Issue No. 3

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Editorial Content

The Editor reserves the right to refer to the Executive Committee, any article which he considers to contain material of a derogatory nature or that may cause offence to the Association and/or its members.

Whilst we endeavour to publish every article submitted, please appreciate that some items have to be delayed until later issues. A tremendous response to my plea for material has been forthcoming and every article and photograph will be published in due course. Even so, please do not be deterred from forwarding your own particular story or record of event. We need a constant and continued supply of suitable material for future publications. Your input will be greatly appreciated.

If sending photographs via the e-mail system, please ensure that they are in the following format:

Grayscale at 160 resolutions in JPEG format. This method ensures that the print company responsible for producing our Journal have a standard format to work from.

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From the Chair

Bob Prosser - Association Chairman

Since November 1989 when Captain Joe Houlston, then Admin Officer of 9 Para Sqn RE called a meeting at the All Ranks Club at Aldershot with the idea of forming an Association, a tremendous amount of input from many people have formed this Association. A formidable Constitution has been put together in conjunction with a comprehensive set of guidance notes to assist anyone in forming local branches. With the growth of both Branches and Membership it has been decided that the Constitution, particularly with regard to the duties of your Executive Committee and Membership, should be revised. A Steering Committee has been formed, consisting of Colonel Chris Davies, Vice President and our two former Chairmen Bob Ferguson and Tom Ormiston, to analyse and put forward at the next AGM, their recommendation of any changes they feel might be necessary.

I sincerely hope that many of you will be able to make the trip to the AGM/Reunion at Bristol, the Double Hills Commemorative Service and/or the Airborne Forces weekend at York. I look forward to meeting you all again.

Museum Update

The Curator of the RE Museum has allocated a space and position for the Reg Orton medal collection and they will be displayed with Cole's medals the first and last DCM's awarded to the Corps of Royal Engineers. Our President Brigadier Garth Hewish MBE got to hear of a chance to obtain some WW2 uniforms, etc. So accompanied by Brigadier Garth and Tom Thornton we visited the film set at Hatfield Studios, where "The Band of Brothers" was being filmed, which is the sequel to the Tom Hanks film "Saving Private Ryan." On arrival we were surrounded by German and American WW2 soldiers, plus 500 dummies laid out wounded i.e. limbless. It was noticed that most of their uniforms were either American or German but after a quick recce we found a small room of English uniforms and equipment. The wardrobe master, Joe Hobbs, who happens to come from Weymouth, was very helpful and we left fully loaded up and Joe was happy with the swap, he had two copies of our Journal (typical 9 Sqn) and an invite to join us at a future function. A big "Thank you" is extended to all the Association members for their kind donations of uniforms and medals. The collection is really taking shape and the Association should be able to provide a very comprehensive display in the future, with a few more bits and pieces to come - I hope.

Brigadier Garth and Nick Gibson attended a Friends of the Royal Engineers Museum Executive Committee Meeting, this being our first invitation to attend and to start planning the Chatham museum "Airborne" exhibit. Your local representatives to hand in any memorabilia for further displays are: Fred Gray, Aldershot; Bunny Brown, Birmingham; Tom Brinkman, South West; Nick Gibson, Chatham; Bob Prosser, Yorkshire; or bring your contributions to the AGM. All items will be gratefully received.

Annual General Meeting/Reunion- Bristol October 2001

Bunny Brown

The AGM and Reunion Dinner/Dance 2001 will be held at the Bristol Hilton Hotel on the 5th, 6th and 7th October. Bed and Breakfast in this 5 star hotel will be £25-00 per person per night for double/twin room. £35 for single rooms, all based on a minimum stay of 2 nights. Due to the high cost of the single rooms, it is suggested that members try to share the twin bedded rooms with a friend! The cost for the Saturday evening Gala reunion dinner will be £22.00 per head for a 4 course meal (silver service).

The hotel has recently undergone a £3 million refurbishment and facilities include a swimming pool and air conditioned gymnasium. The hotel is located just off the M5/M4 junction at Bradley Stoke, Bristol. The Bristol Parkway railway station is just a short cab ride from the Hotel.

Coaches have been organised for Sunday 7th October to transport members and their partners to the cemetery at Weston-Super-Mare and then on to Paulton for the Double Hills Memorial Service. Would you kindly indicate on the proforma enclosed in this Journal if you require a seat/s on these coaches. All reservations and cheques must be forwarded to arrive no later than 25th July. Kindly ensure that you forward all correspondence regarding the reunion weekend to:

B.J. Brown 134, Perch Avenue, Birmingham, B37 5NB

E-mail bjbrown04@hotmail.com

We've done the organising and will conduct the final arrangements; all you have to do is complete the proforma and return it to me; together with full payment. Then just sit back and enjoy a wonderful weekend of laughter and nostalgia. A grand raffle will be held on Saturday evening, and we would welcome donations of suitable prizes, large or small

Avoid disappointment - book now!

Officer Commanding- Anecdotes

Col (Retd) Chris Davies MBE

I assumed command of The Squadron on 8th February 1982 from my good friend Ian McGill. The following day we went to Stanford PTA in Norfolk for a brigade exercise with the newly formed 5 Infantry Brigade (later to change its name to 5 Airborne Brigade). The Brigade's priority one role was Home Defence but its priority two role was much more interesting. This was to train for possible operations to evacuate British Nationals under threat anywhere in the world. Using a *future history* scenario we imagined ourselves carrying out just such an operation from the area of Marsabit in the North of Kenya. The below zero temperatures of Norfolk in February drew lots of wry comments about operating under the merciless African sun but, on the whole, the exercise was a success. The new Brigade had a good shakedown, the units in the Brigade had an opportunity to get to know each other and we did succeed in our mission, of course. A parachute assault on to an airfield, rescuing hostages, defeating motley groups of "terrorists" and a successful extraction by air from a 'remote' airstrip. This was much more fun than imagining how to find 'Spetsnaz' in a conventional war scenario. We crossed our fingers and hoped we would not have to wait too long to be launched in our new role.

As ever, life in Aldershot was dull by comparison. There was plenty to do with all sorts of calls on our time. Running Assault Pioneer courses, catching up with trade training, completing annual training targets and responding to the million and one requests for Engineer support, Regular Army training commitments and so on, all contrived to make life hectic but not really satisfying. Apart from a couple of exercises there really was nothing on the cards for nearly two years. We were scheduled to go to Belize at the beginning of 1983 but the withdrawal from there had been announced and it seemed most unlikely that we would deploy. Only a construction project in Kenya at the beginning of 1984 seemed to offer any hope of sunshine and fun in the foreseeable future.

Then, on April 1st 1982, the answer to our prayers: Argentinean forces invaded the Falkland Islands. We did not have a clue where these were but someone said they were British. What better excuse for a bit of vigorous *community policing*? So we launched ourselves into becoming involved in any way we could in the recapture of the Islands. As it happened the Squadron had just started Easter leave as the news of the invasion was coming in. But, by the following day, most people had received their code word to return to barracks and we were packed and ready to go - we did not know where, but we wanted to go somewhere. The waiting and the on the bus, off the bus, which was to last for the next month had started. The politicians did their best to avoid the conflict coming to war and we prayed they would all fail and we would be unleashed. After all this is what we were here for! While all the talking and planning was going on we got on with an intensive period of training. First we went to the ranges at Lydd and Hythe where we fired a whole year's allocation of training ammunition and some things we normally could not get our hands on (grenades, 84mm, etc). Then we went to Wyke Regis and covered all aspects of Combat Engineer skills as well as military skills like Artillery target indication, the Geneva Convention, action on capture etc, etc. It was a busy time but this was for real, everyone got thoroughly stuck in and no one wanted to be left behind if/when we were finally deployed. In the meantime, the Commando Brigade headed South and two of our Brigade's best battalions were sent with them: 2 and 3 Para. Our contribution was to send a much-reinforced 2 Troop with 2 Para while the rest of us tried to hide our envy and got on with yet more training.

Finally, after lots of false starts, on 12th May we finally climbed onto a ship and sailed South. And it was not just any old ship, it was the pride of the Merchant fleet, the QE2. Talk about going to war in style. However, there were a few things that were different from the usual holiday cruises that were the bread and butter of this beautiful ship. For a start there were 2,500 soldiers on it! We were knee-deep in Guardsmen: the Scots and the Welsh. Also the main swimming pool had been covered over to make a helicopter deck. No Captain's cocktail parties either. For the next 10 days we steamed at full speed to catch up the rest of the fleet. We had hoped to stop at Ascension Island to reorganise and, perhaps, carry out some landing craft drills but there was no time for this. In time-honoured fashion we ignored the lessons of history and hoped everything would be alright when we got there.

Our time on the QE2 was hectic with training, training and training filling every day. Of course, fitness training

was important and we shook the caulking from the planks as we pounded round and round the top deck day after day. Adg' Isles' daily PT sessions seemed certain to cause more casualties than the enemy ever would. Thankfully we were ashore before he had time to wreck us all completely.

One interesting thing about this time was that we had absolutely no idea how long we would be at sea, when we would land, what we would do when we landed and how long we would be in the Falkland Islands. The politicians seemed happy that they had sent us to sea as a gesture to the Argentinians and seemed to have few ideas beyond that. Of course, attempts were being made at high level to defuse the situation, but as we now know, Margaret Thatcher had set her mind on boosting her political reputation by throwing us at the Argies. Of course she did not tell us that. However, we did have some valuable information. The crew of the QE2 told us the date that they were due back in Southampton to prepare for their next cruise. We scoffed: how could they possibly know the timetable of events? But they were right! Funny the way communications work in war.

The Squadron cross-decked from the QE2 to the Canberra or the *Great White Whale* as it was called. Who knows how the Argies failed to bomb this huge, white-painted ship? It stuck out like the proverbial on a donkey. Perhaps they thought it was a hospital ship or that, being so obvious, nobody would be stupid enough to put troops on it. Anyway, it had already taken the bulk of the initial landing force (including 2 Troop) into *Bomb Alley* and now it took most of 5 Brigade (including the rest of the Squadron) back into San Carlos Water - the heart of the landing force.

By this time we had heard about 2 Para's incredible victory at Goose Green and about John Hare (2 Troop) being shot during a patrol in the San Carlos area. Reality was beginning to sink in. We just wanted to get there and get stuck in.

The landing beaches were mud. The area around the beaches was mud. The routes out of the beachhead were mud. The weather was wet, cold and windy all of the time. Shelter was nigh impossible to find and, with weapons, ammunition, rations, radios, hand tools, spare clothing etc, etc every man was carrying in excess of 100lbs. This was not a picnic! We knew that we just had to get on with it and win as soon as we could - and we did.

The Squadron provided support to both the Commando Brigade (with 2 Troop) and 5 Infantry Brigade (HQ, 1, 3 and Support Troops plus an extra Troop drafted in from 20 Squadron just before we sailed.) This meant that we had men out with recce patrols; others doing mine and booby trap clearance and some were in with the assaulting infantry. During two of the main attacks 2 Troop and 3 Troop did sterling work in evacuating casualties from the battlefields. In addition, we carried out a myriad of engineer tasks: providing water, making tracks, rudimentary camp structures etc. Working in atrocious conditions, 1 Tp repaired the Fitzroy Bridge after part of it had been effectively blown up by the retreating Argies. They only downed tools long enough to shoot down an attacking aircraft as it flew over them on its run in to bomb ships in Fitzroy harbour.

Everyone has heard about the bombing of the *Sir Galahad* and the *Sir Tristram*. Sadly, our attached Troop from 20 Squadron was on the *Galahad* at the time and two men, Cpl McIlvenny and Spr Tarbard, were killed, eight others were wounded. Squadron HQ and Support Troop were within sight of it all and, having an open patch of ground, quickly improvised a helicopter landing pad to receive the casualties so that they could receive some first aid before being flown back to the base hospital at San Carlos. All of the first aid training proved to have been worth it and no one who was there will forget the burning, screaming bodies we processed during that very grim afternoon. There was more than one Simon Weston.

But we could not dwell on the *actualities of war* we had to get on with it. The winter was not getting any kinder and the Navy looked as though it might run out of ships so we cracked on. Sadly, the final battles cost us more casualties. Cpl Scottie Wilson was killed on Mount Longdon and LCpl John Pashley was killed in the battle for Mount Tumbledown. Typically, both had been up front where the action was hottest, providing superb examples of leadership under fire. It was a tragedy that two such fine soldiers could not share in our victory.

On the 14th of June Port Stanley was ours and the Argies surrendered. We had won the war all we had to do now

was win the peace. At first it was difficult to decide which would be easier. Port Stanley was in a right mess and the outlying settlements were also in need of assistance. We cleaned our weapons, put them on one side and got on with what we are paid for: engineering. Over the next few weeks we cleared mines and booby traps, gave Stanley water and electricity, repaired roads and runways and carried out a million and one other tasks. Our tradesmen were in constant demand and certainly earned their pay.

At last, in the middle of July we were allocated a ship to take us home and we left the winning of the peace to others. We left Stanley in a full gale but could not have cared less. We finally had a chance to get properly clean, to be warm and to catch up on our sleep. We also had time to reflect on the whole thing. We were glad to have been part of it, happy to have survived but even happier to be going home. We sailed to Ascension Island, enjoying the increasing warmth of the sun as we headed North, and flew home from there on 30th July. We had been away less than three months but it seemed like a lifetime. We had had quite an experience in the intervening time. At Brize Norton we were met by the Engineer in Chief, the Corps Band and, most important of all, our families What a homecoming!

(Editor's Note: For those who would like a copy of the authors *Memoir of The Squadron's* part in the Campaign please ring Col Chris Davies on 01205 820496 or contact him by email chris@stumps.demon.co.uk

Further Anecdotes

Col (Retd) Dennis Eagan

Thank you for your letter seeking my experiences as OC 9 Sqn. Alas I never had such an honour bestowed upon me, for I was a simple Troop Commander (3 Troop) for 2 years followed by Sqn 21C for 18 months.

However, having said that, on first arriving in the Sqn on 23 Oct 52, I discovered that as the OC, Maj (later Maj Gen) Ian Lyall Grant was away for the next 4 weeks as DS on a pre-Staff College course, the 21C designate Capt (later Lt Col) Derek Eales was not due for at least 3 weeks, (the previous 21C Capt (later Brig) Fergie Semple had already been posted as a Sqn Comd to, I think 25 Fd Engr Regt) and of the three Tp Comds, the senior one, Capt (later Maj) Peter Wade, was on leave in the UK and not expected back for at least 3 weeks and as I was the next senior, I was Acting OC for the first three weeks of my AB career!! In fact the other Tp Comd was Capt (later Maj) John (alias Louey) Chappel, who had had considerable war service, but had left the Army only to come back in with loss of seniority.

Anyway, nothing daunted. I got stuck in, as they say, with the extremely able help of SSM (later Maj) Bill Powell. I shall never forget my first night with the Sqn in Moascar because Bill Powell decided "It would be a good thing, Sir, if you and I tested 1 Tp's defensive position in the field tonight - don't you think?" I mean who was I to argue? So my first 8 hours with the Sqn was spent crawling round in the desert in the dark, mapping out the Tp position, with a man who had had more real, wartime experience in this art than most others! All I can say is that he saw me through a fascinating period, for which I was ever grateful. What a truly marvellous man he was.

The other anecdote, which brought me down to reality with a bump, was when Cpl Smith, who was captaining the Sqn hockey team at centre half, invited me to attend a Sqn trial so they could assess my skills and capability. I was only too pleased to accept but privately thought it slightly unnecessary, because I had just come back from the Helsinki Olympics with a Bronze Medal, having played at centre half for the GB team! But what an enormous privilege it was, to have to prove one's way in the Sqn in all things. Certainly it was the happiest and most rewarding period in my 30 years' service.

I do hope you get a good response from the real OCs. Thank you so much for asking me.

A Surprise Encounter

1871652 Maurice Weymouth - Ex 4 Para Sqn RE (Arnhem POW91866)

An incident of interest, which will explain a certain programme in my possession, went as follows.

Just after Xmas 1944, I was being transferred to Camp 1VA from 1VB with about 40 other POWs, to make up a special working party at Dresden

On arrival at 1VA we were being passed through the Arrival' compound to the inner main compound where several were waiting to greet us. A German NCO was calling us by name off a list and passing us through. He came to a stop when he got no response to what sounded like, "Vaymut," "Vaymut."

He was getting quite agitated, stamping his feet and waving his arms at us. We were getting to quite enjoy his discomfort, when a voice from the inner compound said, "Anyone called Weymouth?" I said "Yes, me". He said "For F***s sake tell him," pointing to the guard. "He's shitting himself, thinks he's lost a prisoner and 'Adolf' would not be pleased, and would send him to the Russian front"

Having established with the NCO that I was the missing 'Vaymut,' it was a mixture of relief, anger and more relief. He poked me in the chest and said wicked words - I told him what he could do with his finger, much to the amusement of the others.

I was then passed through into the main compound where my new friend was waiting for me. He said "Come with me, I want you to meet someone." We went to one of the huts. Seated at a table was an elderly 45'ish man with a huge piece of cardboard, and he was drawing plans of a sailing yacht he intended to build the boat after the war. I think he lived somewhere in Devon.

My friend said, "Albert, I want you to meet Maurice, Maurice Weymouth" Then to me he said, "Maurice, this is Albert Weymouth." Well, of course, it was an immense surprise to us both; our names spelt the same way too. I had never met another Weymouth, even today.

Albert was apparently taken POW at Dunkirk. He belonged to the Camp Entertainments committee and took an active part in show and plays. He gave me a Xmas 1944 programme, which bears his name in the cast list, and without this explanation could be construed as being me.

It is one of my most prized possessions.

A Charmed Life

Stuart (Willie) Wiltshire

Reading through my December 2000 issue of the Airborne Engineers Journal, I was surprised to discover that I knew so many people in just one issue. I was even more surprised to see "Action Man" staring back at me. You see, many years ago, I knew him better than most. I remember him standing on the tarmac at Abingdon putting on his red beret for the first time just having been presented with his wings. Soon after that he was standing in front of Reg Orton, the SSM in '9 Sqn'. After certain formalities, the SSM looked up and said, "You will be in the Squadron boxing team, and 2 Troop (the fairies!) - Next."

During his 7 years with the Sqn young action man would rub shoulders with people like Reg Orton, Ian Wilson, Mike Matthews and of course the legendary Nobby Arnold of '1 Para', and dare I say Rick Mogg and Charlie Edwards? It is generally thought that only the rich and famous have the privilege of extensive foreign travel. Young 'Action Man' however was invited to quite a number of exotic places during his stay with '9'. These included Germany, Malta, Cyprus, Greece, North Africa, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, the Trucial States, Singapore and Malaya, to mention but some. To all of these he was escorted and looked after by various numbers of gentlemen who would make the three hundred Spartans seem tame.

He did go on active service on various occasions, but unlike so many before and after him, nothing seemed to happen while he was there - thanks to his luck!

Seven years passed and reluctantly he had to move on. He was posted to various other Squadrons and regiments, but he won't tell the numbers as he uses them on the lottery!

Late in 77 his last posting was to civvy street, where he saw an advert in the job centre for and instructor/supervisor taking teams of special needs youths on projects and teaching them various skills, carpentry, bricklaying, painting etc. It was time to pay back some of the gifts that he had been given, so he took it on. Thirteen years later redundancy hit, so he decided to take a job where he would only be responsible for himself. He went into a factory, but after eight months realised that this was not for him - but what was? He went for security. He has just under 2 years to go now before the magic "65". He still remembers hundreds of men that he knew well in '9 Sqn', like his special mate, Fred Matterface, who as a young LCpl in the middle of a very soft sandy desert miles from anywhere was presented with a problem. There were still a few tons of concrete to mix and the concrete mixers engine had died a terrible death. Fred brought up a Landrover, put it up on blocks to an exact alignment, bolted a cog onto the back wheel hub and joined the two with a drive chain. He put the 'Rover into low ratio and low gear, and the job was completed.

In conclusion, young "Action Man" remembers that as an even younger apprentice tradesman in the Army Apprentices School in Harrogate he once noted a comment on one of his reports which read as follows, "If A/T Wiltshire were to lose his flippant and irresponsible attitude, he would make a good soldier and a good tradesman."

He's not sure that he ever did, but he met the very best on his way.

Response to a December Article

Peter Stainforth 1st Para Sqn RE (1942-1945)

Bob Seaman is a little wide of the mark when he suggests that the name 'Red Devils' originated from members of the 1st Parachute Brigade habitually wearing their mud-stained Airborne smocks with the uncomfortable crotch-piece hanging down behind like a tail. It is true, however, that the Tunisian Arabs often referred to the paras as being 'men with tails.'

It is pretty certain that the nickname 'Die Roten Teufel' was bestowed on men of the 1st Parachute Brigade Group in Tunisia by German paratroops of Col. Koch's 5th Fallschirmjager Regiment Afrika (The Green Devils) out of respect for their most formidable British opponents who wore the red beret.

2 Para and Sappers of 1 Para Sqn. RE were the first to encounter Major Jungwirts' 1st Bn of 5 FJR during the Oudna operations of 29 November to 4 December 1942, and left a lot of wounded in their hands. Later in March 1943 all three battalions of the 1st Parachute Brigade and its Sapper squadron fought Major Witzig's Para Engineer battalion of 5 FJR in the battles round Tamera and Sedjenane, and the name 'The Red Devils' took root and stuck.

Through my friend, Hans Teske, formerly a L/Cpl in Jungwirts' Bn of 5 FJR, whom I first encountered on a farm during the Oudna operation, I met Hans Jungwirts and other members of his battalion at an extraordinary reunion holiday with veterans of 2 Para Group in Tunisia in July 1973. After thirty years all animosities were forgotten, and the sixty-strong party of British and German veterans and their wives found they had much in common.

The Radfan Operation

John "Tommo" Thompson A revised draft from his book "Where No Grass Grows"

I was well into my second tour of the sceptre island of Bahrain, a tiny pearl set amidst a blue sea, either called the Arabian Gulf or the Persian Gulf, depending which country had the most oil at the time.

To say the least I was a wee bit pissed off. I never use the expression, "I'm bored." I have never been bored in my life. Our first tour consisted of approximately nine months on the construction of Hamala camp, where we worked for many months with hardly a break, preparing the concrete foundations and the erection of the silver clad Twynham huts. Now we were back again, working mainly on camp structures, deep trench latrines etc. really exciting!

After four years in 3 Troop 9 Sqn, I had reached the exalted rank of lance corporal. My only crimes in the past being charged for eating a third of a chocolate bar from an emergency pack whilst on a map reading exercise in the Lake District in temperatures below zero. We were huddled together on a small outcrop of rock. Frank Glennet had gone over the top in a snow white out, with a suspected broken leg. Bob Ferguson and myself were huddled up to him, affectionately of course, until morning. On return to camp we were charged by Mike "Screaming Skull" Turner, for eating emergency rations and spent the Christmas of 1963 in nick.

Back to Bahrain. I had been put in charge of our tiny plant section of a broken down Vickers dozer, a wheeled Michigan and a BK 12 grader. Our main task was to keep the football pitch level and playable. At that time we were in support of the 3 Battalion Parachute Regiment. As usual rumours were abound, the main one being "Spartacus is showing tonight" So that evening after a shit, shower and shave I would be sat there diligently awaiting Spartacus, only to be dismayed when "High Noon" (starring Gary Cooper) appeared once again. Thirty-five years later, and I still haven't seen the bloody film! However this day one sensed an electric atmosphere in the air. Bodies were running all over the place.

In my normal inquisitive manner I discovered that 'B' Company were gearing up for some operation down in Aden. In the spring of 1964 the main tribes of the Radfan, the Quataibi, Ibdali. Bakri. Ghazzal. spurred on by Egypt and communist insurgents from North Yemen, had started mining and raiding the Dhala road. The British authorities had decided on a punitive expedition, to teach them a lesson. These fiercely hard tribesmen turned out to be quite a formidable enemy. The first task was to secure a base and airstrip adjacent to the area selected for operations. The plan was for 'B' company to parachute in followed by 45 Commando Royal Marines. A patrol of SAS had gone in to mark the DZ. but were caught in an ambush and two members of the patrol killed. One, was an officer, the other was Spr Warburton. Their bodies were taken to North Yemen where they were decapitated and their heads shown to the world on poles. This led to a massive outcry worldwide.

Lt Col TMP Stevens of 45 Commando had been put in charge of this particular operation and had decided the only way forward was a long insertion march at night to capture the high ground. This was through the Rabwa Pass into a highly populated area of Wadi Taym and the neighbouring Danaba Basin. The plan had been for 'B' Company to capture a feature nicknamed "Cap Badge" and for the marines to secure another feature nicknamed "Rice Bowl."

B' Company then reverted to a ground attack role and set off with 45 Commando, during which they were in action for some 30 hours including an 11-hour march and 10 hour battle to secure the village forts of El Naqll. It had not been easy. It was dark; the ground was unknown; and the maps were poor. Paras and Marines lost their way several times, but skilfully recovered. It was extremely hot. The route lay amongst stones and boulders. When daylight came, each group was still some way from its objective, marked for 'B' Company by a number of stone watchtowers and a village below broken cliffs. As the leading patrol approached, they came under heavy small arms fire. Major Peter Walters, the company commander, led a dash forward with most of the leading platoon to clear the closest enemy positions in and around the central watchtowers. The battle was long and arduous and casualties began to mount. Captain Jewkes was killed while giving medical aid to Sergeant Baxter, seriously wounded in the lung. Private Davies was killed while dodging through bullet swept ground to fetch

water. Private Thornton and Cassidy were in serious need of attention. Lance Corporals Bright, McKenzie, Letham and Private Clark were all awaiting evacuation as wounded. It was late in the afternoon by the time the Royal Marines had cleared the heights of the rebels. At the end of the operation Padre Preston arrived in a Belvedere helicopter to organise the removal of all the wounded. He gave a temporary burial to Captain Jewkes and Private Davies before climbing the cliffs with B company group into their night positions.

The marines, amazingly, had made their deep penetration past many villages and occupied houses, without mishap or misadventure. 400 men like a long snake through the night. When they arrived in the area they were above the fire fight, but unable to give support in fear of firing on 'B' Company.

For a few days until their return to Bahrain, the Company Group remained in the Wadi Taym area, searching out any further dissidents. On return to Bahrain they were given a tumultuous welcome by the rest of the Battalion. We all got pissed!

Barely had the dust settled when the battalion were off down to Aden. Apart that is, from a few bodies of the other minor units and 3 Para rear party, we, 3 Troop, had been left behind rather disillusioned. At this time I felt like a professional boxer, highly trained, very fit, but no one to fight. However in no time at all we were called on to the square. The battalion commander Lt Col Farrar "The Para" Hockley had returned to give us the most inspirational briefing of my career. He talked of the smell of cordite and the sound of cannon fire, which set my arse twittering. Within 48 hours we had packed the GIO98 stores, drawn live ammo, and were lumbering our way down to Aden in our beloved Beverley.

Aden, set at the tip of South Yemen is a barren volcanic rock, steaming hot and humid. Known by the military as the 'arsehole of the world.' And we were going a long way up it! We were accommodated under canvas in the Radfan camp. Our bed mates at this time were the East Anglian Regiment, affectionately known as the "angle iron pickets." I was quite taken aback by the youth of the angle irons, looking so much like bottles of milk; they had just arrived from UK. I had woken that morning to the sound of someone arguing. In fact it was the Anglians' RSM and battalion commander. Opposite our tent was a makeshift barbed wire compound full of bodies. I heard the RSM say "If they act like pigs I'll treat them like f***** pigs!" Apparently there had been a near riot in the NAAFI the night before. We remained in the Radfan camp for a couple of days whilst they built up a convoy to strength.

Thirty miles to the north of Aden, across a sandy desert, the mountains stark and ominous begin, and spread to the borders of the Yemen. These hot and jagged mountains, sparsely populated are probably one of the toughest areas in the world to survive. A harsh country populated by a harsh people, where there is little water.

The day arrived and we loaded men and equipment and headed towards the distant mountains in an enormous convoy of 3 tonners, land rovers, ferret scout cars and other machines and vehicles. As we passed through the Sheik Ophman area, we could feel the hate emanating towards us. The place was a hot bed of terrorists. At this stage the Dhala road was of metalled construction, but soon gave way to the dust and heat. The road had been constantly mined and sniped upon by the then named Radfan Wolves. The journey was very slow and laborious, as we made our way into the cooler air of the mountains.

It was nightfall when we arrived at Wadi Taym where a small airfield and tented camp had been constructed. They had their priorities right and told us to head for the cookhouse where we had a magnificent meal watched over by a very overweight cook sergeant, who treated us like guests at the Hilton hotel. We were told to make our way to a tented area, but not to unpack until further orders. As usual, in that type of situation, we made ourselves as comfortable as possible, and got our heads down. Four of us had found an empty tent; and were heading into the land of nod when there was a burst of small arms fire! Myself, Geordie Smart and young Lofty Gallagher hit the deck and started digging. Geordie Small looked up, let out a sigh and turned over back to sleep. Peering out of the tent flap I expected to see bodies running all over the place, but it was all very quiet. We lay there for what seemed to be ages until a couple of guys walked past. "What's the score with the shooting lads?" I asked. Realising we were new arrivals they told us that there was a film showing, and it was normal for the Radfan Wolves to have a couple of pot shots at the screen. I thought, "Hope High Noon was showing." Back to

kip! No sooner was I heading back into the land of nod than Johnny Powell, our section corporal, told us to start moving out.

We were loaded onto the back of three tonners and once more headed into the mountains. We had been on the go for some seventeen hours when we arrived at our destination. It was very dark, but lit by beautiful constellations of stars as can be in that part of the world. We took up an all-round defensive position, and were told that we were at the tail end of the battalion group getting ready for a big offensive. Just my luck, myself, and Tony Weatherly were chosen for the first stag in our section. Tony was the section Bren gunner and was as wide as he was tall. Probably as a result of working in the flour-mills of Norfolk; handling 2 cwt bags of flour. Tony was a very strong lad. The rest of the troop was well into dreamland when we heard the sound of rattling. Immediately we tensed up and Tony took the Bren into his shoulder. The metallic rattling became louder and seemed much closer. Tony's hand went to cock the Bren gun. I laid my hand on his shoulder to restrain him, and could feel the bulging muscles. He looked at me as if to say: "This is it". I shouted, "Who goes there?" asked for the password and waited. There was no reply. I could feel Tony getting tenser, but kept a restraining hand on his shoulder. Sweat started to run down my face, my heart was pounding. Should we fire? Once more I asked for the password. No reply. As I was about to give Tony the go ahead, the rattling slowly begun to recede into the distance. It seemed a lifetime before we were both convinced that whatever it was had gone, and then we expelled our lungs and nigh on collapsed over the Bren gun. I felt suddenly drained and very cold. The following morning I reported the incident to Johnny Powell, our section commander. Later that day he told me that he had been informed that a company of the Arab Federation Army, our allies during the operation, had passed by our lines during the night. They had moved into position to aid 3 Para in the offensive. My heart skipped a beat.

That particular day was probably the most spectacular of my time spent in the army. We were loaded onto Belvedere helicopters and flown to the top of a jebel overlooking a small village of adobe construction leading into a large wadi. On the other side of the wadi was an even larger jebel where one could see many caves in the cliff face. As we quickly offloaded from the helicopters Jock Wallace, our troop sergeant, was directing us into an all-round defensive position. Young Lofty Gallagher and myself, were unknowingly given the best seats in the house, and immediately started erecting our Sanger. Apparently, directly in front of us, across the wadi in the caves were a band of dissidents, and 3 Para were about to remove them. First of all light artillery fire went straight over our heads and seemed to annihilate the side of the jebel where the caves were. A large roar went up from all around us, and we thought, no one could survive that onslaught. It went very quiet and then all hell let loose as the dissidents returned fire from the caves. In answer to that we heard the roar of aircraft and, dive-bombing into the wadi. About ten feet above our heads, came two Hawker Hunter jet fighters, their cannon blasting the side of the mountain as they pulled up at the very last moment. An amazing feat of hazardous flying. Time and time again, they went in. It seemed impossible that anyone could this time survive another onslaught of such magnitude. Once again it went deadly quiet, and then, as if to say, "Up yours," heavy small arms fire came back at us. I think at this stage the battalion commander had decided to send in a fighting patrol.

Young Lofty and I spent the rest of the day fortifying our sanger and making it as comfortable as possible. Then came the evening meal, which is when I found out Lofty's love for sausages and beans. He ate nothing else, and swapped his Irish stew etc. But this presented a problem for myself, as Lofty took great pleasure in spending most of the day and night, belching and farting due to the excessive amount of beans he'd eaten! That night a patrol had been sent to clear the caves, but on arrival found there were hidden passageways leading out the other side. On one wall a bloodstain 12 feet long was found, confirming that the enemy had sustained a severe casualty, but the Radfan Wolves had made good their escape.

The ensuing operations had been divided into two phases — the first from the 17- 20th May. The Commander of 39 Brigade, Brig C. H. Blacker, ordered 3 Para Gp to move from their position in the Wadi Rabwa to clear the ridge on which the Bakri villages lay. Our CO Lt Col Farrar-Hockley, was told that there would be no helicopter lifts available from the Belvederes, however the Scouts of 653 Squadron AAC could be counted on for a few light loads and reconnaissance. Rather than delay the operations, the CO decided to divide the force into fighting elements and fighting porters. 3 Para Group consisted of 'A' and 'C' Coy, 3 Tp RE, the RAMC section, a rifle platoon found by the Heavy Drop Platoon, and with elements of 63 Coy, RASC. One troop of I (Bull s Tp) RHA were already

fighting in the Radfan. Obviously it was decided the two companies would be the fighting elements and the supporting arms; the fighting porters. We, 3 Tp were assembled on the side of a jebel awaiting orders; when the MTO of 3 Para appeared, Ex RSM, Tom Duffy, a short and stocky Geordie. He came swaggering up, came to attention, and said: "Yes I walk as if I have a pace-stick up my arse and I like it!" He then explained what our duties would be in supporting the two fighting companies. The next three days were hell. Keeping up with the fighting elements, carrying Jerry cans full of water, packs of rations and ammunition. Sometimes it felt as though big bubbles were coming out of my rectum, as we seemed to toll ever upwards.

On the night of the 16/17th May, the antitank platoon, under the command of CSM Nobby Arnold, secured the village of Shab Tern between the Wadis Taym and Rabwa and, from this area; three patrols went forward in bright moonlight to seek routes up to the Bakri Ridge. The next task was to move forward by Land Rover the battalion group's ammunition, food and water to Shab Tern. Unfortunately the tenuous track between the two wadis could not take the traffic of guns and vehicles. So once again, where the track was broken, we were used as handling porters. This set back the operation by 24 hours. On the night of 18/19th May, enough had come forward to make a start. Preceded by a reconnaissance party, the column set off, 'A' Coy, the fighting element, with mortars and machine guns; Bn HQ and the battery commander's party, 'C' Company and the intrepid 3 Tp RE, bearing enormous heavy loads as fighting porters. By the first light on 19th, 3 Para Gp were well established on the Bakri Ridge, whilst 3 Tp marched back to Shab Tern ready for the next load to be brought forward.

Apart from minor brushes, little had been seen of the tribesmen. Then an 'A' Company patrol walked into a party of dissidents, and a running fight ensued. It was fought over a series of climbs and descents. The battalion group fighters were carrying loads up to 80-90 pounds. They eventually reached their objective above the vast gorge of the Hajib escarpment where the Radfan Wolves once again disappeared into the mountains, leaving behind them a wide assortment of weapons, ranging from British SMLE No 1 and No 4 rifles to antique French Lebel rifles.

The antitank platoon, under the command of Nobby Arnold. ("I never knew why the lads called me Nobby, until I looked down once in the shower") had cleared "Arnolds Ridge" with the support of the Hawker Hunters, and took the only two live prisoners captured under arms in the whole campaign. I was involved in transporting the two tribesmen back to Shab Tern in the back of a land rover and was quite amazed by their friendliness and laughter. At this stage I thought "What the hell are we doing here in this country, killing people who have lived here for thousands of years?" But then my mind went back to the communist insurgents who were spreading the conflict. These had to be stopped!

During this battle 3 Tp had been called forward to advance the artillery guns onto a small plateau. We arrived to find some elements of 34 Sqn and other RE units. As we arrived Farrar-Hockley came screaming up in a Land Rover and headed straight to Jock Wallace our troop sergeant, "SSgt Wallace, how long are we going to be held up?" he asked. Jock replied, "Get rid of the craphats and we will be up there today." With a smile on his face, Farrar-Hockley said: "Carry on staff, it will be done." The task was to make a very small goat track up to the plateau, into a track big enough to get the artillery and their Land Rovers, with ammunition and supplies to the top. Jock took a slow stroll up, stopping now and again to assess the situation. On his return he broke us up into small units making 5 and 10 pound charges of 808 plastic explosives. Another small unit was set to the task preparing the detonating cord. When all was ready and Jock seemed happy, he told us to follow him with the charges. Heading slowly up, he would point to a location and say either 5 or 10, meaning the size of charge. When all charges had been laid, the other unit set about connecting the detonating cord with the detonators. All in all it took about five hours, then we were ready. We cleared the area and pulled back to a safe distance where Jock gave the task of pressing the plunger to the youngest sapper in the troop. I believe it was Johnny Farr? There was a very loud explosion and a great cloud of rocks and dust shot into the air. When it settled a roar went up from everyone in the area. It was the most amazing piece of field engineering I have ever seen during my years in the Royal Engineers. In front of us was a track all the way up to the plateau, apart from a few rocks here and there. We ran forward, excitedly clearing the way as 1 Bulls Tp RHA had arrived on the scene. In no time the way was clear, and we assisted the artillery with their guns and equipment to the top.

It now became possible to plan further advances, and to show the tribesmen that there was nowhere safe from military action. As long as they continued their attacks, they were to learn they could be found in the remotest wadis and highest mountains. 'A' Company were given the task of securing the tip of "Arnolds Spur," a feature running south from "Arnolds Ridge." En route were two villages to be cleared. This task was given to 3 Troop. The two villages lay approximately two kilometres apart. Jock had broken us up into our sections and my section were given the task of clearing the first village under the command of Johnny Powell, our section commander, who had grown in stature during the operation. On arrival at the village Johnny set us out in line abreast, about a hundred meters from the first adobe building. I must admit my heart was pounding and my rectum all a twitter. We had cleared about two thirds of the village when I was confronted by a fairly large mud walled construction with a flimsy looking door. Johnny nodded his head towards the door, telling me to go for it. As I slowly pushed the door inwards I saw something white move in the gloom of the building. Instinctively I let off a few rounds from my SMG. There was a loud bellow and realised that I had just shot a cow. My first kill! Moving back into the bright sunlight, I realised I was drenched in sweat.



Fighting Porters

L to R: Dave Kitcher, Biddy MacMillan, Tommo, Lofty Gallagher & Stan Marley

In the other village they had a minor incident. Section commander Bill "the fixer" Rudd, had apparently been searching a house, climbed the wooden ladder leading to the roof, just as his head appeared briefly above the small protective wall, Sid Grounsell, known as "El Cid" because he

looked more like an Arab than they did, let fly with the Bren gun he was carrying. Seemingly just missing Rudd. A couple of weeks before leaving for the Radfan, Bill had put Sid on a charge for a minor misdemeanour. I'm not inferring that that had anything to do with the incident, but whenever Sid is asked about it, he just smiles!

Once both villages had been cleared, we returned to our sangers up in the jebel. The possession of "Arnolds Spur" now enabled the force to observe the enemy stronghold along the Wadi Dubsan, an area hitherto remote and inaccessible. Prior to this, traffic in arms and men of the Radfan Wolves had been free, but now plans could be made for the Radfan force to temporarily occupy the area. Due to a torrential rainstorm, this was postponed. But, from the 24th, preparations were put in hand to descend the 3,200 feet into the Dhubsan. The operation was scheduled for two days, and during the 24/25th May, routes were recced and stores brought in by helicopter. On the night of 24/25th patrols investigated the possible routes down from "Arnold's Spur." One narrow, but adequate track beneath Jebel Haqla was discovered, and the head of the Wadi Dhubsan was found to be passable despite an initial descent of a 30 ft rock face, avoiding the guarded pass, and a subsequent boulder strewn track. Therefore achieving complete surprise.

The evening of the 25th 'C' Coy less one platoon, established a piquet line across to Jebel Haqla. At the same time the machine gun platoon and the CO's party, started to rope down the cliff. No mean feat, with the equipment and supplies. At first light the machine guns were in position after a slow and very dangerous descent of the cliff and 'A' Coy were ready to infiltrate the first area, the village of Bayn Al Gidr. The high ground was quickly picketed and a Scout Landing Zone marked. When the Bde Commander arrived by helicopter at 0600 hrs, he was met with the news that the whole basin around the village was deserted.

X Coy Royal Marines, who had come under command for the operation, now advanced further into the wadi, which was not to remain very quiet for long. Some fifty minutes later numerous reports were received that the enemy were re-entering the area from the south, in small groups of 7-12 men. Where they had been lying in ambush on another easier route into the area. Then X Company and elements of Bn HQ came under heavy small arms fire. At the same time the Scout helicopter, which had been moving the CO's "R" Group forward to the Royal Marines position, was sniped at, and forced to land in a very dangerous position, some 500 yards ahead of X Coy's position. The intelligence officer was wounded, and all were forced to abandon the helicopter under fire.

It also came across the net that the RSM Arthur Shannon had been wounded in the arse, but this was not true. However, it did command a roar of approval in the wadi!

It was found that the number of dissidents in the region, were approximately fifty strong, with light automatic weapons. X Coy was unable to progress more than 600 yards further into the wadi. 'A' Coy moved around the left flank while a reinforced platoon of C Coy began to clear the area down from Jebel Haqla. There was a fierce gunfight, and this action, with the support once again of the RAF Hawker Hunters, a section of medium guns and battalion mortars drove the enemy away from the area.

Two REME NCOs of the ACC worked throughout the night and successfully repaired the Scout helicopter. Major Jackson, the pilot, was able to fly out of the area at first light. The battalion group were then withdrawn from the area by the Royal Navy Wessex helicopters.

Thus ended the battle as far as the 3 Battalion Group was concerned. Apart from the debrief by Battalion Commander Farrar-Hockley which was given on the top of a jebel. During the debrief he mentioned the minutest detail about the operation, naming individuals and incidents. His favourite in 3 Tp being sapper "Biddy" Alec Macmillan, so named because of his love for exotic wines. Farrar-Hockley highlighted the problem with the GPMG. The lubricating grease had been the cause of it jamming. Red Robson, a tall red haired Irishman, who had used the margarine from the ration packs to lubricate his successfully, had overcome this. It was then used by the rest of the battalion and probably saved the day.

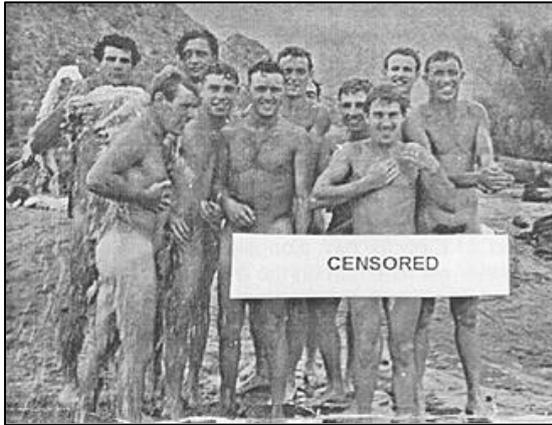
Farrar-Hockley heaped praise on 3 Tp, and one of the projects built by Bill Rudd's section, an aerial ropeway to get equipment to the top of mount "Cap Badge."

During the whole operation 3 Troop had worked extremely hard, building and clearing tracks to keep open the vital routes of communication. There were also many amusing incidents, our troop commander (whom I only followed out of curiosity, and, in my opinion, was not an airborne soldier (just as I was not a squadron plant fitter, but ended up in the job), had at the start of the operation, asked for a volunteer in the form of a batman. We all took one pace back, but Frank "the Bishop" Brady took it on. Frank had been Para Regiment TA. then a good spell in 1 Para, finally transferring to 9 Sqn. so he never took on anything lightly! Our Troop commander had to go to an "O" Group each evening, and on his return, Frank would have his evening meal ready. Our main pack during the operation was Irish stew. Frank would remove all the meat and vegetables from the troop commanders stew and scoff it himself! Leaving only thick gravy. However one night he returned early and caught Frank with two mess tins full to the brim with delicious Irish stew. By this time the troop commander had become very thin in the face, and his eyes lit up when he saw the stew. "Where did you get this from?" he asked Frank. Not batting an eyelid Frank said: "You have been on officer's rations sir, but I managed to scrounge some of the men's packs." "That is very kind of you Brady," he replied, wolfing down the Irish stew. It must have been quite daunting for a young officer to be given the command of 3 Tp. Probably forty of the most professional soldiers and roughnecks to be found in any army anywhere in the world. However, I understand that he went off to have a brilliant career with the survey squadron!

On another evening, we were returning from a track-clearing task in the back of a three tonner, when we appeared to run into an ambush. We leaped from the back of the three tonner, and took up an all-round defensive position. I was lying just inside the right rear wheel. It had turned dark and as I lay there with the sky lit up by tracer and gunfire, I realised my luminous watch seemed to me to be lighting up the area around me. My heart was pounding as I pulled it off my wrist in panic. We eventually realised that the firefight was actually between elements of 3 Para and the dissidents, and was way above our heads.

Back to the debrief.

The men of 23 PFA had showed outstanding courage, but in my mind the most courageous of all was the battalion photographer seemingly unaware of being fired upon whilst taking photographs during the whole operation.



Save Water, Shower with a Friend!

L to R Lofty Gallagher, Tony Weatherley, Hank Codling, Tommo, Dave Kitcher, Dave Stennett, John Farr, ??, Brummie Harper & Jock Wallace

Like most modern battles, the Radfan Operation was a combined operation, small in size, but an important contribution to maintaining world peace from the communist threat. The battalion withdrew from the area on the 27th May having secured an area 200 square miles, and inflicted severe casualties and a serious blow to the Radfan dissidents moral. The Battalion Group returned to Aden on the 28th May, having won a DSO, five other medals and six C-in-C's Commendation. Bob Bruton from

'B' Company had been awarded the MM in the previous 'B' Company operation.

A Winter's Tale

Albert Ball

The month of November 1946 found me on the permanent staff of the Regimental Quarter Master at No1 MTTD in Gibraltar Barracks, Aldershot in the employment of LCpl Fuel NCO. The barracks were situated on the site now occupied by Browning Barracks, adjacent to Queens Avenue. A poster on the company notice board requesting recruits for the Glider Pilot Regiment had recently attracted me. So I applied. The interviewing officer, I believe was a Captain Simpson, who informed me that Glider Pilots were no longer required, but that he was recruiting for the Engineer Airborne. He was from the Airborne Wing based at No3 TBRE Guillemont Barracks Cove, and that if I applied; I would be sent for training followed by a parachuting course and then would join 6th Airborne Division in Palestine. So I said that I would like to volunteer.

The training at Cove consisted of physical training, road runs, assault course etc. As I recall, we were about 30 strong on the course, quite a mixed bunch, but we all got on well together. Our NCOs were Sgt Swift and a big Cpl naturally called Tiny and Lt Weyman, who was our officer but was also on the course with us. A further 2 weeks was spent with the Parachute Regiment in Aldershot; which consisted of (you've guessed it) more physical training, road runs, assault course, plus regular 'hair cuts'.

The day came for us to move on the No 1 Parachute Training School at Upper Heyford, it had only recently moved there from Ringway. By this time winter had set in and our Para Course officially started on 16th December. We were stationed in a camp at Middleton Stoney, and each day were marched up to the Air Station to be handed over to the RAF instructors who called us 'Bods' - this was somewhat different to what I had been called in the past!

We learnt to jump and roll and practice our aircraft drills. Our jumps were to be from the good old Dakota, but not before carrying out 2 jumps from the balloon. Then due to unforeseen circumstances, we had an unfortunate delay in the jumping programme, 80% of the parachute stock was declared unserviceable due to the porosity. The first balloon jump was delayed for 10 days, the second followed 5 days later, and then there was a further delay of 13 days before our first aircraft decent. You can appreciate that these delays put most of us on edge, and course took much longer to complete.



The proudest day of my life was when we received our wings. I can only say, "Better late than never." Following embarkation leave, Barton Stacey, Dover, Calais, Toulon, Cairo and eventually Palestine, I joined the 1st Airborne Squadron RE. Our OC at the time was Major O'Callaghan with Captain Harris and SSM Doherty.

Course No 206b, taken at No3 TBRE Guillemont Barracks, Cove 29th January 1947. 24 passed the course (note the snow)

My 'D' Day- 6th June 1944

Spr Charlie Willbourne (Aged20)

I parachuted into NORMANDY on 6th June 1944 at approximately 0050 hrs as a member of No.4 stick of No.1 Troop of 3 Para Sqn RE. Our primary task was to demolish the five span masonry arch bridge at St Samson, Troarn, covered by a Coy of 8th Para Bn, 3rd Para Bde.

I vividly remember leaving the aircraft into a stream of tracer and trying to convince myself that the fire was intended for the aircraft and not me personally. I can remember releasing and lowering the kitbag from my right leg on the way down, but I must have left it a bit late because I was totally unprepared for the landing when it came and I hit the ground like a sack of the proverbial! As soon as I was able to stand up I knew that I was in trouble, I had damaged my right hip. I was able to recover my kitbag and handed it over, less my rifle, and walking was becoming increasingly difficult.

In the many briefings we'd had, it had always been stressed that anyone wounded or injured on the DZ would have to fend for himself; and I fully accepted what happened to me subsequently.

It turned out that we had been dropped on the wrong DZ, and were some 4 miles off target. The situation on the ground was pretty chaotic. Out of the shambles, it was decided that Spr Thomas, (2 Troop) who had been wounded in the foot during his descent, and me, would join a mixed bag under the command of the SSM. When they were ready to move off Thomas and me were put on a couple of stores trolleys. We hadn't gone very far when the SSM decided that his two passengers were becoming an embarrassment and we were taken off the trolleys and told by the SSM that we would have to find our own way to 3 Para Bde HQ, at Le Mesnil. By now dawn was breaking and me and Thomas hadn't a clue where we were or where Le Mesnil was. The SSM said that he would leave arrows made from twigs whenever his party changed direction and that we were to follow them. He bade us farewell, wished us luck and the party moved off.

Thomas and me moved off in their wake at a snail's pace. I was by now using my upturned rifle as a crutch and wishing it were 6 or 7 inches longer. We came across several 'boy scout' arrows and followed the direction indicated until we came to a junction, where three different tracks merged and there were no 'twig arrows.' At this juncture a soldier from the 8th Para Bn, who said that he had lost touch with his 'stick' decided to join us. A case of the blind leading the blind! He was perfectly fit and we welcomed him as a potential defender should we run into any trouble. We guessed that the Seaborne Landings had started when a terrific bombardment started up from the direction of the coast and the very ground was shaking as if an earthquake was imminent. We reckoned that the battleships lying offshore in support of the landings had opened up with their big guns.

By now we were standing on a metalled road debating which direction to take, when we came under small arms fire from two German soldiers who were supported by a small armoured vehicle at a range of about 250 yards. To my left was a wide track with a 7ft high wall running along its left hand side, and, about 30 yards into the track on its right hand side; was a thick hedge running at right angles to the track. SPR Thomas ran across the road to my right and dived over a low wall into the front garden of a house. That was the last I saw of him. The 8th Bn man and myself had committed ourselves to the track, and as we moved forward I could see the brickwork of the 7' wall splintering as bullets struck it. There isn't a lot one can do when you can hardly walk - a one legged man in an arse kicking contest comes to mind, - and self-preservation was the ultimate aim of my companion and me.

The Germans were now about 120 yards away, and we had reached the thick hedge. Just past the hedge we found a five-barred gate leading into a large field. How I got over that gate I do not know, but I suppose blind panic helped. I tried to 'run' alongside the hedge for cover; when the machine gun on the armoured vehicle opened up and started sweeping the hedge. I could see the tracers whizzing through the hedge a few inches in front of me. The 8th Bn man was way ahead of me and out of sight and I never saw him again. So much for infantry support!

I dropped to the ground utterly exhausted and pulled myself into the hedge flat on the ground. The firing stopped and the two Germans on foot had reached the five-barred gate. I lay there less than 30 yards away hardly daring to breathe, when surprisingly, they made no attempt to climb the gate. I could hear them talking, presumably discussing what to do next. They obviously decided to give up the chase because they turned around and went back the way they had come. Why they didn't see me I can't imagine, didn't think my effort at camouflage was of such a high standard!

I waited a few minutes; and managed to stand up and take stock of the situation, and was sure that the Germans had left when I heard their vehicle start up and drive off. A short while after they had gone four Frenchmen appeared on the scene, apparently roused by the shooting. In my limited French I told them that I was 'Anglaise,' and I took out my issued French phrase book and showed them the sentence, "I am wounded, can you take me to a barn?" Whereupon they had a discussion, then indicated that they would leave and come back later with transport. I wasn't particularly impressed with this arrangement, and decided to move my location. I was now at the crawling stage and my objective was the opposite side of the field where I could see a spot from which I would be able to see the gate without being seen. As I crawled across the field past a stagnant pond full of croaking bullfrogs, I realised the seriousness of my situation, when I almost crawled across a heap of shit and pieces of a German newspaper with which the depositor had used to clean himself. Salisbury Plain this was not! In my limited French I told them that I was 'Anglaise,' and I took out my issued French phrase book and showed them the sentence, "I am wounded, can you take me to a barn?" Whereupon they had a discussion, then indicated that they would leave and come back later with transport. I wasn't particularly impressed with this arrangement, and decided to move my location. I was now at the crawling stage and my objective was the opposite side of the field where I could see a spot from which I would be able to see the gate without being seen. As I crawled across the field past a stagnant pond full of croaking bullfrogs, I realised the seriousness of my situation, when I almost crawled across a heap of shit and pieces of a German newspaper with which the depositor had used to clean himself. Salisbury Plain this was not!

I eventually reached the other side of the field and found the spot, which hid me from view from anyone coming over the gate. I lay there in the shadow of the hedge for some time. No sign of a French rescue party or of Germans, so I got out my Tommy Cooker etc and made myself a cup of awful tasting tea (solid block of dried milk, tea leaves and sugar) followed by a couple of boiled sweets. I have no idea how long I lay there but I became aware of English voices quite close by. I shouted as loud as I could, "8th Battalion". Perhaps my erstwhile companion had found some of his comrades. When the hedge finally parted I was amazed to see the face of my Troop Commander, Capt 'Freddy' Fox. His first words to me were, "Where did they get you Willbourne?" To which I replied, "They haven't got me yet, but they will if you don't get me out of here sharpish."

Some of the lads hauled me out of the field and someone produced a French bicycle, which I was able to mount with assistance, and found that I could get along fairly well by using my left foot. I cannot remember much of the ensuing hours except for the constant pain in my hip and the explosions going on all around, but suffice it to say that I was in the hands of the medics at Le Mesnil on the morning of 7th June and told I was to be medevacked. I can remember seeing Mulberry Harbour (still under construction of course) and remember being transferred from a ship to a Hospital Train - in Dover, which took us to the Morrison Emergency Hospital in Swansea. A journey, which took two days, (we stopped over night at an hospital somewhere in the Aldershot area).

I was feeling very low at this time because I knew that I had cocked up the most important parachute jump of my life and was on a Hospital Train with many very seriously wounded men, and I felt that I was there under false pretences. During the whole of the train journey the rail trackside was lined with hundreds of cheering people. This was the first Hospital Train from Normandy, and obviously word had got round very quickly. I shook myself out of my depression and said to myself, "Well, you could have quite easily got yourself killed." So I resigned myself to the acclaim!

I spent a week in Morrison Hospital, followed by a week's convalescence and one weeks leave. I returned to my Squadron in Normandy in early July; to be met by many ribald comments from some of my mates. It was not a joyous occasion however; when I was told of those Sqn members that had been killed, wounded, taken prisoner

or reported missing during my absence. My best mate, Sammy' Peachey had been reported missing, but it later transpired that he had been taken prisoner during the mad dash to demolish the St Samson Bridge, Troarn. He contacted me after his release from the POW camp, and we still correspond.

Points to Ponder

Paul Dunkley

1. Why were the hoses on the stirrup pumps in 9 Sqn, much shorter than anyone else's?
2. Why, when travel warrants were being handed out was everybody going to Scotland?
3. If nobody stole bungies from the reserve 'chutes, where did everyone get their elastic's from?

For those of you lucky enough to be heading to Cyprus for a spring/summer holiday, why not look Paul up. He resides in Paphos and would welcome the opportunity to chat over a pint or two. His e-mail address is as follows: Paul01@avacom.net

Can you help with my Book

I am currently writing a book about the Royal Engineers during the days of National Service, and have learned that there were a number of rather rare postings that I have not yet had information about. If any member went to Trieste, Malta, the West Indies or served with 9 Para Sqn during that period, I would like to hear from them. Eric Pegg 14, Reginald Street, Burwood, Christchurch 8009, New Zealand E-mail ericpegg@clear.net.nz

Grangues Follow Up

The personal experience of Captain John Shinner relating to the Grangues affair, which was published in the December [2000] issue, has raised quite a number of comments from our members. The following photograph was taken at the unveiling of the memorial to the fifty-two men that died.



Major John Shinner RE conducting the unveiling ceremony of the Grangues Memorial in June 1994

Looking Back Over the Years

Canal Zone 1953 - 1 Troop

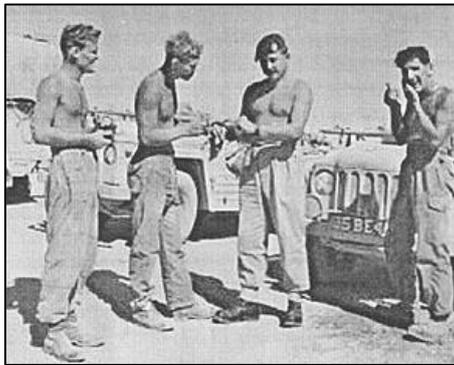


Wot, no reserves?

How about those creases!



Ken Bowen and friends



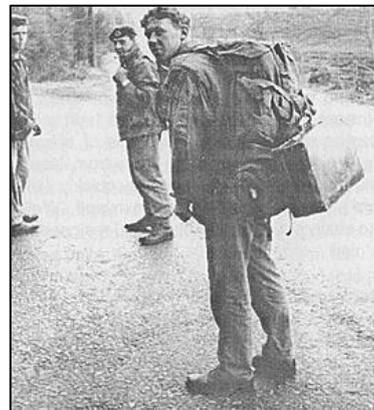
Brian Truran, Ian Wormald, Ifor (Taff) Anthony & Dave Edmonds



Mick Beadle, Willy Willtshire & Jack Braithwaite - Singapore 1959



Chris (Yorkie) Lunn, Eddy Roberts, unknown & Tich Netley (Passing Gibraltar enroute to Cyprus 1968)



In those days the bergens weren't big enough! Ian Wormald demonstrates Airborne Initiative

You're Invited to an Airborne Forces Weekend At Elvington near York

The Colonel Commandant of the Parachute Regiment General Sir Mike Jackson KCB, CBE, DSO invites you to an Airborne Forces Weekend at Elvington near York – Saturday 7th July 2001 – 'Reunion Bierfest'

The Reunion supper will be held in the spectacular Canadian Memorial Hangar, housing the unique Halifax bomber, will commence at 1900hrs. The theme will be a Tyrolean Evening of Food, Beer and Wine, accompanied by the well-known Jaeger-Meisters Band and with Dancing to the music of the superb Squadronaires Air Force Swing Band. A very special Prize will be awarded to the couple most suitably attired for a Tyrolean evening; otherwise dress will be casual. Authentic Bier Steins with the famous 'Pegasus' motif will be on offer at a modest cost that will include a free pint of lager! Cost of tickets for the evening including food is only £15. There is an added incentive of a reduced rate of just £12 if tickets are booked before 1st May 2001. A list of accommodation for those wishing to stay overnight in order to attend Sunday's events will be included with your tickets on request, plus a plan on how to reach The Yorkshire Air Museum. Make up a table by bringing friends and have fun!

Sunday 8th July

A wonderful and spectacular day out for all the family, from grandchildren to grandparents. Join us at 1100hrs at the Yorkshire Air Museum for a Drumhead Service followed by the Veterans' March past. The parade, which will be led by The Parachute Regiment Band accompanied by their famous Pony Mascot. The Main Gate will be open from 0830hrs to allow sufficient time for people to gather for the event.

Our main Pageant for the day will be the exciting re-enactment of the taking of the famous Pegasus Bridge in June 1944. Also, provisional arrangements have been made for The Red Devils Parachute Display Team and the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight (Lancaster, Spitfire and Hurricane). Many historic aircraft will be on display for viewing and photography (open cockpits). An Army Medical Centre. 1940's style ENSA Entertainment will be provided in the Hangar during the day. The York Concert Band. The various re-enactment groups will talk to visitors as they inspect their original WWII vehicles. Other displays will include Vintage Vehicles, Birds of Prey in Flight, The Army Cadet Force Drum & Bugle Band plus the chance to 'take a jump' from The Fan with the Parachute Regiment Recruiting Team adding to your enjoyment. The Grand Finale will be a magnificent flying display by the Red Arrows.

Entry Fee, payable at gate is just £5 Adults, £4 concessions (Senior citizens & Children 5-16) Under 5's free. A full range of Catering will be available throughout the day. Free parking.

Don't forget to bring along your beret and medals.

Please ensure when submitting your application for tickets for the Tyrolean Evening, that you include the following information:

From: (full name & address and telephone number)

Number of tickets required for the Reunion Bierfest, and please confirm if you would like an Accommodation List
Please enclose your cheque made payable to: YAMCO/AIRBORNE FORCES for £.....

All applications are to be sent to: David Mellors, 10 Chesterfield Road, Barlborough, Nr Chesterfield, Derbyshire. S43 4TR Tel: 01246 810854

Familiar Faces

Shattered



John Shave & Bob Beaumont after the opening of the Museum at Ranville 4th June 2000.
They are both, former members of 3 Para Sqn RE



L to R: Bob Roberts, Bob Knight, Fritz Bedford, Mac McKenna, Dad Wallace, Fred Robson, John Tonna, Neil Westbrook, Mick Fisher, Bob Cooper,
Alan Peak, Jock (the toothless cook),
squatting, Ken Maybee & Phil Ecclestone - Oman 1962

I'm not going to ask Englishmen to do that!

Nick Gibson

Airborne forces, as with most elite military units, were not created overnight, but rather, were moulded and shaped by men of foresight, vision and determination. Such a man was Lt Col John Frank Rock RE

Right at the beginning of the war several far-sighted people were beginning to see the potential of airborne forces. The Germans, with their customary efficiency, were the first to realise this potential. But even within the British army the idea was beginning to make sense. Sir Martin Lindsay, then a junior officer, sent a memo to the war office suggesting that a small parachute cadre be set up to study the problems that may arise should they decide to train paratroops. Having been passed all the way up to CIGS, it was returned with the hand-written response, *"I am not going to ask Englishmen to do that."* Sir Martin was to become the second army officer to be tasked to build the airborne forces, later to become Brigadier in command of the airborne forces

On the 6th June 1940, prophetically 4 years to the day before the D-Day landings, Winston Churchill wrote a minute directing the War Office to form a "corps of at least 5000 paratroops". John Rock would not at first have seemed to be the most obvious choice to be the man to take that job on. Recently returned from Dunkirk as Bde Maj. of 11 Inf. Bde, he had no experience of parachuting or flying.

He was born in 1905, the son of a Naval Officer who was killed on active service during WW1. Educated at Imperial Service College and RMA Woolwich, he was commissioned 2Lt RE on 3rd September 1925 and promoted to Lt exactly 2 years later. Up to his posting to command 31 Fd Coy on the 27th April 1935. then stationed in Ceylon, he had completed courses in Mounted Duties, Anti-Aircraft Defence, Air Photography, small arms and could speak 4 languages including German. He was posted to SME Chatham on 3rd March 1938, having since been promoted to Captain, and was to be Assistant Instructor (Construction) until his move to the Staff College in January 1939, and his subsequent round trip of France to the beaches at Dunkirk.

The Central Landing School was opened at Ringway Airfield, near Manchester, on 21st June 1940, under the command of Sqn Ldr L A Strange assisted by Sqn Ldr J E Benham. 3 days later Maj. Rock and Capt. Lindsay arrived as the senior army officers. Also present at these early days was Capt. W Brandish, Capt. J Lander, some RAF 'enthusiasts' and a few ex-professional 'stunt jumpers.' No.2 commando provided an initial detachment of some men, not all of who were entirely enthusiastic about the idea.

An impression of the kind of energy that Rock was capable of may be seen by the fact that the first 'Live' jumps were commenced on 13th July, less than 3 weeks after his arrival. When, a week later, the first fatality occurred, he again showed his mettle by insisting on being the first to jump when training recommenced on 8th August, as he did on all occasions where an injury or fatality threatened the morale and confidence of his troops.

Rock's vision can also be seen in the minutes of a meeting held at Ringway on 19th June 1940 where, among many other items, the issues of extra pay for airborne soldiers, specialised jump clothing such as helmets, boots and the smock, (copies of captured German equipment), redesigned battledress trousers, the provision of specially trained parachute packers ("These may be women") and the acquisition of the ideally equipped Douglas Dakota aircraft were all raised and dealt with. Even down to considering the need to provide paratroops with gloves, anklets and 'jock straps' for their protection.

By the spring of 1941, the Central Landing School had become the Central Landing Establishment and was visited by Winston Churchill, Rock having been promoted to Lt Col on 9th February 1941. Churchill had, early on, accepted the case for Glider Operations in conjunction with parachute troops and with the CLE at maximum output Rock's talents were now focused in this direction. He was appointed CO of the Glider Pilots Regiment on 21st December 1941.

From 22nd December 1941 continuously until 9th September 1942 he learned to fly from scratch. Elementary training followed by advanced on Magisters and then converting to Hotspur gliders and finally the large Horsa Gliders. Less than a month later he was to die tragically. On the 27th September 1942, during a night flight at Shrewton, the towrope of his Hotspur Glider broke and he was injured when he crashed into a telegraph pole on landing. He died on 8th October 1942 at Tidworth Hospital. He was 37 years old and unmarried. His next of kin was his sister, then Miss M A Rock. Amazingly his only decorations were the 1939-45 star and medal, awarded posthumously on 8th April 1949.

Although he has been largely ignored by the annals of history, his achievements can never be. A Sapper from the outset, not only was he our first parachute soldier but also the first glider soldier. The legacy of pride and ability that he began in 1940 thrives in today's airborne soldiers, not just in our army but in the armies all over the world that have based themselves on his model. The tradition of ABI 'airborne initiative' that is such a vital component of today's parachute soldier, can be traced directly to the early days at Ringwood and John Rocks inspiration.

The official War Office record, Airborne Forces, compiled by Lt Col TBH Otway DSO says:-

"The greater part of the credit, on the Army side, for the success of the initial experiments and trials, must go to Major Rock, whose unflinching courage and determination in the face of all difficulties was an inspiration to others"

With grateful thanks to Fred Gray and Bob Prosser without whose research this article would not have been possible.

A Real 'ard Man

A Former Troop Commander

I gained, completely without justification and for a limited time only I suspect, the reputation of being a very hard man indeed. It happened thus.

The Squadron was required to support a 16 Para Brigade exercise in Germany and apart from some jammy souls who clicked for the umpire slots our participation was limited to a very large composite troop. One of the normal troop commanders, well senior to me, was elected Troop Commander and I, as a much more junior member of the species was popped into the Troop Officer's slot for the duration. Clearly the OC had his head on properly and I was going to be given the most limited possible opportunity to cock things up. Things followed their normal pattern and having taken off from UK we spent hours flying around waiting for someone to decide that things really were too bad even for the likes of us to be distributed willy nilly around the countryside by parachute. We landed in Stuttgart and, guess what, it was dark and raining. However, with commendable dispatch the Americans found us some hot food and Glory be! Two blankets apiece. Of course we were going to remain out of doors in the rain on the grass of the airfield pending some different arrangements, which turned out to be a ten-tonner conversion course. Naturally it was still raining and in the dark when we set off. I was in the cab with one of the Para Bn QM's and a seriously bad RCT driver.

After overtaking a stationary convoy of American vehicles and hitting every one with the big lollipop thing on the front mudguard, the QM declared enough was enough and took over the driving where upon I went to sleep. The exercise, which followed, was the usual kind, very little sleep, too many fags and too much strong tea and no idea what anybody else was doing, except the umpires who were warm, dry and full of good German bier.

The end of the exercise duly arrived and having been such good boys we were allowed one night on the town before getting the big bird home again. There was an early bird flight and a later bird flight and I volunteered to be on the second flight so that troop commander being a married man could get back to his little nest before anything else got cold. Being wise in the ways of the Squadron I decided that if the boys had to be back in camp by 0330hrs, which they did in order to get the flight at the usual ungodly hour, it would be eminently sensible to organise a posse to round them up. I duly elected myself and a LCpl Champ driver for the honour and set off for the bright lights at about 0230hrs.

In due course we hit the bright lights and, sure enough, there were a couple of the boys very pleased to see us. Even they had managed to work out that with no money, no German and no time they could, possibly be heading for trouble. As we headed for the airfield I spotted a Parachute Regiment soldier who also needed to have a lift if he was going to make the flight. When this was explained to him for about the fourth time he climbed aboard and off we went only to be stopped by traffic lights about half a mile down the road. At this point the Parachute Regiment chap bailed out and legged it in a rather unsteady fashion back down the road. At this time of the morning I am not at my best and, somewhat incensed I gave chase shouting to my driver and his passengers to follow me (to make the arrest as it would never do for an officer to wrestle with a soldier would it)

The soldier turned off the road and ran across a bombed site and, quite suddenly, disappeared. On reaching the spot where he had disappeared I saw the reason. There was a roofless cellar in the middle of the bombed site protected by a single strand of wire conveniently placed just below knee height. The soldier lay on the bottom of the cellar moaning gently as he had fallen on his face, which had proved less than suitable for breaking concrete. Seeing some steps down into the cellar I climbed down, got the chap on his feet and got him to the top of the steps just as the Champ arrived. Picture the scene. Self-supporting clearly unhappy soldier whose face is covered in blood with a fairly obviously broken nose. Newly arrived clutch 9 Sqn punters clearly a lot less than ready to believe every word uttered by their young officer, whom they had last seen a lot less than grunted legging it in hot pursuit of a soldier who had obviously displeased young Sir.

I assured them, "I didn't lay a hand on him," which statement generated a lot less than total belief.

Looking back on it, it was really rather funny observing a bunch of 9 Sqn hairies pretending they believed every word of my disclaimers "No, of course you didn't Sir". "You wouldn't lay a hand on him Sir." I continued to assure them that the chap had fallen "Of course he did Sir, you can see that, silly fellow that he is." All my attempts were in vain and word went around the squadron and the battalion that it was not a wise move to upset me now they had seen what I was capable of when aroused.

Sometime later I overheard one of my troop warning a newly joined member with words to the effect that, "You don't want to mess with him or he'll half kill you and I mean half kill you." Grossly unfair, untrue but quite handy when it came to getting a bit of order from time to time.

Tapping the Boards

Paul Dunkley

Waking up with a hangover was pretty much the norm. What made this day different, was that we were in best kit for church parade. On our return from church, leave passes were to be given out prior to the Sqn going overseas

At muster, prior to us getting on the 3 tonners the S.S.M. I for (Bend the Knee) Anthony, informed us that there would be an ID parade when we returned to camp. The NAAFI Manager would be picking out some individuals who had caused a disturbance in the Roundabout Club the night before. I thought little of this at the time.

Then on the way to Aldershot I wondered what the disturbance could have been; and what's more, how had I missed it? Then it hit me. Could they be referring to the little misunderstanding we'd had with the manager. No, surely not?

Time to think. What had we done? We'd had a few words with the manager, Phi! Poulton had put his point over very plainly, Froth Beer had agreed with him, and that was that. Or was it? No wait. Phil tried to get hold of him. He failed, Froth leaned over the bar, Phil gave him a shove and over he went.

By this time the NAAFI Manager (an ex-marine, I might add) had made himself scarce. 'Netter,' the barmaid, feeling sorry for Froth lying in a pool of slops from the drip trays which he had taken with him in his descent the other side of the bar, helped him to his feet, and escorted him back to his rightful side of the bar. Yes that's what happened.

On being marched into church I couldn't help wondering what all the fuss was about. No real damage was done. All through the service that morning I couldn't help thinking something was amiss, and I was about to be dropped in it!

Phil being a catholic was not with me in the C of E church, and I didn't know where Froth was, so we had no time to put a story together.

The NAAFI manager and myself had had words in the past; and we didn't see eye to eye on a lot of things. Doing some quick thinking on the way back to camp I knew the sod wouldn't miss this opportunity to drop me in it.

Time for A.B.I. to kick in

Knowing Titch Netley the 4 ton driver, would have to slow down at the North Horns crossroads, this would give me an ideal opportunity to leave the truck and nip in to camp the back way. The 'Gripper' would fall the lads in as they got off the trucks and the ID Parade would take place. I figured if I wasn't there, I couldn't be ID'd. Wrong! Unknown to me they'd already captured Phil, and were looking for his mate.

I quickly got in to the spider without being seen and was changing when Cpl Henry Morgan came in. He informed me then they already had Phil, and that no leave passes were to be given out until I was found. He then left me . Getting back in to best kit I couldn't help wonder how Froth had slipped through the net. Jammy Bugger.

I gave myself up to a standing ovation from the lads queuing for their leave passes. The S.S.M. told both Phil and myself we were to be charged, and stood us outside the O.C.'s office. Taking our belts and berets off the two of us were to be tapping the boards once again.

Once inside the O.C.'s office I couldn't help thinking something was not quite right. When the O.C. was talking to Phil he'd be looking at me, and when he was talking to me, he was looking at Phil. He then did a very funny thing. He found Phil not guilty and asked the S.S.M. to march him out. On bringing Phil up to attention the O.C.'s head shot to Phil from me as I stood ridged. I remember thinking at the time Froth wasn't the only jammy bugger that day.

The O.C. being a nice sort of chap asked me if I would accept his punishment or go for a court martial, having nothing personal against him I said I would accept his punishment, after all anyone can make a mistake.

Prior to getting marched in to the O.C.'s office Ken Hart had told us that only 14 days could be fitted in before going abroad, so accepting the O.C.'s punishment I figured I'd be lucky to get 7, but more likely get 14 days nick. I was indeed awarded 14 days detention and marched out.

Now where were they going to put me for Christmas?

They tried all over the 'Shot' but none of the nicks wanted me. They tried Cove, they definitely didn't want me, as they already had one Sqn lad, and he was giving them the run a round. I remember the S.S.M. saying if they couldn't find me somewhere he would take me home. (What a nice man) They eventually found a vacant cell in Buller barracks.

Deep down I knew they would find somewhere for me to reside for the next 14 days!

An Incredible Sequence of Events

Editor

I was delighted to find a fairly lengthy letter contained in the first of many letters received that day. The sender was John Ferry, who is currently serving as the GSM in Hohne Garrison (Germany). The content of the letter read as follows:

I have, as one of my duties as GSM, to plan and undertake the annual garrison Remembrance Service. I don't know if you have been to this part of Germany, but nearby there is a fairly large Commonwealth War Grave site at Beckingen. The cemetery contains 2,401 known and unknown graves. To cut a long story short, my wife (Sandra) and I have spent the best part of a year compiling the cemetery onto a computer database. I appreciate that there is a Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, however it has been designed to assist a single person locate a single grave, and not to answer the multitude of question that was being asked. (How many by Regt, Corps, Sex, Army, RAF, dates of death etc). During our research we found a single Airborne Engineer grave, and wondered, if, through the Association, you could find out any information on the following soldier:



2090772 Sapper John (known as Jack to his family) Everitt, 9 (Airborne) Field Coy, died 29th November 1944, age 23, son of John and Mary Everitt, husband of Doreen Elsie Josephine Everitt of Steventon Berkshire. Having read the letter, I place it to one side, and opened the second of many other envelopes. This contained the subscription to the Journal together with a short note from the sender, Eric Thorne. Concluding the note with 'regards,' Eric wrote in brackets, (former 9 (Airborne) Field Coy). A hasty telephone call revealed that not only did Eric know Jack Everitt, but he was in fact his best mate. They had served together in North Africa, Sicily, Italy and Arnhem. Eric had also been requested by Jack to be his best man for his marriage to Doreen on the 11th May 1944. However, due to travel restrictions in place at that

time, Eric was not permitted to fulfil his friends wishes.

It was during the battle for the Arnhem bridge that Jack suffered a serious wound and was subsequently taken POW. His death is recorded as the result of an aneurism and from the wounds he suffered at the bridge.

The original letter from John and Sandra also contained a photo of John Everitt's final resting place, and my offer of the photo to Eric was eagerly received. Eric could not give me any further information regarding Jack's widow, although he believed she had remarried some years later and had emigrated to Australia. But the story didn't end there. Several weeks later I received further information from Hohne. John and Sandra on revisiting Jack's grave, had found a recently placed 'poppy cross' with a message from his widow Doreen; together with her married name of Hughes, and a UK address. The name of Doreen Hughes together with the address was familiar to me, as she is one of only two ladies that receives a copy of the AEA Journal in her own right.

A further phone call, this time to Doreen, confirmed the previous information, save that she had not emigrated after marrying her second husband Gibb. Accompanied by Gibb, until his death several years ago, they had regularly returned to Oosterbeek and in particular, to Jack's final resting place in Beckingen. Eric's belief that she had emigrated now explained why in 56 years she had never heard from him. However, to this day, Doreen still does not know the full story of Jack's demise. But the years of not having the opportunity to speak to each other has now lapsed, and Eric and Doreen have spent much time talking and reminiscing about the past.



John Everitt's final resting place, suitably attired with 'Red Beret,' courtesy of John & Sandra Ferry

Our thanks and appreciation are extended to John and Sandra Ferry who made all this possible. In the words of Doreen, "You have made one lady very happy."

On the behalf of the Airborne Engineers Association may we offer belated congratulations to Doreen on her 73rd birthday which was celebrated on 11th March.

John and Sandra will be happy to assist anyone requiring information concerning the Beckingen cemetery and will take photographs if required.

James Corby Cause

WO2 (SSM) Adam Frame MBE

I am writing to express our appreciation for the most substantial and generous donation received for the James Corby Cause. On the behalf of all ranks of 9 Parachute Squadron and indeed the Corby family may we offer our most grateful thanks to the members of the Airborne Engineers Association. We have not yet completed fund raising activities therefore I am unable to inform you of the total sum raised. Suffice to say that with all the fund raising in Northern Ireland and since our return, we were able to present the Corby's with a cheque for almost £8,500 at Christmas. With the fraternal assistance of the AEA branches collectively and continued efforts, we are now well up to the anticipated £10,000.

The funds will be retained in an interest gaining account, with Capt Mick Coles (Admin Offr) and Sgt Martin Corby as the named holders. The two account holders will then justify and release funds as necessary for either the improvement of James' quality of life, or the inevitable heart operation.

Again, we are most grateful for your support to this cause and the very kind donations. The Squadron wishes you all well.

The Grand Piano Expedition 2000

Further travels of Jim Masters as he accompanies Col John Blashford - Snell on a recent Expedition

Until recently a small community of 190 Amerindians of the Wai Wai tribe have lived at Gunns Village in a remote part of Southern Guyana.

They are hunter-gatherers who have established a symbiotic relationship with the tropical forest around them. Travel to the outside world is limited to long journeys by dugout canoe and an occasional aircraft that may land at the nearby airstrip. These are deeply religious, gentle, shy people endeavouring to be as self-sufficient as possible.

The Guyana Defence Force maintains a radio station at the village so that illegal incursions, mainly by gold prospectors may be reported. Recently, a number of foreign scientists have shown a growing interest in the plants of the area, especially in the Acari Mountains. However Guyana's Environmental Protection Agency is extremely cautious when issuing permits for research groups. Likewise the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs carefully vets applications to visit this restricted tribal area.

Since 1988 the Scientific Exploration Society (SES) has at the request of the Guyana Government, been carrying out projects in Guyana. During a visit to the Wai Wai in March / April 2000, Elessa, the tribe's priest asked Colonel John Blashford-Snell if a grand piano could be obtained for their church. Although the Wai Wai could not play one they are musical people and it was felt they could soon learn.

Whilst consideration was being given to this request the Essequibo burst its bank flooding Gunns village. Major General Joe Singh, former commander of the Guyana Defence Force has always taken a keen interest in the Wai Wai's affairs. He is also the SES representative in Guyana and alerted the Society to the fact that the Wai Wai was in a desperate state. Immediately funds were sent out to enable a powerful chainsaw to be purchased and used to clear a site for a new village on higher ground. At this time the Millennium Copthorne Group whose Chairman, Mr Kwek Leng Beng is a classical music enthusiast, kindly agreed to provide a grand piano and BWIA West Indies Airways offered to fly it to Georgetown, the capital of Guyana. This proposal attracted much media attention and enabled the SES to gain sponsorship for many items needed urgently by the Wai Wai. Thus with the backing of the Daily Mail and a BBC TV an expedition was sent out on 17th October with a splendid grand piano, medical supplies, engineer equipment and educational materials. The team was led by Colonel John Blashford-Snell, Chairman of SES, and included Captain Jim Masters (a retired Royal Engineer), Professor Yolima Cipagatita, a Colombian economist and the Society's Latin American representative, handicraft specialist Anna Nicholas, the eminent ethno-biologist Dr Conrad Gorinsky, Sgt Paul Busek, Royal Engineers, Dr Simon Richards, a piano playing general practitioner and Daily Mail photographer Mark Large. The TV team consisted of David Goodale who had spent many months with the Yanomane Indians in Venezuela, Karen Kelly and Stephen Foster. In Guyana, they were joined by Corporal Kari Kerr and Lance Corporal Gmawale Sisdhannie of the Guyana Defence Force Engineer Battalion. The aim was to deliver the piano, medical supplies and educational materials to the new village and teach the Wai Wai to play the piano. At the same time an assessment would be made of the most urgent needs in order to make (the village reasonably habitable before the onset of the rains in November.

The team's first problem came when BWIA discovered that their aircraft flying between Port of Spain, Trinidad and Georgetown was too small to carry the piano in its carefully prepared crate.

This measured some 5' x 5' x 2'6" and weighed 800 lbs. However, BWIA could still get it from England to Trinidad. With only 10 days to go there was feverish activity at SES Dorset base to find a means of lifting the piano the final leg of its journey to Georgetown. In the end a Skyvan from Guyana flew to Port of Spain to collect it. Then BWIA learned that the piano must be on the ground at Port of Spain for at least 24 hours to clear customs, even though it was in transit. Frantically the packers, Derek Cadde Pianos, brought their work forward and the piano was rushed to Heathrow with hours to spare to meet the outgoing BWIA flight. Alas this aircraft had technical problems in Barbados and did not reach England until 24 hours later. By this time the SES Expedition Manager, Melissa Dice was beginning to wish she had never heard of the piano.

However the BWIA plane eventually came in and after a dozen trans-Atlantic phone calls, bureaucracy was overcome and the expeditions highly efficient agents, Wilderness Explorers of Guyana sent their deputy General Manager Teri Ramnarain with the Skyvan to ensure the precious cargo was collected. By this time it had achieved celebrity status in Guyana and was safely landed at Ogle airfield without let or hindrance.

Arriving at midnight on 17th October the team was greeted by a smiling Yolima Cipagauta who had flown in from Miami two days earlier to purchase rations and camp stores.

At dawn Jim and Paul were off to a local carpenters shop and with sweat pouring off them started constructing a very robust hard wood sledge on which to mount the piano for its overland haul.

At the ungodly hour of 0500 19th October the expedition assembled and at the start of another boiling hot, humid day, the Skyvan opened her huge rear doors to reveal "the beast" securely strapped in and ready to be flown where no piano has ever been.

Two Brittain Norman Islanders joined the fleet, and as a great orange sun rose out of the Atlantic, the planes roared off like a military task force heading south over the endless unbroken jungle.

Two and a half hours and 350 miles later the massive Essequibo waterway was just a sinuous muddy river, barely a hundred yards wide, snaking through the forest.

Throttling back, the aircraft dropped through the low cloud and ahead lay their destination, Gunns Strip The 600 yards of yellowing grass appeared deserted, but as they circled; figures appeared running from the forest. The Wai Wai were there. The Skyvan thumped down and with her propellers thundering in reverse, came to a halt beside the Amerindians.

Not wishing to close down his motors in this remote spot the pilot was eager to be off again. The Wai Wai needed no second bidding and in a trice had the stores off and under Paul Busek's stentorian orders they lifted the massive crate. "Rather you than me" said the pilot as he waved farewell. Within minutes the planes had gone and silence reigned. Immediately Jim Masters, in despite of his seventy years, was off to recce the route. Using the Motorola walky talky he kept in touch with John. "A few creeks to cross, bit muddy here..." but Jim, a highly experienced field engineer was enjoying the challenge.

Meanwhile Paul had got a team of braves and expedition members manning the pulling ropes and the sledge began to inch its way forward. It was noon, the sun right overhead and water at a premium. Yoli and Anna went ahead to find a stream whilst the men heaved and strained at the ropes. The sledge creaked but did its job well whilst the TV cameras whirred and the camera people sweated along with the others.

A mile of open savannah had been a swamp when the SES was last there, now fortunately it was bone dry but full of foot deep fissures. The sledge crossed these with ease but suddenly the grassland ended at a wall of jungle trees. The track ran on, a thirty-foot wide creek was bridged with logs and more Amerindians arrived to keep up the momentum. At the old Gunns village, now almost a ghost town, they made a base camp in the thatch roofed guest house, known as "Roach Hill" in view of its other occupants, which also included a nest of large red legged tarantulas who took a liking to David Goodale.



The new village or Masakemari ("The Place of Mosquitoes") was 4 miles upriver and only partly built said the Wai Wai, but that was where the piano must go. There were two routes. The overland way through dense forest was littered with fallen trees and bisected by numerous streams before it reached the 200 foot

high hill on which the Indians were building their new home.

This would be a safe but very slow route. Alternatively there was the Essequibo, although only flowing at a knot it was dangerously low. Rocks and shoals made navigation hazardous and a set of rapids ran across it, which although no great challenge for a lightly laden canoe could be disastrous to a boat heavily weighed down with a grand piano. If the river fell further it might not be possible to surmount this obstacle.

John, Jim and Paul discussed rafts and boats, and then Jim found a huge dugout, thirty feet long and five feet wide with an 8 hp outboard.

The rapid came up as they rounded the first bend and the motorman skilfully aimed at the centre of the main tongue of water that ran between the black rocks in the centre.



The route from the river to the hill top village was narrow and swampy with more creeks, but Isaiah, one of the priests, knew a shallow creek that led nearer to the village. So, landing all the women and children, the great canoe went on up the river to this inlet. The air was thick with insects. Narrow and choked with vines and logs it seemed impossible but flashing axes and cutlasses cleared the way as gas bubbled up from the depths of the coffee coloured water. Around the final bend, a mass of Indian canoes blocked the creek. Thankfully there was no shortage of help and soon the piano was being carried with the aid of long poles up the steep hill. Grunts and groans punctuated the oven hot air as the summit came in sight. The Guyana flag was flying above the half

built school. For the last leg the faithful sledge was used again. Now women, children and braves were fighting for a place on the drag ropes.

The crate was carried into the shade of the thatched roof. The Guyana Defence Force Corporals shouldered their AK47's and started unscrewing the box. Everyone peered at the gleaming polished wood and brass fittings reflecting in the afternoon's sun. As the elegant instrument emerged the Wai Wai stood in awe.

In the days that followed Jim, Paul, Karl and Gmawale worked on the school walls and designed a water pumping system for the village. Simon handed over the medical supplies to the clinic and treated several patients. An obsolete set of ENT inspection instruments, given by a retired Dorset Doctor, had been fitted with batteries by Varta, the Somerset Company, and this was greatly appreciated. Dennis the headmaster of the school was unwell; so he was very glad of Anna's help in teaching the children.

Conrad discussed herbal cures with the Wai Wai and recommended natural sources of malaria prophylactics. Simon also used his tuning forks to test some of the children, born without ears. He wanted to see if anything could be done to help their hearing, but sadly, this seems unlikely.

A party of older Indians had gone to visit friends in neighbouring Surinam and as the river was falling it was felt they might have difficulty in making the 100-mile journey upstream in a small canoe. So John, Conrad, Mark, Karen and Yoli went with two young hunters, Aron and Eligah, to take them food, and using the expedition's petrol to tow them home. This journey took them through completely uninhabited territory with breath taking scenery, and rocks exposed in the riverbed showing ancient petroglyphs depicting animals and strange symbols. One especially fine design showed a jaguar attacking all an anaconda, and, as a jaguar is often seen at this point by the Wai Wai, it may depict something that actually happened in antiquity. John recorded the mysterious signs for further research by the Walter Rothe museum in Georgetown.

Aron and Eligah had their powerful long bows always to hand with which they shot iguana. They also killed a huge tapir that must have weighed 500 lbs, and several wild turkeys and large rodents named labba. They even caught a small caiman (alligator) alive with their bare hands. John and Mark fished using the rod kindly provided by Shakespeare to land eight piranha and fine farana in thirty minutes!

Alas when they reached the point where the older Indians were expected there was no sign. Eligah, whose father was one of the parties, was concerned, but after waiting sixteen hours, he decided to leave food and return to Gunns. Happily the party was located two days later and came home unscathed.

Returning up river, the expedition boat had a tough time in surmounting a long cataract and the team had to go over the side to push the canoe up the foaming rapids.

Back at base the tribe gave them a great welcome. Food is not plentiful at this time of year and the tapir fed the entire village. The Indians are conservationists, and only hunt what is needed for food. Thus there is no shortage of game or fish. They also have small farms producing yams, cassava, bananas and other fruit and vegetables.

Using a NERA Satellite phone, John had been able to order the pump and pipes for the new water system, additional medical supplies and spares for the chain saw. So, Wilderness Explorers staff purchased all this in Georgetown. Thanks to the efforts of Anna and Simon, who is also a choirmaster, a concert was arranged and on Friday 27th October the Wai Wai children gathered outside their school. Their parents came too, and on this lovely hill; surrounded by rain forest, a hundred voices sang Swing Low, Humpty Dumpty, Steal Away and many Guyanese songs. Simon and the Wai Wai musicians played Praeludium from J.S. Bach, the Moonlight Sonata by Beethoven and Chopin's Nocturne. It brought tears to several eyes. A feast of curried tapir, a cassava cereal named terrine and smoked fish followed before the expedition made its way back to Roach Hall. Next day, all enjoyed a football match, in spite of it being 93°F.

Out of respect to Karen Kelly, the Scots BBC camera lady, haggis, neeps and tatties, kindly provided by Stahley's of Edinburgh, were served for the final dinner, with Karen reading the famous ode.



Karen with members of the Wai Wai tribe

When on 29th October the Skyvan returned it carried the pumps and pipes for the Wai Wai water supply. There were also medical supplies and spares for the vital chain saw. A small Honda generator was also left for the village and many other items needed to re-establish the community in their new home. The grand piano had proved to be file catalyst that had attracted all this support. As John said in his final briefing, "The mission had been accomplished," and as Elessa, the Chief Priest had said, "God moves in mysterious ways."

Celebrations Down Under



Bert and Maureen Stevenson at the occasion of their daughter Mandy's wedding to James.

Bert was the Sqn SSM 1963 - 1965.

You're still looking good Bert, keep taking the beauty pills!

Double Hills Memorial

Peter Yeates

Most Airborne Engineers will know that the first casualties of Arnhem were not suffered in Holland but in the peaceful countryside of Somerset. On Sunday morning, 17th September 1944, as they made their way in the giant air armada heading for the descent at Arnhem, there was an explosion in one of the 9 Field Company (Airborne) gliders and 21 Sappers and 2 glider pilots lost their lives as the glider crashed to earth near Paulton.

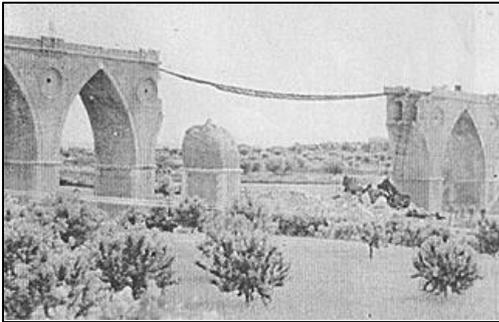
The field where the glider crashed is known as Double Hills and it lies on land owned by the Prince of Wales who, with his tenant farmer, has given useful support to the project which erected a memorial to the fallen on the site some 22 years ago. Every year there is a service of remembrance and a parade at the site. It is an example of our determination not to forget the sacrifices of those who went before us to ensure our freedom and one hopes that such memorials will continue, even after those who were part of this period of history have passed on to that other LZ.

Normally the service at Paulton takes place on the nearest Sunday to the anniversary of the beginning of the battle of Arnhem. This year the date has been slipped to coincide with the AGM weekend of the AEA which will be held nearby in Bristol. The parade and service will, therefore, be on Sunday 7th October at 2.30p.m. Please note that the service starts at 2.30p.m. and that the approach to the memorial is across two fields. Be prepared for a short cross-country walk and give yourself plenty of time. Also note that it is October so the weather may be inclement. Dress for the conditions!

Railtrack-Take Note

Robert Burgess MC, ARIBA, APAGB

As railway lines seem to be in the news these days, perhaps the readers would be interested to see the state of an Italian rail bridge passing over the Sangro, South of Pescara, in 1943 after being blown up by the Germans. In spite of the devastating explosion which demolished the stone arches, the lines and sleepers remained intact.



Should there have been any hair cracks or defects in the steel rails during manufacture; these lines would not have withstood such stresses. Whilst I appreciate that the present spate of rail accidents have taken place 50 years after I took this picture, I believe that hair cracks have their beginnings in the manufacture stage. Would our railway lines survive this treatment? Of course the lines as left by the explosion were no good; and had to be removed before a Bailey bridge could be built. However, some of these bridges passed over raging torrents and the Sappers could then pass over to get

measurements of the gap, establish the state of the abutments and obtain details sufficient to call up bridging equipment.

I have records of other demolished bridges with the lines intact and the gap is some 90 metres wide. We did not reinstate the railway, but the tracks made good assault roads for the infantry.

A Holiday Down Under

Fred Gray

Betty and I left the UK on the 24th November for a long tour of Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand. The first month was to be a nostalgic trip to the places we lived in during our Far East posting in 1961-64. I was serving with 11 Independent Field Squadron RE, first in Butterworth, and later in Malacca. The second month we would be visiting friends and family in Australia and touring New Zealand seeing as many former 9 Squadron friends as possible. On the return journey we would be staying in Perth for six days with George and Rene Jones.

We arrived in Bangkok on the 25th Nov and one day later went on a prearranged two-day tour to the site of the infamous River Kwai Bridge, and the allied war cemetery at Kanchanaburi. We also saw "Hell Fire Pass " a cutting for the railway through solid rock made with the most primitive of hand tools. It is twenty-seven meters deep and thirty meters long. As sappers I think we could appreciate the enormity of the task having done a bit of rock blasting during our service years. No fewer than 76 men were beaten to death during its construction. The Australian government maintains it as a war memorial now.

Penang was a great disappointment to us as we remembered it as a sleepy little Island in the sun. It is now one huge holiday centre with high-rise hotels and apartments. The roads are almost as bad as the UK and more are being built to take the increasing number of cars. Malacca was almost as bad with development on the increase. One of the biggest disappointments was to see the state of Terendak Camp. Built in the early sixties for the 28th Commonwealth Brigade it was truly a dream posting. The camp had everything to make life pleasant; swimming pools (three), a beach club, a sailing club, squash courts, soccer and cricket pitches, a very modern hospital and all the facilities that any army wife could wish for on a foreign posting. Sadly the married quarters are now in a rundown state and the sailing club and squash courts just about ready to fall down. The beach club looked deserted and the beach was filthy. New blocks of flats have been built where once there were football and rugby pitches. Apart from the HQ area and officers' quarters the place resembled little of its former self

After five days in Singapore we flew to Adelaide in Australia. A wonderful city laid out by Colonel Light, a former Royal Engineer officer. The city is surrounded by parkland on four sides with broad streets built on the grid system. The sea is only a short distance away by various forms of transport, which run on time. In contrast the largest and oldest city in Australia, Sydney, is a bustling city of over a million people and boasting the most famous harbour in the world. Betty and I spent New Years Eve there (along with one and a half million other people), watching the fireworks. A truly magnificent display but not an experience I would like to endure twice. On the 4th January we flew to Cairns in Queensland to see the Great Barrier Reef. The most memorable part of this trip was eating the "Tiger Prawns." The most delicious seafood that we have ever experienced. At least six inches long and dipped in a honey sauce they were a meal in themselves.

On the tenth of January we landed in Christchurch, New Zealand. Christchurch has a most wonderful atmosphere, which compliments the people and the attractive city centre with its cathedral and old-fashioned trams. I was amazed that I could do a "U" turn in the main street during the rush hour. With hardly a moving car in sight and a street broad enough to turn a bus and petrol at 30 pence a litre, it made the motorists life very pleasant. After seeing the sights of Christchurch we set off for Queenstown in our hired car to see the first of my former 9 Sqn friends.

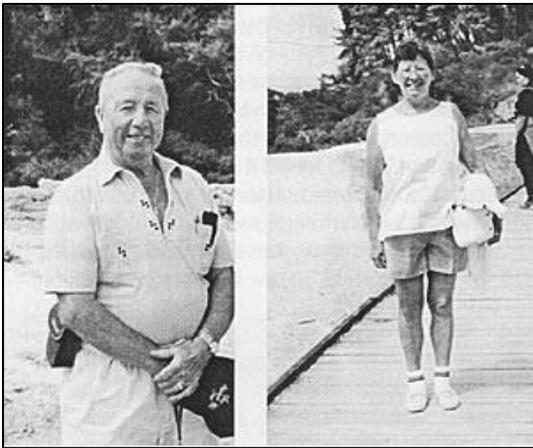


The journey down to Queenstown took ten hours travelling through magnificent scenery and almost empty roads. Betty and I met up with Major Don Spary and his very charming wife Jan at their home near Queenstown, and also had the pleasure of meeting their son Alistair, recently arrived home from a trip to South Africa. Don was my Troop Commander in 1957 and later was 2IC of the Squadron under Major Ian Wilson.

Jan & Don

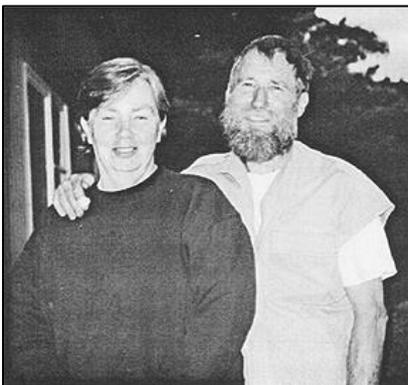
Queenstown is the tourist centre of the South Island and a more beautiful place to live would be very hard to find. The scenery is magnificent and only topped by that of Milford Sound, which is a four-hour coach drive through more beautiful countryside. As the weather was at its best Betty and I decided to fly back to Queenstown from Milford in one of the many light aircraft that act as a taxi service. Flying over the Southern Alps in a five seat Cessna almost touching the peaks is an experience that will not be forgotten for a long time.

After breakfast with Don and Jan on our final day we departed Queenstown for our long drive north, via the west coast to Picton where we would cross the Cook Strait to the North Island.



George & Phyllis

Our first stop in the North Island was at lake Taupo where George Bell and his wife Phyllis have their home. Once again this is an area of outstanding beauty with the township of Taupo built on the shore of New Zealand's largest lake. We stayed with our hosts for four nights and during that time they gave us the full tour of all the places of interest around the area. A drive of about fifty miles to the north of Taupo is the Waiotapu thermal area. With an ever-changing landscape, due to the thermal activity, we saw everything from boiling mud pools to beautiful coloured thermal lakes. We left George and Phyllis to drive north to the home of Cliff and Marion Joy.



Marion & Cliff

Their home is perched on the side of a mountain with only one neighbour for at least fifteen miles on either side.

Cliff decided to show us the river, which runs, along the valley at the bottom of his property. As we walked down the hill we were followed by fourteen ducks, four chickens plus one old one that was lame, a huge dog and two cats. Further down the hill a goat and a sheep joined us. Cliff took Betty and I to see the old worked-out gold mines and then on a tour of the local beauty spots.

It seems that every turn you make in New Zealand there is more magnificent scenery. In Auckland we saw the gathering of the yachts that will be taking part in the Americas Cup in two years' time. There was no British entry on show but the Americans and the Italians were trying very hard to outdo each other with the size of their national flags. I think the Italians just shaded it.

After a final visit to George and Phyllis we spent time near Wellington with the intention of seeing Bob Gillespie. I had arranged to see him three weeks previously but when I phoned his wife told me the sad news that he had passed away since my phone call.

We returned to Sydney for two days then flew onto Perth. George and Rene Jones met us at the airport and took us to their home in the suburbs. They had organised a barbeque for the following day and had invited a number of former members of the Squadron.

I hadn't seen Don Newman since 1969 and was greatly surprised to see that he had changed so little. Jim Crozier and Bob (Percy) Waddell were another of the Perth locals and I was extremely pleased to see Terry McGrath who had been a guest at my wedding forty-one years ago. We all had a great time reminiscing and catching up with what we had done with our lives in the intervening years. George and Rene had other guests staying at the time and I'm sure they were more than a little bemused with what to them must have been a strange sense of humour that is probably unique to the Squadron. I was very sorry when the time came to say goodbye.

During our stay George and Rene gave Betty and I some excellent tours of Perth and the immediate area. On one occasion George drove for over three hours for me to meet up with one of the Australian Troop I served with in Malaya. He also invited another one of the Troop to his home where once again we brought each other up to date with the events of our lives. These former 11 Squadron colleagues had served in Vietnam and both finished their Army careers as Warrant Officers.

Betty and I flew back to the UK on February 12th after 80 days of touring. Our Squadron friends went out of their way to make us welcome and made sure we saw as much as possible in the short time that we were with them. We both appreciated their kindness very much and thoroughly enjoyed --being able to meet up with them after



so many years. I hope that in the not-too distant future we will be able to return the hospitality they gave to us. The value of the Association is most evident on this type of holiday, as without the AEA we would have lost contact many years ago. One regret I do have is that I was not able to see all the former Squadron members living Down Under. Time just did not allow. Next Time!

L to R: Bob (Percy) Waddell, Jim Crozier, Fred, Terry McGrath, George Jones and squatting: James, son of Bill Heseltine

Piper Banner

Bob Prosser



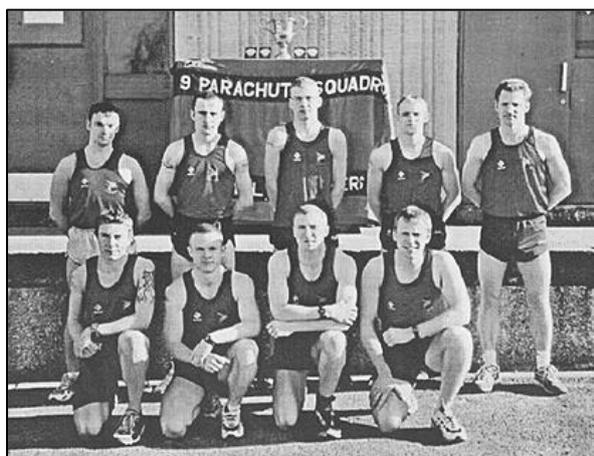
At the Yorkshire Branch Christmas dinner a beautiful silk Banner, made by Mrs Bobby Thornton, wife of Capt (ret'd) Tom Thornton MSM, was given to the Chairman for the Association.

Our 'Piper,' Frank Menzies-Hearn, was delighted with such a beautiful banner, and promised that it would hang from the bass drone with pride wherever he is playing throughout the world. Bobby we thank you very much for another beautiful reference to our Association.

9 Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers

Cross Country

Tapping the huge reservoir of natural resources in the Squadron, the OC, Maj Rob Rider asked the Squadron to do a bit of running and try and win some of the many trophies on offer. The Cross-Country team duly responded and led by the excellent Troopy Clark (3Tp) and Troopy Lawes (2Tp) have won a succession of races: RE Half Marathon Minor Units Team and SNCOs champs; Corps Major and Minor Units Cross-Country champs, Army Minor Units Cross-Country Relays and 4 Div runners up and finally, on a glorious day in February, Army Minor Units Cross-Country Champs - the first time ever for the Squadron in the field of Cross-Country and the first winners from the Corps since the days of the under worked Postal and Courier days in the 1980s!



The key event has definitely been winning the Armies at Deepcut on 14th Feb 01, with 9 Parachute Squadron winning the Army Minor Units Cross-Country title ahead of the PT School/HQ 4 Div. Lt Richard Lawes in 30th position, who has just passed P COMPANY and the Jumps Course and is now an Army Champ already, ably led the team.

**L to R - Rear: Sgt Jackson, Spr Malcolm, Spr Walker, Spr Jones, Major Rider
Front: Cpl Wyer, Spr Minns, Lt Lawes, Lt Clark (absent LCpl Hall)**

The rest of the team did extremely well to pack close behind on a tough, muddy course, with Cpl Danny Wyer and Spr Taff Jones (both borrowed from the Pre-

Para staff for the afternoon) posting good quality performances in 48th and 52nd place. The OC, Maj Rob Rider, LCpl Twiggy Hall and Spr Spotty Walker rounded off the team positions in 61st, 66th and 74th place respectively. Spr Walker was selected to run for the Army Junior Team in the Inter Services Competition, which was subsequently cancelled due to the Foot and Mouth disaster! Similarly, the above mentioned were due to run for the Sapper team in the Inter-Corps Champs in March but that race too fell victim to the plague!

So a tremendously successful year for the running team, easily the best in the Corps, with results achieved despite doing all the exercises and no full time training! Individual and team results in the Army race were as follows:

Individual Men

1 st	Cpl Kenny Butler	HQNI	- 31 mins 01 secs
2 nd	Pte Hinch	3 CS Regt	- 31 mins 18 secs
3 rd	LCpl Shepperd	3 CS Regt	- 31 mins 21 secs
6 th	SSgt Palmer	1 RSME	- 32 mins 19 secs
30 th	Lt Lawes	9 Sqn	- 34 mins 37 secs
48 th	Cpl Wyer	9 Sqn	- 35 mins 38 secs
52 nd	Spr Jones	9 Sqn	- 36 mins
61 st	Maj Rider	9 Sqn	- 36 mins 15 secs
66 th	LCpl Hall	9 Sqn	- 36 mins 24 secs
74 th	Spr Walker	9 Sqn	- 36 mins 43 secs
79 th	Spr Minns	9 Sqn	- 37 mins 04 secs
94 th	Spr Malcolm	9 Sqn	- 38 mins 09 secs

Major Units

1 st	3 CS Regt	RLC	256 pts
2 nd	3 UK Div	Sigs Regt	365 pts
3 rd	7 RHA		436 pts

Minor Units

1 st	9 Para	Sqn	331 pts
2 nd	PT School/HQ	4 Div	448 pts

Snowboarding

Between the 5th and 21st of January 2001, 8 members of 9 Para Sqn RE embarked on Exercise Pegasus Boarder, 9 Sqn's assault on the Corps and Army Snowboarding Championships. Not being perhaps the most experienced team in the competition (only 1 of the 8 team members ever having stepped on a snowboard before) we were, nonetheless, determined to acquit ourselves in a typically airborne way -with plenty of enthusiasm and a complete disregard for one's safety.

Held on the picturesque Stubai Glacier in Austria, we deployed by minibus from Aldershot and found ourselves, a mere 16-hour journey later, at the foot of some rather steep and impressive mountain scenery. As we thought of those toiling away in a rather miserable and rain sodden Aldershot, we took our first tentative steps on the nursery slopes. A few hours, numerous falls and some rather amusing collisions later, we retired to the restaurant to dress our wounds and reappraise our situation. Perhaps this was to be more difficult than some others on the slopes made it look. Nonetheless, we embarked on the Corps Championships (on our third day) and though bravery was in abundance, skill unfortunately was not! With some of our runs being measured on a calendar rather than a clock, the decision was made to withdraw from the Corps Championships, use the time to actually learn how to snowboard and then launch an all-out assault on the Army Championships the following week.

Seven days, many miles on the piste and numerous near-death experiences later, we considered ourselves fully ready for the challenges that were to face us. With our team efforts focusing on the Army Novice competitions, it soon became apparent that our vigorous training was paying off with a couple of our "stars" sweeping all before them. After many tense and enthralling moments in the slalom and giant slalom races, the Novice Championships came down to a two-man battle between two 9 Sqn men - LCpl 'Smudge' Smith and Spr Brian Tulett. The Boarder Cross, which consisted of up to four men trying to get down the same banked slalom course at the same time, proved to be an outstanding 'Gladiator' like event to decide the Championship. Ultimately, and after close competition, it was Spr Tulett who crossed the line by a head from LCpl Smith. Thus, on our first attempt, 9 Sqn managed to win first, second and fourth places in the Army Novice Snowboard Championships - an outstanding effort!



Special mention must be made to a few individuals. Firstly, to Spr Brian Tulett for claiming the overall crown, Spr Stacey Farnell for managing to talk non-stop from Calais to Innsbruck and lastly to Cpl 'Myra' Hindley for covering every inch of the Stubai slopes - on his backside. Now all that remained was the small matter of a 16-hour drive back

9 Para Sqn Stay Firmly On The Ground

Some More Than They Would have Liked

2Lt Toby Rider

On the 23 November 2000 myself and three sappers from 9 Parachute Squadron RE set of to attend the RE Nordic Ski Camp at the Swedish resort of Idre Fjall, some five hours north east of the Norwegian capitol Oslo. Being a first for the squadron in recent years we did not have the luxury of experienced team members and so the four of us were all new to the sport. The aim of this first trip was to gain a basis for a more advanced team next season. Our own aim was to be competitive in the championships at the end of the camp.

After a journey of 41 hrs we arrived and were pleased to find a decent sized chalet with all the facilities we could hope for including a sauna. The camp itself was run by 35 Regiment and was attended by 9 other Engineer units. The training was broken down into two phases. The mornings were spent in groups of similar ability working with a qualified instructor and the afternoons were free for individual and team training. Before our first group lessons we decided to try our skis and so, with equipment made when my grandfather was still on his paper round, we headed for the hills. To say we spent most of the next few hours on our backsides would be a severe understatement and as the dark closed in we headed back to prepare for a repeat performance in front of the rest of the Corps the following day.

Needless to say, as the days passed by we began to find our feet and the distance skied each day began to increase. Skiing, as long as you stay upright, is a non-impact sport and so you find your fitness developing at a fast rate. By the end of the camp the team members were skiing between fifteen and thirty kilometres a day. The final week of the camp was put aside for the RE Nordic Ski Championships 2000. This was to consist of four races, a 15km Classic cross country race, a 15km Biathlon race, a 10km Biathlon Relay and finishing with an Army Patrol race. Due to the lack of a SNCO in our team and the fact we had no rifles we were restricted to the 15km Classic race. And so on the first day of the championships the Squadron tops were donned and we headed up the mountain to the start of the race. The team put in a strong performance with good times all round. Sapper Brett did particularly well finishing 25th in a field of 50 more experienced skiers. The ski camp was well run and will be of great benefit for any teams hoping to go on to Divisional and Army level competitions.

News from the Branches

Aldershot

Betty Gray

Our New Year Dinner was again held in the Falcon Hotel Farnborough. It has now become almost our permanent venue as the service and the dinner are of such high quality. Thirty-seven members attended which was slightly down on the Millennium number but this was due to branch members being away on holiday or committed to other functions on the same night. This year the money collected from the raffle ticket sales and a further donation from branch funds was given to the James Corby Cause. A letter of appreciation has been received from the SSM 9 Para Sqn on behalf of James family. Sunday continues to be our meeting day usually followed by Sunday lunch in a local restaurant. We did try the Potters International again after a long absence but unfortunately the service and food proved to be indifferent once again. A pity as the hotel is so convenient and close to our meeting place. Peter Myatt has had a worrying health time during the last four months but now seems to be well and truly on the mend. Watched over by Sally he has no choice but to get well quick and follow doctor's advice. We look forward to seeing Peter back to full fitness and both of them back with us by the spring. John and Glenda (Smith) have made the long trip to Australia to see family and no doubt will be seeing as many former Squadron friends as possible during their stay. Fred and Betty Gray have been away in the Far East for almost three months and have now returned to these frozen shores after seeing a good number of friends now living Down Under.

A number of the branch had lunch at the Brubecker restaurant with Dave Rance on his recent visit to Hampshire. It was his first time back since the 1999 reunion, so a lot of catching up had to be done in a short time; as he was leaving for Canada the next day.

The branch hosted the Ordinary Meeting of the AEA in February and our thanks must go to Tony Manley for the superb buffet lunch he laid on for us. Also to Cpl Myra Hindley, the Squadron barman who served us with the liquid stuff until 4 o'clock when the meeting finished.

Our AGM is to be held in May and that is the ideal time for anyone wishing to join our branch to do so. Please contact Mrs Betty Gray on 01252 668339 if you would like to become a member, you would be made most welcome

Chatham

Ron (Smokey) Gibson

Things have been pretty quiet in these parts recently, we even had snow, how about that? The Branch is still going as strong as ever, we have however suffered the loss of one comrade, Mike Farrow. Mike will be sadly missed by all members.

We still average 14-18 members at each meeting, and our numbers are swelled by the wives and partners who's company we share following our meetings. Our books record our membership of more than 40, with a distribution across Kent, East Sussex and Essex. But we are always on the lookout for new members.

Our Christmas lunch was held in the King Charles hotel, which is located just outside the main entrance to Brompton barracks. Numbers attending totalled 52, with some members and their guests having travelled quite long distances. The pre-dinner drinks were taken in the refurbished "Pegasus" bar, which now sports our "Airborne Engineers" sign, and a variety of Airborne pictures decorate the walls.

Gordon 'Smudge' Smith who resides in New Zealand, sent me a 3ft long photograph taken of 3rd Sqn in 1943. To my amazement, Bob Sullivan (former 3rd Sqn) named bloody nearly 95% of the faces in the Sqn, and that was after 55 years - some memory! It took me nearly all my time to name the lads in my troop!

As a reminder for those wishing to attend the 6th Div RE reunion dinner, it will be held in the Victory Club on Saturday 29th September 2001.

Future events planned for the branch will include a cross channel trip on 16th April, and will include dinner in the ships dinning suite (no bow tie required!) A Sunday lunch is programmed for Sunday 20th May in the King Charles hotel. If anyone is interested in joining us for either or both of these events, please give me a call. Until we meet again - so long for now.

Edinburgh

Mick Walker

Our second AGM was held in November and was well attended. Brian McKean and Mick Walker were re-elected as Chairman and Treasurer respectively but Dick Barton did not stand again as Secretary. Dick was one of the main movers in the formation of the Branch and has been a real stalwart in our two years of existence for which we are all grateful. He is not being lost to us and we are sure he will be available to offer his wise counsel to Dougie Archibald who was elected as Secretary.

At the AGM it was agreed that the Branch would meet every two months. These meetings are to be in the "odd" months - i.e. March, May, July, September and November - on the third Sunday of the month at 1.00pm in the Royal British Legion, Rodney Street, Edinburgh and any visiting AEA members would be made more than welcome.

Since the AGM we have 'found' another two people eligible for membership and they have attended our meetings. I am not sure what stage their applications for membership are at but we extend a warm welcome to Andy Cuthbert and Ross Stevenson.

Ten couples joined with the PRA at their Xmas dance and had a thoroughly enjoyable time. We even managed to win a couple of prizes in the raffle!

Various further social occasions have been enjoyed by groups of us and thanks are due to Mrs. Rosemary Walker and Mrs. Rose Panton for their time, effort and expense in hosting individual events. More recently Les Dunsford, an ex-member of 300 Sqn, 131 Indep Para Regt RE (TA) surfaced after an extended sojourn in Australia and seven of us met with him to share memories and a few gallons! Les is returning to Australia but I understand he is leaving sufficient funds with us for life Membership. He and the rest of us are looking forward to a visit to 4 Para, arranged by Mick Porter, early in March where we will be able to see some of the equipment and weaponry currently in use. Another event on the horizon is a visit to Bellhaven Brewery - do they know what they are letting themselves in for?

We were pleased to raise various funds and were able to contribute £310 to the James Corby Cause. Thanks are due to the PRA for their help with this matter.

Dave Rutter has advised that Dave Ruddock would be willing to arrange for a wreath to be laid in Yemen on the grave of John Lonnergan (SSM of 300 Sqn) who was killed there in 1965. I have yet to succeed in contacting the second Dave, but will do so in the near future.

Yorkshire

Bill Rudd MBE (Chairman's thoughts)

I thought it about time to put pen to paper, mainly to report on our very busy year and say a big thank you to the Branch Committee and all Members for their loyal support over the last twelve months.

The Branch continues to hold its own with new members coming out of the woodwork. Our catchment area is quite extensive: from the Scottish Borders south to Retford (Notts), East to Humberside and west across the Pennine's to Oldham.

Our Venue at the Officers Mess, RHQ, East and West Riding Regiment at the TA Centre, Pontefract (sorry about the collar and tie) thanks to Mike Pallott is more than ideally situated and the move south has certainly improved our membership. I would like to see more of our Hull and Doncaster Members of the Association attending branch meetings. The Branch is your Airborne Family so please come and join us whenever you can.

We welcome our new secretary, Mike Pallott and at the same time thank Charlie Dunk for all of his dedicated work over the years. Charlie will of course continue to act as Assistant Secretary of the Association.

A busy year has passed with regards to events such as Elvington, York Minster, Double Hills, Cromwell Lock, OGM's, Blackpool 2000 AGM and finally our very successful Annual Dinner held in January. I would like to thank all Association Members' wives who supported our AGM at Blackpool and made it such a great success. A special word of thanks is extended to Shelia Prosser and Bobby Thornton who manned reception and kept us all on the straight and narrow.

We now look forward to another busy year especially our PRA sponsored weekend at Elvington on 7/8th July 2001. It is anticipated that upwards of 5,000 will be attending (full details contained in this edition elsewhere) Accommodation for single members is available in Queen Elizabeth Barracks, Strensall. Bookings for this accommodation can be booked by a simple telephone call to me **(01423 536191)**

Our meetings are held on the second Friday of Jan, Mar, May, July, Sept and Nov. We also hold a Sunday Lunch during the months in between meetings. For all details of the Branch, enquiries and correspondence, please contact Mike Pallott at "Kirkstone," Church Lane, Rainton, Thirsk, YO7 3QD.
Tel 01845 577649 (Home) or 07818265498 (Mobile).

From the Secretary - Mike Pallott

I write these notes this evening (11 Feb) as given to me by Bill at today's Sunday Lunch held at the Freemasons' Arms, Nosterfield near Masham. We had fifteen plus one child (Recruit!) attending and it turned out to be a very pleasant affair. The food was excellent and the company, convivial, - scintillating even. All enjoyed a good time. Would the child leaving with the vintage Norton 500 motor cycle please return it to the Landlord as it is worth a bob or two.

Many thanks to the members for allowing me to become your secretary and to Charlie Dunk for a fine (Pints) Hand Over at The Bay Horse, Rainton. See you all at the next meeting (Branch AGM) 9th March 2001, Pontefract.

Stop Press- Boxing Finals Report

On Thursday evening 8th March we were treated to an excellent night of boxing at Maida gymnasium. The contest was the finals of the Minor Units Novice Grade 3 Boxing Championships between 9 Para Sqn RE and 16 Air Asslt Bde HQ & Sigs Sqn (216). The gym was absolutely packed with extremely enthusiastic supporters for both teams.

As a mark of respect to Capt (Jock) Wallace who's death had occurred just a week prior, a one minute silence was observed prior to the commencement of the contest.

In bout 1, Spr Shaw excelled in the first 2 rounds forcing his opponent to take a standing count in the 2nd round, and despite his opponent coming back in the 3rd, won the fight on a unanimous decision. Bout 2 saw the Sigs come back into the contest by winning in the 1st round by KO. Bout 3 saw some of the hardest and highest rate of punching of the evening. Spr Death finally caught his man with a terrific punch having previously forced his opponent to take a standing count in an earlier exchange. Winner by KO Spr Death. In bout 4, LCpl Smith scored with some excellent left jabs forcing Sigs to take a standing count in the 2nd round. LCpl Smith (9 Sqn) won on a majority decision. Bout 5, was unfortunately brought to a sudden end in round 1, when a (judged) low blow caused the disqualification of Spr Cutler. In bout 6 Spr Stretton quickly got the measure of his man (Capt) by sitting him on his pants in the 1st round. In round 2 his opponent was given a public warning for failing to keep his head up. At the conclusion of the 3rd round there could only be one winner. Spr Stretton. The last fight of the evening saw Spr Minns give an excellent display of combination punching and midway through the contest the referee stopped the fight. Spr Minns the winner.

Overall results 9 Para Sqn won 5 bouts to 2 and were announced, "The Minor Units Boxing Champions". With throats in desperate need of liquid refreshment the WO's & Sgt's Mess readily obliged!
