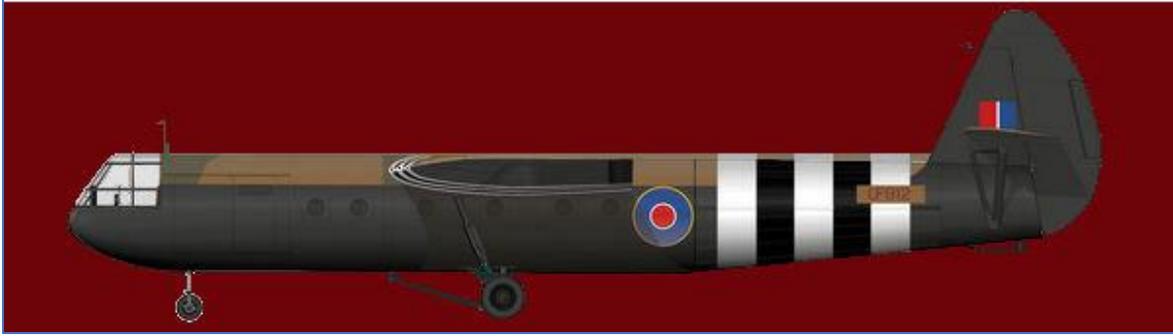




# THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS JOURNAL



The following articles were originally published in the printed version of the Journal in April 2003, Issue No.9

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# The Airborne Engineer



April 2003 Issue No. 9

**President**

Brigadier Ian McGill

**Chairman**

Bunny Brown

**Editor**

Dave Rutter

**Membership Secretary**

Chris Chambers

**Association Shop**

Jan Chambers

**Vice Presidents**

Bill Rudd MBE

Tom Brinkman

**Secretary**

Ray Coleman

**Treasurer**

Captain Dick Brown

**Archivist**

Fred Gray

**Entertainments Secretary**

Mike Holdsworth

**Life Vice Presidents**

Bob Ferguson, Tom Ormiston, Fred Gray,  
Chris Chambers, Bob Jones and Ray Coleman

**Publication Deadline - August 2003 Edition**

Members submitting material for publication in the August 2003 edition of the Journal, are advised that the closing date will be Saturday 5th July. Articles received after this date will not be published until the December 2003 edition. **(Branch Secretaries please NOTE!)**

Kindly ensure that you forward your articles direct to the editor - address as shown above.

**Please** don't leave it until the last minute or you may well miss the deadline!

## Association Chairman

Bunny Brown

Dear Members,

May I take this opportunity in wishing all the members that I have not met so far this year a belated Happy New Year.

Whilst sitting writing this piece my thoughts are with the three specialists Squadrons RE. (9, 59 and 131) who are all readying themselves to take on Saddam. You will quickly note that there is no input from 9 Para Sqn in this edition. The Sqn deployed to the Gulf in mid-February and for security reasons no information on their location; activities or operational commitments can be disclosed. However, by the time you receive this edition all will possibly be revealed in the national press and TV coverage. Let us all hope that they are well fed and watered, and to a man, return home safely to their families, loved ones and friends.

Well, here we are into the third month of 2003 already, the quiet time of year around the Branches, who I hope are readying themselves for the hectic slimmer season, BBQs, trips to the battlefields, Airborne Forces weekend (?) and Elvington. Then it's on to the main event, the AGM/Reunion at Coventry. Mike Holdsworth and his long suffering partner Sue, are working flat out to make sure all and sundry are well looked after at the Royal Court Hotel. So get your bookings in NOW. Last minute applications are not a lot of fun for the organisers, or for the hotel management.

Bob Prosser has kindly taken the reins for the organisation of our weekend at Elvington, in Yorkshire, I feel sure that more of our members could attend this weekend, especially the Yorkshire guys. It really is a great weekend. I have always said that the biggest crime in life is not taking part.

I, like many of the Branch Secretaries, get the Editor, Dave Rutter into a frenzy, by submitting stories late, let's all see if we can help out by sending articles and photo's in on time, the publication deadline is always printed at the bottom of page one.

Our Secretary Ray Coleman has recently been in hospital having a hip replacement, for those who have had one; they know what he's experiencing, the rest of us will no doubt find out in the years to come! So to all who have been hospitalised or ill, get well soon, you know the motto, if you are looking for sympathy it's in the dictionary, between sympathise and symphonic!

I look forward to meeting many of you during the year.

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## AGM/Reunion- 2003

The 2003 AGM/Reunion is to be held on Friday 31st October - Monday 3 November at the Royal Court Hotel Keresley, Coventry.



The Royal Court Hotel is built on ground formerly known as Golden Green Acres Farm estate. The Hotel is ideally set in 11 acres of manicured gardens and woodland yet is only 9 miles from the National Exhibition Centre and Birmingham International airport. The hotel has recently been extensively refurbished and extended offering new facilities in an expansive setting. It boasts 211 bedrooms in total. Rooms are equipped with colour television sets, hairdryers, clothes press, private bath, radio alarm, tea/coffee making facilities and direct dial phones.

The Royal Court has its own Events Management team which specialises in creating exciting event in and around the Hotel and its extensive gardens. They can accommodate from as little as 10 to 800 in a choice of function rooms. Fully equipped with audio visual equipment for any type of business event, conference, seminar or training session.

A new bar area allows for a relaxing drink in a spacious location. The Health Club includes an 18 metre indoor swimming pool, Jacuzzi, gymnasium, sauna, steam room, solarium lamp; beauty therapist.

Location and route directions to the Royal Court Hotel will be included in your August edition of the Journal. You will find a loose leaf booking application form enclosed with this issue - please note - no additional booking forms will be enclosed in the August issue!

Kindly assist our Entertainment's Secretary (Mike Holdsworth) by forwarding your booking proforma at your earliest convenience.



## Rogues Gallery



This detachment of Airborne Royal Engineers, under command Capt DJ Simpson, MC, took part in the Victory Parade in London on 8th June 1946

Standing:

Spr Dade (591 Para Sqn) Dvr Haigh (249 Fd Coy AB) LCpl Thornton (2nd Para Sqn) Spr Cooley, Dvr Simcock (249 Fd Coy AB)  
Spr Carr MM (1st AB Sqn) Spr Simpson (2nd Para Sqn)

Sitting:

LSgt Swift (1st AB Sqn) CSM Harrison (2nd Para Sqn) Capt Simpson MC (1st AB Sqn) Sgt Ellis (1st AB Sqn) Cpl Stuart (2nd Para Sqn )



9 Parachute Squadron RE Officers, Warrant Officers and Senior NCOs - December 2002

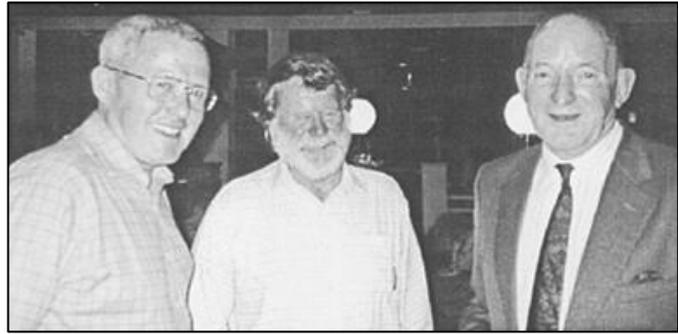
SSgt Greatrex, Sgts Walker, Grantham, Clysdale, Macintosh, Walters, SSgt Frazer, Lt Hart, Sgt Smart,  
Sgt Richards, SSgt Judd, Sgts Smith, Smith, Millar, SSgt Jackson, Sgts Cawkwell, Eddie, SSgt Power, Stewart, Marr, Lt Greaves,  
Capt Coles, Capt MacGill, Maj Fountaine (OC), WOII (SSM) Fitzsimons, Capt (QM) Brown, Capt Thompson, Lt Dent.

---

## Blackpool Reunion- October 2002



**Martin Walker, Phil Poulton & Col Chris Davies**



**Brig Ian McGill, George Jones & Bill Rudd**



**Keith Barker & Harry Padfield**



**Tom Gilks, Dick Wales, Joe Stoddart & Bob Ferguson**



**Gail Harrower, Mick & Christine Humphries & Jim Harrower**



**Jim Simpson, Ken Turk, Tom Robertson & Ian Muirhead**



**But I've had a haircut - Clog Cloughton & SSM Neil Fitzsimons**



**Lorraine Dunk, Brenda Davies & Myra Barnwell**



**John Grosvenor, Fred Gray & George Hoult**



**Plenty of drink and smiles all round on this grand occasion**



**Tich Collins, John Aldridge, Jim Harrower, Bert Tate, Pete Bates, Louis Gallagher, Tony Manley & Fennimore Fleck**



**Roger Howell, Sue Holdsworth, Sean McCargo & Mike Holdsworth**



**Now about this drink problem Tony**



**Ken Mason & Bill Thompson**



**Kilted attired couple with Jenny Davies**



**Barney Rooney, Bert Tate & Bob Clow**



**Baz Henderson & Brig Garth Hewish**



Dave Grimbley, John Aldridge, Yorkie Davies, Bob Runacres & Matt Newall



Jim Harrower, Louis, Dave Jones, Toots Ridgway, Fennymore Fleck, ?, & Ken Mason

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## Corridors of Power Mk 1

Alan (Taff) Brice

**General** – Leaps tall buildings with a single bound. More powerful than a steam engine, faster than a speeding bullet. Gives policy to God.

**Colonel** - Leaps short buildings with a single bound. More powerful than a shunting engine. Is just as fast as a speeding bullet. Walks on water (if the sea is calm). Talks to God.

**Lt Colonel** - Leaps short buildings with a running start in favourable winds. Is almost as powerful as a speeding bullet. Walks on water in indoor swimming pools. Talks with God if special request is approved.

**Major** – Barely clears a Nissen hut. Loses tug-of-war with a steam engine. Can fire a speeding bullet and swims well. Is occasionally addressed by God.

**Captain** - Makes high marks when trying to leap tall buildings. Is run over by trains. Can sometimes handle a gun without inflicting self-injury. Dog paddles, talks to animals.

**Lieutenant** - Runs into tall buildings. Recognises trains two out of three times. Is not issued with ammunition. Can stay afloat if properly instructed in the use of a lifejacket. Talks to walls.

**2nd Lieutenant** - Falls over doorstep while trying to enter buildings. Says, “Look at the choo.” Is never issued with a gun or ammunition. Plays in mud puddles. Mumbles to himself.

**Sgt Major** - Lifts tall buildings and walks under them. Kicks steam engines off the track. Catches speeding bullets in his teeth and eats them. Freezes water with a single glance ..... He is GOD!

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## Funny Old World

The Sentinel (North Carolina) 20/5/2000

The Army said I was airborne qualified and I wasn't going to question their decision," Jeff Lewis told reporters from his hospital bed in Fort Bragg. I had a job to do, and I had to believe in what I was doing, so I sewed airborne wings onto my uniform, and took my parachute and jumped.

Due to an administrative error, Lewis (a supply clerk with the 82nd Airborne Division) had received orders to make a parachute jump, despite having received no training. "A good soldier doesn't question; he just follows orders. The Army doesn't like complainers, so I decided to go with the flow. Apparently my records show that I completed the Airborne School parachuting course at Fort Benning, but the only course I ever took there was in filing. I was a little nervous when the moment came to jump, but I just followed everyone else. I stepped out of the aircraft with the wrong foot, and got twisted up, which was kind of worrying. I eventually managed to get my canopy open, but I didn't know how to land, and I broke both arms, an ankle, dislocated my right shoulder, fractured my elbow and skull, and am still suffering from mild concussion. When the platoon sergeant came to visit me in hospital, I decided to explain the situation to him but I didn't complain. "No Sir"

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# Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

Held at the Norbeck Castle Hotel, Blackpool On Saturday 12th October 2002

1. **Opening Address:** The President, Brig G.A. Hewish MBE opened the meeting with an attendance of 132 and stated how surprised and delighted he was to see so many assembled. He wish to commence the meeting on a bright note by reading two letters from many received congratulating Bob Prosser BEM, our retiring Chairman, on a job proficiently fulfilled during his three year term in office. Both letters highlighted his impressive contribution towards the Museums, Journal and the Golden Jubilee Scroll and stated that Bob may now sit back and celebrate a role successfully accomplished.

2. **Apologies:** There were 29 notifications of apology.

3. **Silent Tribute:** The members stood for one minute in respect to the following colleagues who have passed away during the past year:

Charlie Dunk, John Vickerman, Thomas Duffy & George Wilson.

4. **Minutes of the 2001 Annual General Meeting:** Proposed by John Davies and Seconded by Bud Oldfield that the minutes of the 2001 AGM held in Bristol were passed as a true record of the proceedings. Agreed Unanimously

5. **Affiliation to the REA:** The President informed the meeting of the up to date position with regard to our proposed affiliation to the Royal Engineers Association. Since the Annual General Meeting 2001 at Bristol letters covering this dispute have been published in the Association Journal. In late August a meeting was held at Minley to discuss the proposal for a 'Postal Vote.' After a protracted debate it was agreed further information was required before a formula for action could be considered which will appease the differences of opinion, which exists, and also respecting each point of view. The Royal Engineers Association understands the concerns that have been raised and do not wish that we rush into any decision in which our members are not reconciled. We can be assured that the new committee will make this a priority topic during 2003.

6. **Chairman's Report:** The Chairman thanked everyone present for attending, many from far afield and in particular George Jones from Australia. In a comprehensive report he confirmed the Association has had a very successful year. All our functions have been well supported and a great deal of good publicity has been gained.

The Airborne Forces Weekend at Elvington was an outstanding achievement and he wished to thank Tom Thornton, John Waite, Roy King, John Dickson, Cliff Allison and Frank Menzies-Hearn whose efforts ensured an extremely successful occasion. He is hopeful that in the near future the North West Branch can be resurrected, as he is sure there is a need in that area.

He wishes to thank our retiring President Brig Garth Hewish for his exceptional contribution to our Association and all whilst holding a civilian job, which necessitates him to travel the world.

Soon the time to hand over and he is positive in doing so he leaves the Association in safe hands.

7. **Treasurers Report:** The Hon Treasurer Capt Dick Brown presented the Association accounts as at 12 October 2002. He gave a full explanation concerning all amounts declared in the under mentioned statement.

Assets		Liabilities	
Cash in hand		Journal	
Current account		Museum Fund	
Deposit account			
Shop stock (at cost)			
Value of property			
<b>Total assets</b>		<b>Total Liabilities</b>	

**Total Working Capital £**

Proposed by Bill Rudd MBE and seconded by Fred Gray that the statement of account as presented be accepted.

**Agreed Unanimously**

Additional Note: Proposed by Bunny Brown and seconded by Peter Myatt that the Airborne Engineers Association purchase a wreath and an Association Shield to be presented at the memorial service to commemorate 'Op Freshman' at Wick in Scotland on 20 November 2002.

**Agreed Unanimously**

8. **Membership Secretary Report:** Chris Chambers gave his usual detailed report concerning the strength of our Association. Recently he issued Membership No 1167 and he thanked those who have introduced new members.
9. **Election of Officers:** The Following members were elected and form the Executive Committee.

<b>President</b>	Brig IDT McGill, CBE	<b>Hon Treasurer</b>	Capt. Dick Brown RE
<b>Vice Presidents</b>	Bill Rudd, MBE Tom Brinkman	<b>Membership Secretary</b>	Chris Chambers
<b>Chairman</b>	Bunny Brown	<b>Journal Editor</b>	Dave Rutter
<b>Hon Secretary</b>	Ray Coleman	<b>Entertainment Member</b>	Mike Holdsworth
<b>Asst Hon Secretary</b>	Dave Rutter	<b>Archivist/Historian/Property</b>	Fred Gray

10. **Election of Representatives:** The following members were unanimously accepted and shall be members of the Advisory Committee.

<b>1 Sqn</b>	Bob Jones	<b>9 Sqn</b>	OC, SSM, Cpl's Mess
<b>3 Sqn</b>	Bob Sullivan MBE	<b>Aldershot Branch</b>	Maurice Metcalfe
<b>4 Sqn</b>	Eric Richards	<b>Birmingham Branch</b>	George Barrett
<b>9 Fd Coy (Airborne)</b>	Tom Carpenter	<b>Chatham Branch</b>	Eric Blenkinsop
<b>131 Sqn</b>	Bunny Brown	<b>Edinburgh Branch</b>	Ronny Drummond
<b>591 Sqn</b>	Tony Jackson	<b>South West Branch</b>	Tom Brinkman
<b>147 Sqn</b>	Ian Robbie	<b>Yorkshire Branch</b>	Bill Rudd MBE

11. **Confirmation of Trustees:** The following elected officers were appointed as trustees for the Association:

Mr Bunny Brown Mr Bill Rudd, MBE Mr Tom Brinkman

**Agreed Unanimously**

- 12. Constitution:** The Chairman reported that regrettably the appointed subcommittee have not, for various reasons, finalised the draft constitution by making the minor amendments indicated at the last AGM. It was therefore decided to form a new subcommittee at the General Meeting, which follows this Annual General Meeting.
- 13. Association Journal:** Dave Rutter gave a comprehensive report regarding the administration of our Journal. The last distribution consisted of approximately 700 copies; however there are still 130 who have not renewed their payment and this is causing concern. He stated he was delighted with the input from members and long may this continue. Contributions have been received from as far afield as Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada and the Philippines. It was decided to send one more Journal with a reminder to those in default and hopefully this will stir some consciences.
- 14. Any Other Business of Which Notification Had Been Given:** Ron Day has forwarded the following proposal which is seconded by John Smith BEM that a Benevolent and Awards Committee be formed at Association level to investigate, assess and award an interim payment to any member who is in financial distress due to medical and/or worthy social causes prior to any action subsequently given by the REA, SSAFA or the Social Services.' Ron Day then gave comprehensive reasoning for this proposal and requested the members support.
- After an intensive discussion the proposal was narrowly defeated. However, it was felt that it should be raised again with branch support and with a detailed policy document and should then be forwarded to the Executive Committee.
- 15. Date and Venue of the Next Annual General Meeting:** The next AGM will be held at the Royal Court Hotel, Keresley, Coventry on 11th October 2003.

[Amendment to the 2003 AGM/Reunion](#)

Members are asked to note that since the 2002 AGM it has been necessary to amend the date of the 2003 AGM/Reunion - It will now be held at the Royal Court Hotel, Kerseley during the weekend 31st October - 2nd November. Please amend your diaries accordingly!

An accommodation booking form has been included in this issue and details of the hotel facilities and a location map are published on page 2. [Page 5 of this version]

**As always we request that you submit your booking application sooner rather than later!**

## Blast from the Past

Nev Collins



In April 1963, 131 Para Engineer Regiment were dispatched to the Akamus peninsular in Cyprus. Located nearby was the Baths of Aphrodite (the Goddess of Love). This is basically a natural grotto and fresh water spring. Our task was to build and improve a coastal road in the area near the town of Polis. The reasoning behind this construction was to enable a rapid response by troops and vehicles to counter any threat of a Turkish invasion of the area.



A photograph taken this year (2003) is surely an unkind epitaph to the skills employed by '131' in so much the current road sign states, in both English and Greek, 'Dangerous Road'.

During the 'pull out' of our forces, a REME workshops vehicle was somehow left behind. An enterprising Cypriot painted it white and it still serves as a makeshift caravan for weekend holidays to this day!

N.B. The Turks invaded the island the year following the withdrawal of 131 Parachute Regiment RE

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# The Bell- The Bells

Fred Gray

In the last issue of the journal Taff Brice suggested that the younger generation of Airborne Engineers might be interested in the story of the bells. At that time I was a corporal in 1 Troop and helped remove the bells from the tower of the Cambridge Military Hospital, Aldershot and had an insight into what happened after they were removed. The bells in question, one weighing 17.5 hundred weight and two smaller ones at 4.5 hundredweight (504 pounds) had been looted by the British Army from a church in Sebastopol during the Crimean War. On their return from the Crimea they were hung in the tower of the Cambridge Military Hospital in 1879, there to hang undisturbed through two world wars until 1959. A decision had been made to demolish the hospital and 1 Troop, under command of Capt Bill Marks with Lt Jesse Owens as Troop officer and Sgts Frank (Punchy) Mowett and Paddy Smyth MM as the seniors, were tasked to carry out the removal of the bells and convey them to a safe place within Morval Barracks, Cove. Work began on the Monday morning and by the following Friday the bells had been "safely" stored in the MT garages at Morval Barracks. Or had they?

## **Aldershot News Report on the Incident**

The ancient bell that vanished and then as suddenly reappeared by a bit of Army wizardry— stood last night in the middle of a guardroom. For 81 years the 504 pound bell, captured in the Crimea had hung in the tower of the Cambridge Military Hospital. When it became necessary to demolish the old tower the GOC ordered Specialist troops to remove them and place them in store.

Then a corporal and two sappers cast their eyes on them. When nobody seemed to be looking they heaved one of the bells worth £250 into a van. Then sold it to a scrap man for £35. That started a rumpus. A "Nelsons" order was passed to the 200 troops: "Get the bell back by 4pm and nothing more will be heard. So Corporal Charles Edwards, ACC aged 27, with Sappers Geoffrey Gillespie, 24 and Richard Willis 20, went back to the dealer and gave him £35 and brought the old bell home. But in the meantime the scrap dealer who felt a bit awkward about buying a £250 bell for £35 told the police.

Yesterday at Aldershot magistrates court the whole story came out ending in fines of £20 for the three 'bell men'. Captain Alan Julius of the 9 Parachute Squadron RE told the court "We had put it out that if the bell was brought back nothing more would be done. The magistrates clerk asked, "Did you realise you might be compounding a felony?" Last night the bell was back in Aldershot. Said an officer, "We thought someone had taken it as a practical joke; after all it weighed 504 Pounds. Who would have thought of a thing like that being stolen?"

## **The "Truth"**

### **(What actually happened as told by Charlie Edwards)**

After the three bells had been stored in the MT garages they were left unnoticed for a few weeks whilst it was decided what to do with them. Not entirely unnoticed, as myself and two others decided we could put them to better use than what the military had in mind. We saw an opportunity to make a few pounds on the side. The first thing we did was to throw a cam net over the bells to see if there was any reaction from anyone. There was not. After about two weeks the next move was to remove one of the smaller bells to the Squadron coal yard. I provided the transport by removing a consignment of coal from the back of my van, which had been recently purchased from a "bloke in a local pub Using two greased planks, we hauled the bell into the van. It was then removed to the coal yard and once again it was hidden from view by throwing coal on the top of it. After a short period of time when no one appeared to have noticed it's disappearance from the garages the would be scrap dealers reloaded the bell into the van, ran it down to the scrap yard and sold it. It was only bad luck that the disappearance was noticed so quickly because the site for all three bells had been made ready at the same time and the bells were due to be moved from the garages. It was then noticed that one of the small ones was missing. The rest is as reported in the Aldershot News

Not too long after the incident Charlie Edwards was promoted to Sergeant. Geoff Gillespie was posted to 11 Independent Field Squadron in Malaya in 1962 (I had already arrived there in 1961). As for Richard Willis I think this may have been a mistake by the reporter. This could have been Josh Wills who died from heart failure a few years later. One of the bells is now hung outside of the Officers Mess but of the other two there is no trace. No one in Aldershot District HQ or the local museums have any idea where they are. Perhaps Charlie Edwards could give them a pointer!

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## Your Call

This is an actual radio conversation of a US naval ship with Canadian authorities off the coast of Newfoundland in October 1995.

Americans: Please divert your course 15 degrees north to avoid collision.

Canadians: Recommend you divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision

Americans: This is the Captain of a US Navy ship. I say again divert YOUR course.

Canadians: NO, I say again divert YOUR course

Americans: This is the Aircraft Carrier USS Lincoln, the second largest ship in the United States Atlantic Fleet. Three Destroyers, Three Cruisers, and numerous support vessels accompany us. I demand that you change course 15 degrees north, that's one five degrees north or counter measures will be undertaken to ensure the safety of these ships.

Canadians: **We are a lighthouse. Your call!**

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## Further Anecdotes

Joe Cook

On completing my Sapper Training at 22 TCRE Lockerbie in Scotland I was posted in February 1945 to the Bomb disposal unit in Wansted, London. My first UXB was in a sports field of the British Oxygen Company, and it was located close to the canal and the gas works at the top end of the field. After a few weeks digging we located the bomb (a 500 lb) about 20 feet down. The Sgt in charge placed a magnetic detector on the bomb and we all retired to a place of safety. The Sgt had given each of us a set of earphones and we could hear a distinct ticking. After about 15 minutes the Sgt instructed LCpl Brownsword to take 'Blondie' (meaning me) back down the hole to the bomb. LCpl Brownsword asked me if I could see anything - "Yes," I replied, "Water is dripping off the platform above and it's dropping on to the magnetic detector." He then instructed me to remove the detector and to wipe a dry spot on the bomb and to listen to see if I could hear anything. I informed him that everything was OK. He ordered me to inform the Sgt of the situation. I passed on the message to the Sgt who was sheltering with the remainder of the crew. He then passed me the earphones, and I could hear the sound of 'Roll out the Barrel.' The rest of the crew also listened to the unusual sound. One of the lads said, "We've got a Musical Bomb." On reaching the hold we saw the LCpl Brownsword had the magnet in his hands and was humming 'Roll out the Barrel.' We all stood around the hole and gave LCpl Brownsword a round of applause. The officer and Sgt removed the fuse and we emptied the bomb of its explosive content. A derrick with block and tackle was set up and the bomb casing was lifted out of the hole. The bosses of the British Oxygen Company came out to congratulate us all and took the complete crew off to the works canteen for a very nice meal.

### **Palestine 1947 - serving with 1st AB Sqn RE**

One of the jobs allocated to the Sqn was to go to the docks at Haifa. The Royal Navy had intercepted an illegal ship and was escorting it into Haifa. Our task was to erect a wire and hessian walkway along the quay from where the ship would be berthed to where a ship that would take the refugees to Cyprus. Whilst working on the archway I cut my hand - Taff Huxley, who was with me at the time, said I should go and have it seen to by one of the medics. At the MI post the Medical Officer asked me what I had been doing, I told him about the task and he told one of the orderlies to clean and dress the wound. He then asked me if I'd ever had an ATS. I said, "No" and what is more I hadn't even seen any ATS in Palestine! The Orderly looked at the MO and both were smiling, "In that case I'll get you one," replied the MO.

The Orderly finished dressing the wound and then told me to roll up my sleeve - the MO returned holding a hypodermic needle and proceeded to inject its contents into my arm. "There," said the MO, "You have now had an ATS in Palestine," and spelled out 'Anti Tetanus Serum.'

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## Soqotra- Island of the Dragons Blood

John (Tommo) Thompson

It was towards the end of my second tour on the sceptre isle of Bahrain. We had the Radfan conflict under our belt and finally got the football pitch level, when our troop commander and troop sergeant Jock Wallace, called us in for a very brief briefing. At this time the majority of the troop had returned to UK and once again I was in the rear party. During my army career I had never made the advance party always ending up on rear party. Perhaps someone was trying to tell me something. There were sixteen of us assembled at the briefing. The troop commander told us that we were heading for a small island located 400 miles south of Aden and just off the Horn of Africa to do a reconnaissance.

We were not told at the time, but the British government had made the decision to pull out of Aden and the protectorates and were looking for somewhere else to locate our troops to defend the Straits of Hormuz, where nearly a half of the world's oil supplies come through on the way to their varying destinations. The island where we were to carry out the recce was hopefully to be their answer. It was called Soqotra! It was to be a further two years until the British finally pulled out of Aden in November 1967 after the loss of many fine young servicemen's lives.

It took us about four days to get the gear together with a full GI098 compliment and a massive tent I believe borrowed from the RAF. The tent was to house our stores and equipment. With a further briefing from Jock Wallace we headed for Muharaq, the Royal Air Force base. On a steaming hot day we loaded the old lumbering Beverly to its gunwales leaving little room for the sixteen bodies. After a fairly long haul, our very effeminate flight sergeant informed us, that we would be landing at Salalah in the Oman. Our reason for the stopover was that were dropping off Sammy (the bin) Clyde. Sammy had been given the job of checking the road used by the refuse wagon. Every morning he had to check it for mines all the way to the rubbish tip. Apparently the dissidents as they were called had tried to mine the road many times previously. Sammy disembarked with a mine detector under his arm. Not a very happy Chappy! He wanted to come to Soqotra.

Sammy he carried out his task very diligently until apparently one night a group service entertainers put on a show. Sammy got p\*\*\*\*d and put his hand up the skirt of the lady entertainer then promptly collapsed. The next morning Sammy slept in and the rubbish truck got blown up. Fortunately the driver of the truck was unhurt but Sam went before the RAF commander who gave him a severe reprimand. Tragically, Sammy died of a heart attack during a workout in the gym in 1992. Knowing Sam very well I reckon he died of Lycra poisoning. God bless your soul Sam.

As we lumbered towards Soqotra in our beloved Beverly, the RAF flight sergeant was giving me the jitters. Twittering and prancing around like a big fairy. I don't think he had actually come out of his closet yet! I decided to wind him up. I took out my Hexi burner and placed a full mug of water on it. I waited until an opportune moment when he came prancing past. I held up a match as if ready to strike it. On seeing me he nearly had a fit yelling at me over the noise of the engines, "What the hell do you think you are doing?" "Just having a brew up mate," I replied. He legged it to the front of the aircraft and returned with the co-pilot or navigator? Who immediately sized up the situation? He gave me a right rollicking and as he turned away gave me a wink.



Two hours later, the flight sergeant informed us that we would be landing at Soqotra in a few minutes. I managed to get to one of the portholes and looking out, saw the island below us. I could see golden beaches and a beautiful clear blue sea. However there was also about two thirds of the island covered in a very uninviting mountainous region. As we came into the airstrip we seemed to leapfrog over a flat mountain and then descended between two other mountains, was in a train We hit the airstrip with a resounding thump and with an ear splitting roar the pilot reversed the engines and we came to a halt.

When the aircraft door was opened there was a blast of heat and dust. The airstrip was just a very flat stretch of land covered in a layer of dust. We did not have much time to admire the surroundings as we hurriedly unloaded our stores and equipment then carried it to the side of the airstrip. When completely offloaded the Beverly taxied to the end of the airstrip, turned around and with a roar of its engines and a minor sand storm, took off heading into the now setting sun. Did I detect a slight wiggle of its wings as it disappeared into the fading light?

We did not have very far to move our gear and immediately started erecting the large tent. There had been quite a few of the locals at the airstrip but now they were appearing from all directions. I noticed that many of the islanders had scars on them and a couple were covered in what looked like white mud?

The Soqatra Archipelago is situated some 400 miles south of the Arabian Peninsula. The island of Soqatra is a mythical and ancient place with an abundance of rare and unusual plants, animals, and marine life as well as fascinating archaeology and a unique language. The island, only 75 miles long and 25 miles wide, is also known as "Island of the Dragon's Blood" and has a sporadic history of attention from the outside world. Reaching back to the first seafarers. The name "Island of the Dragon's Blood" comes from the indigenous dragon's blood tree (*Dracaena cinnabari*) which legend suggests sprouted from congealed blood shed by an elephant and a dragon as they fought in a duel to the death. The tree has a crimson resin, known as cinnabar, in its leaves and bark that was highly prized in the ancient world as both pigment and a multi-purpose medical treatment. Ptolemy was aware of the island and called it, "Dioscoridis Insula," "The Island of bliss." Other visitors included Marco Polo in the thirteenth century and Fernandez Perara, who in 1503 made the island known to European navigators.

The sun was setting as we finished erecting the tent and stored away all the stores and equipment. We were to learn that we had done the right thing, as the Soqotrans would steal the laces out of your shoes. We made do with twenty four hour ration packs food wise and settled down for the night, very tired but content under the stars. It was a brilliant sunset as it can only be in that part of the world and then a stargazer's paradise. I was laid back looking at the stars and noticed one that was extremely bright. Not knowing that in the future this star would have a very profound effect on me.

The next morning as usual I was awake before the rest of the lads and took stock of my surroundings. In the distance, which I found out was Hadibo, the capital. I heard the Mullah calling the Muslims to early Morning Prayer. I noticed that we were not too far from the sea and took a slow walk down to the beach. We were close to a small village of adobe walled houses, which turned out to be a fishing village. The men were getting their boats ready, with smiling faces they all waved at me. The sea was a beautiful azure blue and very inviting in the humidity of the morning. No chance, I had to head back and see what the day would bring.



**Base camp, near the capital Hadibo - Jock Wallace extreme right, Lofty Gallagher centre with back to marquee, while Bidy MacMillan chats with the Trucial Oman Scouts interpreter**

After breakfast Jock Wallace called us together and explained our varying tasks. We were to carry out a very comprehensive reconnaissance of a good part of the island. Starting along the beaches and then across the plateau and into the mountains. Then he landed the

bombshell he said smiling, "Thompson and Metcalfe you will stay behind to do the cooking and camp chores." Jock had done his homework. A few years earlier I had been picked up drunk and disorderly in Aldershot. When I went before the OC he gave me the alternative to attend a six weeks Regimental Cooks course or fourteen days in nick.

Obviously they could not get volunteers. I took the lesser option and went on the cook's course, because the following week I was playing for the Squadron in the semifinal of the army minor unit's football cup. I was really p\*\*\*\*\* off.

The lads geared up and set off on foot giving us a wave as they went. Metcalfe and I started to sort out the cooking gear and checked the rations. To our dismay whoever had ordered the rations had screwed up and all we had was chicken supreme - no alternative. After nearly seven weeks of chicken supreme, forty years later, I still cannot look that meal in the face. We built the cooking area and generally got our camp looking spick and span. We had no option in our choice for the evening meal and got everything ready for the return of guys. We had decided to give them a soup as starters as they would be ravenous on return. Everything was going fine and we could see one of the patrols in the far distance so we started to heat up the soup in a very big container. Whether the water should have been cold or hot I do not know but as we added the soup powder it turned all lumpy. By this time Met and I were drenched in sweat. It was rolling down our faces and soaking our camouflage face veils. Instant decision. I took off my face veil and said to Met, "Lets sieve it through this." As we were in the process a voice behind us shouted "What the f\*\*\*\*\* hell are you doing?" It was Jock and the troop commander, "Don't worry, I said, "It will be a bit salty but OK!" Jock nearly had a fit and promptly took us off our culinary duties. It was exactly what I wanted without really trying. Met and I were not exactly flavour of the month for a few days.



**On patrol with Biddy MacMillan, Tim Duffy, Dave Stent and Mac ?**

As we progressed with our recce we found what a fascinating island Soqotra was. The people were very friendly. Around the coast the Soqotrans were a type of Arab and African mixture. In the mountains were the Bedou unlike the Arabs, much smaller and with darker skin. They lived in caves and lived off their goats and very small cows, which are indigenous to the island. The coastal Arabs were mainly fishermen and subsidised the fish with a date crop when the monsoons blew, which is approximately nine months of the year. We were there during

the March/April weather window. The scenery was breathtaking in parts of the island where sand had been blown right up the side of the very stark cliffs, offering a wonderful backdrop to the clear blue sea.

We had brought along with us Taff 'the Blood' from 23 PFA (Parachute Field Ambulance). Taff soon sussed the Soqotrans out and found them to be raving hypochondriacs. He would point to a part of their body and give a grimace and they would respond hoping Taff would give them some medication. His favourite treatment to the malingerers was to tape an aspirin to their forehead but one old man came back and the tablet had burnt into his forehead so Taff stopped that cure. A lot of the children were covered in a white dried mud. They used this primitive method for fevers and sometimes used camel dung on their heads to alleviate pain. The most bizarre was the many scars on their bodies. This is called N'ar a form of self-abuse to relieve pain. They would burn another part of their body. No doubt it worked in effect. Alex (Biddy) MacMillan, a connoisseur of fine wines, had a massive boil on his ankle. We had been out on patrol and came into camp to find one of our Arab helpers just about to use a firebrand out of the fire to burn Alec's other ankle. Alex was sleeping at the time and the Arab boy thought he was doing him a good turn. We stopped the young Arab boy and woke Alex to tell him the good news.

The following day I was very happy to get my bergen on my back and go on patrol, our task was to look for fresh water, which we found in abundance from streams running down the mountains. Along the coast were many small fishing villages with an area set aside for growing vegetables and dates, these appeared to be their staple diet supplemented with the fish. One very noticeable feature was their beautiful healthy white teeth.

We had been on the island for just three days when we were told the Sultan of the island was going to visit us. We waited around until just before midday when a cloud of dust appeared coming from Hadibo the capital. It was the Sultans entourage. He was sat on a camel and running behind holding the camels tail was an enormous Arab. He was running with a very funny gait. This was Abdul the Sultans executioner who apparently had Elephantiasis of the balls, which meant they were about ten times the normal size. The Sultan had a quick look at the camp and a few words with our troop commander through our interpreter from the Trucial Oman Scouts and then he was off, his executioner running ungraciously behind, still holding the tail of the camel.

The following day our patrol was given the task to go up into the mountains on recce. Jock Wallace had been to the village and hired three donkeys and a donkey whalla. The currency on the island was East African shillings. Jock had brought an enormous box full of them from Bahrain. The Soqotrans soon found out about the box and would eye it with what I can only describe as greed. We loaded all our gear onto the four donkeys and set off across the plain to the mountains in the distance. It was quite hard going as the ground was covered in flints and stones. We set off at a steady pace but our donkey handler Hussain would keep asking us to slow down for the donkeys but I believe it was more for him than the donkeys. We had been going for about four hours when we reached the base of the mountains where Hussain had said there was a path leading upwards.



**Still on patrol - Sid Grounsell, Johnny Powell, Tim Duffy & Dave Stent**

As soon as we started to ascend, a strange thing happened, all four donkeys laid down as if commanded. Hussain kicked them and punched them - but nothing. Then he gibbered at the interpreter. Apparently the donkeys were very upset about climbing the mountain and would not move until we paid Hussain more shillings. The negotiations went on for a long period until Johnny Powell our section corporal succumbed and paid out more cash. Amazingly the donkeys stood up and started the long haul to the top.

It was quite a climb of approximately 2000 feet. Wending our way upwards on what could only have been a goat track. Through rocks and rough scrub until weird looking trees appeared shaped like an upturned umbrella with small type foliage on the top. This was the Dragon's Blood tree so named that when you cut the bark, the sap seeped out red like in appearance and looked as if the tree was bleeding. The sap was used in many medicinal processes and was used also as a hair dye not unlike henna.

The temperatures were well into the hundreds and it was a long hard slog until we came to a rise where we were looking out on a vast escarpment very similar to the Cotswolds. There were green fields with lots of vegetation. On the way up I had been aware that we were being watched. When we stopped at the crest a small birdlike figure appeared. This was Ali one of the Bedou who lived in caves and very small built stone structures. He had smiling eyes and seemed to twitter like a bird. The interpreter told us that when Alexander the Great was fighting his way across the Middle East he had left a battalion of Macedonians on the island to look after the vast amounts of frankincense and myrrh, which grew in abundance on the island. They had interbred with the Arabs from the mainland who came across trading and had ended up living in the mountains. The Soqotrans had their own language but the Bedou spoke an entirely different language. More recently linguists have been to the island and dispelled that theory, but that is the one I prefer.



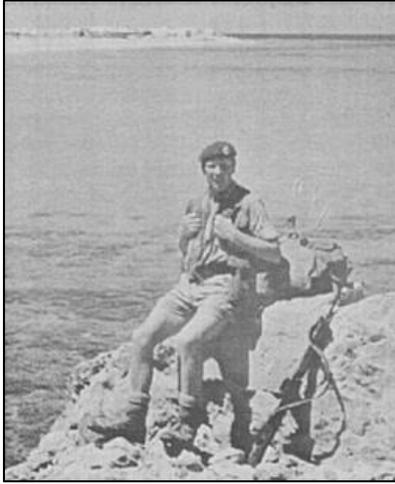
Cooling off in a mountain stream - Biddy MacMillan, John Farr, Lofty Gallagher, & Cpl Dave ?

At the top we rested for a while and then John Benny, a Rhodesian in the troop, to our surprise took out a tin of white paint and a brush and daubed all our names on a very large rock with '9 Squadron' written above. A year later an expedition run by military intelligence came to the island. According to their research no European had ever been in the mountains. Did they get a shock when they saw, Johnny Powell, John Benny, Tommo, Tim Duffy, Geordie Small and Geordie Smart daubed on the rock. The major, who many years later, lectured on Soqotra for the National Geographic Society, reckoned his best laugh was received when he told that story. So much for military intelligence!

It had been a long hard day so we decided to have a brew up and make camp for the night. Out of the dusk appeared many faces. It was the Bedou in abundance; apart from Ali they kept their distance. They were very shy especially the woman, but we found from a distance they were quite flirtatious, with flashing eyes, olive skin and gleaming white teeth. They were not opposed to showing a bit of thigh as they ran down the mountainside laughing, quite unlike any Arab woman that I had seen before.

The next morning we were having a brew up when Tim Duffy who had gone on walkabouts shouted, "Come and have a look at this!" Tim was standing at the edge of a very large valley, which looked as if everything in it was petrified. As if a finger had come out of the sky and fired lightning; burning everything growing in the valley. Very spooky!

As we gathered up our gear a crowd of the Bedou came to watch us and chatter away in their strange language. We moved off heading deeper into the mountains. The vegetation, apparently unique to Soqotra; was quite strange. Passing very small adobe built houses with a compound to hold their goats and dwarf humped back cattle. After a couple of hours tabbing, we came upon what looked like an orange grove, which obviously had been cultivated and let go to seed. At some stage there had been Portuguese living on the island and was probably a product of their efforts. The scenery was breathtaking as we headed upward to about 3,000 feet. Climbing up over the top of an escarpment onto a level plateau I was in the lead and spotted a strange circle of stones on the ground. On examination we found strange shapes cut into the stone like ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics. The mountains reminded me of Arthur Conan Doyle's book, 'The Lost World.' We spent four days in the mountains and got to know the Bedou very well. They were a very happy people but suffered from many illnesses living in the damp conditions of the caves. Most of them were covered in flea bites. They loved the hardtack biscuits of our compositions, and of course all the hard-boiled sweets went to the kids.



**With the capital Hadibo in the background, Biddy MacMillan poses by the sea.**

Sadly our recce was finished and we had to head back down to the plateau and our base camp, tired but much wiser in the ways of men. On our return to camp, Johnny Powell gave a quick account of our trip to Jock Wallace.

The following day we were given the day off so we all headed for the beach. The temperature was high in the thirties so the sea looked very inviting. I held back as I was not a very good swimmer but the water felt terrific. We splashed around for a while and then lay on the beach getting in some bronzy. I was dozing off when Sid (El Cid) Grounsell, a mate of mine from Geordie land said, 'Look out there, a Chinese Junk.' Without looking up I said, "It's probably a dhow, this is the Indian Ocean not the China Sea. Sid insisted it was a Chinese Junk and as it came nearer to the

island it was obvious he was right. They anchored up out in the deep water and a small zodiac craft was lowered into the water. As they closed in to the beach you could see the incredulity on their faces when they saw a crowd of white guys.

As we shook hands with much backslapping, they explained they were a crowd of French film people who had been to the Hong Kong film festival. They had bought the boat and were sailing it back to France in time for the Cannes film festival. They told us they were nearly out of food and were living off the sea. We asked them to come up to the camp and we would give them a good meal, (one way of getting rid of the chicken supreme)! They went back to the boat in the zodiac and returned with arms full of booze. Soon we were back at camp with the chicken supreme on the boil supping wine and pastis. They relished the compo rations and must have been starving judging by the way they wolfed down the food. As the effects of the wine and pastis took effect we had a singsong in French and English. It was quite a night and went on until early morning. The Frenchmen made their way back to the boat apart from one guy called John Pierre Salmon. He was quite a character and claimed he was the editor of the magazine Paris Match. He said he was the only Salmon in the Paris telephone directory and if any of us ever visited Paris to look him up. I had cause to many years later while travelling through Paris on my way back from the Middle East. There were over forty Salmon's in the directory! Perhaps he was trying to tell me something. He invited a few of us back on board for lunch as most of the lads were heading out on patrol again.

It was an amazing sight close up and now surrounded by the small fisherman's boats. We had a quick lunch, which was mainly compo rations we had provided, and a couple of glasses of wine.

The following day I found myself on camp duties and by early morning I had squared away the breakfast dishes and cleaned around the camp. The rest of the guys had gone out on patrol. I headed down to the beach to catch the cool sea breeze. Arriving at the beach I saw the Frenchmen lowering the zodiac, then stowing some diving gear on it. There were four French guys in the zodiac as they pulled away from the Junk. When they saw me they headed inshore. John Pierre was onboard and shouted, "Come with us." They pulled into the shallow waters and I got on board. They seemed to know where they were going and after a good three quarters of an hour, we came to an area of white-capped waves, apparently where the waves were hitting the top of a reef. They made anchor and started to get dressed in the diving gear. John Pierre asked me if I wanted to dive. I explained to him that I could hardly swim. He just shrugged his shoulders and then started to dress me up in the gear. I was crapping myself and did not make a very good entry into the water. John held on to me until I got my breathing right and then we descended. It could not have been very deep as we were soon on the bottom and looking around I was amazed to see that I was smack in the middle of a shipwreck. Obviously it had been badly smashed up on the reef. It was quite an experience albeit a very harrowing one. After the dive I felt very exhilarated and was feeling quite proud of myself. They invited me back onboard the junk and John showed me a map of Soqotra with a wreck marked on it. Next to it he had written the name SS Oder. I had to make my way back to camp and for some strange reason never mentioned it to the lads.

Soon our reconnaissance finished and we had to pack away all the gear. The morning we were flying out it seemed as if the whole island had come to see us off. We flew out from the airstrip once again in our lumbering Beverley. The pilot banked the aircraft as if to say goodbye to the islanders. Looking out the window I felt as if the island had a strange magnetic effect on me. Little did I know then that I was to return many years later? We picked up a smiling Sammy on the way back and within a couple of weeks we headed back to Blichty.

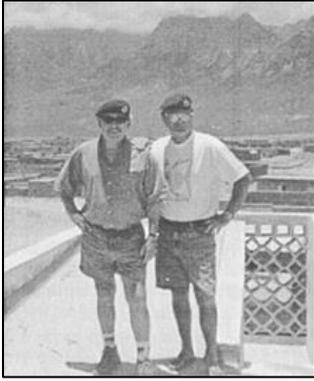
My short venture in to diving had not exactly given me a great enthusiasm for the sport, so I was not over enthused about three years later when I applied for a driving course and instead was sent on a diving course to the Royal Engineers Diving School at Marchwood. However I took to the diving like a fish to water, I finished top of my basic course, which quite honestly was six weeks of hell. It was not long before I went back on my Supervisors course and ended up as the Squadron Diving Supervisor. To cut a long story short I ended up at the Royal Engineers Diving School as a sergeant instructor and at the end of my twelve years decided as many divers had done before me, to leave the army and go into commercial diving.

On leaving the army I worked mainly in civil engineering diving. Sometimes in rivers where you could not see your hand in front of your face and freezing bloody cold. I had a lucky break because of my expertise in demolition's I ended up on a job in the Persian Gulf on Kharg Island. We were blasting through a coral reef to lay an oil pipeline. From there I was head hunted by an American company called Oceaneering once again on a demolition job. This was a step into the offshore oil industry where the big bucks were to be made. Soon I was working offshore on the work-over barges covering many aspects including salvage diving. I worked in Africa, the Middle East and the Far East finally ending up as Middle East manager for Comex a French diving company, who at that time was the largest company in the world. Unfortunately in 1980 my diving career was terminated by a spinal bend.

It was not until 1997 an advert was brought to my attention about the Scuba Trust, which teaches disabled persons to dive. I have had two spinal operations because of my previous bend and thought that I would never dive again. Encouraged by my friend I contacted the Scuba Trust who recommended a medical. Much to my amazement I was passed fit to dive, although limited to 25 meters. I am also a sufferer of rheumatoid arthritis but am now at the stage where I assist in teaching the disabled to dive.

Starting from scratch again I completed my basic PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) course in San Diego, California, then went on to accomplish my advanced open watercourse in Watamu, Kenya. My next step was to achieve my Rescue Divers course, which was done in the UK in the freezing waters of a lake at Wraysbury. Last August during a holiday in Cyprus I completed 85% of my Divemaster course. During this period I was carrying out some research on the Internet for a book I am writing and came into contact with a gentleman whose Great Grandfather had died on the SS Oder, (the wreck I had dived on in Soqotra). Because of the coincidence I carried out further research and to my amazement found that there were many ships sunk off Soqotra including two Portuguese traders, carrying gold and silver specie from the Sultan of the Oman to the Sultan of Turkey. An English East Indian trader who I believe was a pirate, who had plundered the temple in Northern India, was heading home to England when his ship foundered off Soqotra. I had certainly got the bug spending hour after hour researching on the Internet and then to Kew Records Office and Lloyds Register amongst many others.

I made a decision to run a diving expedition to the island to carry out a reconnaissance. However there was a major problem I needed finance. I tried to get sponsors but to no avail. I then decided to cash in my life insurance policy. It is only any good if you are dead and at that time I did not have anyone in particular to leave it to.



Many people have asked me why these wrecks have never been dived on? The reason for the lack of exploration is the fact that they are located in a politically sensitive area and because of the monsoons which blow for around nine months of the year. Since the British pulled out of Yemen there has been a Russian presence on the island but my research indicates that they never dived there. They left in 1998.

Accompanied by my good friend Dave Ruddock we returned to Soqatra in late 2002.

To be continued...

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## The Parachutist

After the security of childhood and before the insecurity of the second childhood we find the parachutist.

Parachutists are found everywhere; in bars, on bars, behind bars, looking through Police bars, in trouble, in debt, in the air on leave and in love.

Parachutists come in assorted sizes, weight, and states of sobriety, misery and confusion.

Girls love them, mothers worry about them, the government supports them, and somehow they manage to get along with each other.

A Parachutist is laziness with a deck of cards, a millionaire without a bob, bravery with a grin, the protector of Great Britain with the latest copy of Playboy in his possession at all times.

A Parachutist is a composite; sly as a fox, has the energy of a turtle, the brains of an idiot, the sincerity of a liar, the appetite of an elephant, the aspiration of a Casanova, and the story of a hero.

When he wants something it is usually a weekend pass, a "swan" or someone to do his fatigues.

He dislikes answering letters, wearing his uniform, his superior officers, getting up for reveille, Army food, RAF planes, RAF Pilots, the week before pay day, his girls old man's curfew, and "bull."

He likes girls, women, ladies, and members of the opposite sex.

No one can write so seldom, yet think of you so often. No one else can get so much fun out of your letters, civilian clothes and sex magazines.

A Parachutist is a magical creature; you can lock him out of your house but not your heart. You can take him off your mailing list but not off your mind.

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## Question from Oz



Frank Brady from the Australian outback has sent us this photo of two members of 3 Tp doing a quick kit check on pants ridiculous as they were affectionately known.

Paddy Byrne is substituting in this case for Billy Bradley's mother and making sure that if an incident occurs on this 1964 OMEX patrol in the Oman, he will at least have been wearing clean undergarments.

What was the predominant colour after an interesting and arduous 6 days on patrol?

I'm sure Bill will enlighten us!!

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## Airborne Engineers Weekend

Yorkshire Air Museum, Elvington, York  
Saturday 21st & Sunday 22nd June 2003



Join us at Elvington, RED LIGHT ON - GREEN LIGHT - GO, with evening dinner and dance on Saturday 21st June in the atmospheric restaurant for a great social evening.

Gather again for the Airborne Show on Sunday 22nd June and enjoy the Service, Parade, Flypasts and Displays.

### Programme

Saturday 21st June

7.00pm	Gather in the	Restaurant for pre-dinner drinks
8.00pm	Dinner. Piper	in attendance
10.00pm	Dancing	
1.00am	Carriages	

Tickets for Dinner / Dance: Please send cheque for £18.50 per person direct to:  
Roy King, 4 Trenfield Court, Holgate, York, YO2 4LF. Tel: 01904 795 733  
Cheque payable to: **"Yorkshire Branch AEA"**

### Sunday 22nd June

Airborne Show. Gates Open 9.30am.

A full day of activity, including:

Drum Head Service

Veterans Parade & March past

Flying Displays - Battle of Britain Memorial Flight

Free Fall Parachute Display (subject to operational status)

Sideshowes & Regimental displays, including:

9 Parachute Squadron RE Static Display, 21 Field Squadron EOD (Bomb Disposal), Military Vehicles, Normandy Arnhem Society, Band, Birds of Prey Exhibition, Parachute Packing Display, Re-enactments.

Admission: £6 Adults, £4 Senior Citizens, £3 Children (5-15) Under 5's free.

Yorkshire Air Museum, Halifax Way, Elvington, York YO41 4AU (Tel: 01904 608595)

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## 3rd Airborne Squadron RE

(late 1948 or early 1949)

Lawrence Long - 150, Kings Way, Heysham, Morecambe, Lancs LA3 2EF (01524 852607)

I enclose an old photograph of part of the 3rd Airborne Squadron RE, taken while we were on a month's bridging camp at Hameln. If my memory serves me right it was just before we moved from Nienmunster to Hameln for good.

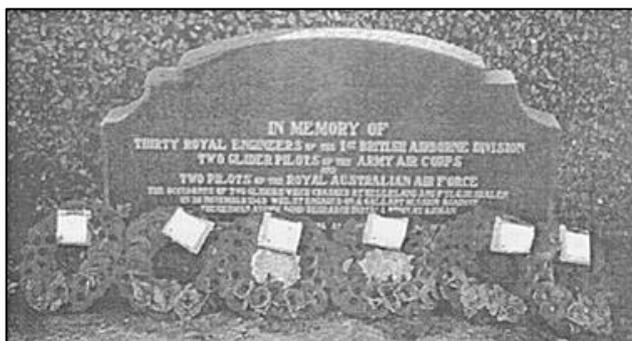
Front centre was the (OC) Major Smith, on his right Capt Marsh and on his left Lt Ratcliffe. Yours truly is 8th from left in rear rank, my old pal Eddie Gray is on my left. I would be delighted to hear from anyone who recognises themselves in the photo.



## Operation Freshman 60th Anniversary

Col Chris Davies MBE

“Your mission (and none of this “should you choose to accept it” nonsense) is to undertake the longest-ever attempted glider flight and you are to do it in late November across the North Sea. You will take off from one of the bleakest spots in the far north of Scotland, in the dark and, if you managed to find Norway, you will crash land on to a frozen lake. If you survive this you are to man pack explosives, weapons, ammunition and the barest of emergency rations across frozen snow for about 8 miles to a power station, which is defended by the enemy. You are to neutralise the enemy and, then, place your explosives on machinery in the power station in order to close down its operation. In doing so you will destroy the Germans’ efforts to make deuterium oxide (Heavy Water) and, thus, prevent them from making an atomic bomb before we do. Having done all of this, and if you remain unwounded, you are to walk to Sweden. Oh, if all goes well, this might only take you a week and, sorry, we do not have any special winter equipment or rations to aid you in your cross-country trek and the only maps we can give you are unreliable.”



**“Operation FRESHMAN” Memorial, Eiganes Cemetery,  
Stavanger Wreaths laid on Sunday 10 November 2002, 10 days  
prior to the 60th Anniversary**

This may not be word for word the briefing they received, but it was, essentially, what the volunteers for Operation FRESHMAN were told to do. The operation was so important and the risks so high, that the assault party was duplicated. Two gliders full of Royal Engineers from 9 Field Company and 261 Field Park Company took off from Skitten (a satellite airfield of Wick) on the 20th of November 1942. Despite thick cloud - at one stage they had to climb to 11,000 feet (no heaters or pressurisation in those days) - both tugs, with their gliders, made a landfall in Norway. One of them actually over-flew the intended landing zone but, owing to a blizzard and the malfunction of the beacons intended to guide them in, they were probably unaware of this. Shortly afterwards everything started to go wrong. The towropes iced up and broke and both gliders were cast adrift miles from their intended landing place. In zero visibility one tug aircraft flew into a mountain and all seven men on board were killed. Only one of the tugs managed to make it back to base and it landed with no fuel left in its tanks.

The following day the Germans put out a statement that some ‘saboteurs’ had landed from the air but that they had ‘been put to battle and all had been killed.’ This was to be the only news that anyone had of the fate of the thirty-five men in both gliders until three years later when Norway was liberated by victorious British forces. As it happened, it was the Airborne Division, which was given the job of liberating Norway, and there was a comradely determination to find out what had become of their FRESHMAN colleagues. As the story unfolded it became clear that there had been no survivors. Some had died in the crash landing of each glider some were badly injured. The unwounded sought help from local farmers but they were quickly rounded up by German troops who saturated the area to look for them. Hitler’s infamous order to shoot all commandos and saboteurs was implemented and the survivors of one of the gliders were shot almost straight away and buried close to where they landed. The other glider party were imprisoned in Stavanger and Oslo. Ultimately, they were also killed. Most of them were shot but four were despatched with lethal injections after having been subjected to harsh treatment in a series of brutal interrogations. Their bodies were dumped outside of Stavanger fjord near Kvitsoy. They were never recovered. Those who were responsible for these deaths were subsequently hanged at Hameln as war criminals.

So a gallant attempt to carry out an impossible operation ended in failure. Happily (as followers of Kirk Douglas and “The Heroes of Telemark” will know) the production of Heavy Water by the Germans was successfully halted a couple of months later by a small party of Norwegian SOE agents.



**Major Graham Dunnett TD JP HM's Lord Lieutenant of Caithness delivers his welcoming address to all participants attending the 60th Anniversary of "Operation FRESHMAN" at the Skitten Memorial**



**Salutes to the Heroes of "Operation FRESHMAN" at the Skitten Memorial on 20 November 2002**

On the 60th anniversary of Operation FRESHMAN around 200 people gathered on the site of Skitten airfield at a stone cairn which was erected some years ago to commemorate the operation and the brave men who took part in it. The Airborne Engineers Association was represented by twenty of its members and the Standard.

Being Scotland it poured with rain and there was a strong gale of wind but who would have thought of flinching when one considered the reason we were all there. We saluted brave men who, despite knowing that they were going to certain death, did not flinch for a moment in at least giving it a go.

What an inspiration their selfless courage has been to generations of Airborne Sappers since and continues to be so. Operationally they may not have succeeded but as examples of the warrior spirit to which we have all aspired, their sacrifice was most certainly not in vain.

Chris Chambers carried the Standard and Chris Davies and Bob Prosser laid wreaths on behalf of the Corps of Royal Engineers and the Airborne Engineers Association. Major Paul Fountaine, the current OC of 9 Parachute Squadron, laid a wreath on behalf of the Squadron. What an honour it was that he and the SSM, W02 Neil Fitzsimons, together with Cpls Dye, Mowbary and Gunson, took time out from an extremely busy programme to make the journey north. They certainly brought the average age of our delegation down by a fair margin! Tom Thornton, Sheila Prosser, Cliff Allison, Fred and Betty Gray, John and Glenda Smith, Ron and Daphne Day, Tony Manley, Maurice Metcalfe and Patrick Pronk formed the rest of our party, which was the largest contingent of any of the groups represented. The FRESHMAN boys would, we feel, have been honoured by the respects paid by all to them: and deservedly so.

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## Response to Brummie Howell's Article

Ron (Smokey) Gibson

In reply to Harry (Brummie) Howell's article regarding Palestine, published in issue No 8, I too left 9 Sqn in 1947 by the Medloc route as it was called. What he omitted to say was the 48 hours journey to El Cantara on a train with wooden seats and eastern type toilets, which caused much problem trying to 'aim' properly in the hole on a swaying train. And the train from Toulon was not much better!

I also recall Sgt Harry Dunstan; he was in 3rd Sqn 6th Division at Bulford 1943-4. He came from the West Country as I recall, with a good singing voice. His favourite party piece was the Cornish Floral Dance. His party tale was about a 'farting competition and a plum' - Is that the same tale as "The Raspberry?" I believe he was posted to Donington sometime before we went off to Normandy. Is he still about?

Brummie also mentioned football, 286 Field Park (later 147) had a good team and I believe some of the lads had a trial for Swindon. I believe two of them were Gough and Goeff.

On a sad note, Spr Harry Morgan (2 troop 3rd Sqn) passed away in November 2002. A full obituary is published on page 32 of this edition. Harry took part in the Normandy landings and was wounded and evacuated to the UK but returned a short time later to rejoin the Sqn and remained with them until his demob.

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## Material for the Journal

As always I am on the lookout for new material for future publications. So if you've a tale to tell or would like to relate some of your experiences, forward it direct to me (editor) address as listed on page 1.

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## Anecdotes of a Sapper

Tony (Toots) Ridgway

Sorry, guys, but I am about to inflict on you another episode of army life as experienced by yours truly. If any of you object to my rambling write to Dave (editor) who will weigh up the pros and cons of printing a load of boring crap, or leaving a few empty pages in our magazine.

Anyway, if you care to read on, here are three short stories...

On joining the REs (1961) I went to No. 1 Training Regt. Cove. During basic training we were required, apart from square bashing, to undergo basic field training. One day our corporal (ex-junior bleeder) took us out to the training ground and said in a loud pompous voice, "I am now going to show you how to make a right angle in the field using only a piece of string, 3 nails, and a ruler, it is called a 3,4,5, triangle". (He'd probably never heard of, or couldn't spell Pythagoras). He then went on to laboriously explain that if you measured 3' x 4' x 5' on a piece of string, put a nail in each knot, stretched the whole thing out, then one angle would be a right angle. (I won't insult your intelligence by telling you which one it is) What the hell anyone wanted to do this for, I still haven't found out.

The Cpl then took about 15mins, measuring string, tying nails, stretching string, farting about and then, when the whole thing was in position, proudly announced this is a right angle'

After this charade, I casually remarked that I reckoned I could do 2 right angles through the base line, using the piece of string, 2 nails and no ruler, and it would probably take about 10-15 seconds.

Stunned silence! Then, "Show me," he sneered' (I may just mention here that I was a fully qualified engineer and draughtsman, having served a five year plus apprenticeship in civvy street.

However, back to the story. Receiving the piece of string and 2 nails I produce, in less than 10 seconds, two perfect right angles through the base line. He then proceed to turn purple, froth at the mouth, and screamed at me "It's not in the book, it's not in the book!" Army rule No.1 if it's not in the book, then it is not allowed. You can only do things one way - their way - regardless of the best way.

So, after a posting to Germany where I came across the same ignorant attitudes, and other problems, I applied to join 9 Sqn.

Some of my old mates know that my main reason for joining the army was to stay out of civvy nick. In those days you were given a choice, join the army or go to prison. So when I joined the army I already had a civilian record. Three months into basic training at Cove I landed up in Brixton nick on a charge of G.B.H. I wasn't kicked out the army, but I was back partied.

Prior to joining the army I lived in a Polish ex-serviceman's club In Newcastle. I lived there rent free for about 2 years and in return I cooked the owners books. This was during the Hungarian uprising, when a lot of Eastern bloc refugees came to the U.K So I was living with Poles, Hungarians, Russians, Czechs, you name it. Reds in beds, cold war, communists, spies, etc. all that was rife in those days.

So, to the story: - After finishing training at No. 1, I was posted to H.Q. BAOR Rheindahlen, as a draughtsman. I reported to the 'Big House,' which is what HQ was referred to. As it was my first day, I had to report to security, who rang the Engineers section. An RE NCO came down and signed me in then escorted me to our section. I was shown my office and introduced to the other ORs. (1 sapper, 2 Cpls, 1 Sgt, and 1 WO1) (Officers amounted to 6, ranging from Captain to Brigadier or General, I am not sure, but the unit was certainly top heavy.)

The section consisted of draughtsman's office, office for Sgt & Cpls, one for the WOI, offices for the officers, and one special strong room where the Brig/Gen. worked. This was an office with iron bars on the window, an iron grilled door with a combination lock, and filing cabinets marked Confidential, Secret, Top secret, NATO secret, Atomic secret. (I kid you not) The whole big house was guarded night and day with a special security unit, guard dogs, etc.

During my first day, I was issued with a temporary pass; this allowed me to enter the Big House, though I still had to be escorted to my workplace. The WOI gave me a security clearance form to fill in. I took one look at it and thought "Oh Sh\*t," they wanted to know the far end of a fart and which way it was blowing. And if you told any porkies, it was the tower of London. So, I told them everything thinking that in a few days I would be getting another posting to a Field Sqn. I listed all past offences, addresses, employers, etc. handed it in to the WOI, who just put it in an envelope and sent it on to M.O.D., War office, or whoever watches over security in the U.K.. (I did hear later that someone had been to my hometown, interviewing family members, former employers, and old acquaintances.

So, imagine my surprise, when a couple of weeks later the WOI called me into his office and said "Your security rating has arrived." With that he gave me a permanent pass and a copy of the Official Secrets Act to sign. If you are reading this, I guess I haven't breached it.

For the next 3 months or so, my work involved top security stuff on all engineering works in BAOR. As part of my job, and there were only 2 sappers, we had to take it in turns (one week each) to arrive at least 1 hour early to open up the strong room ready for the officer and after work, lock up the strong room, making sure that no documents had been left out and that all rubbish in the dustbin was properly incinerated. Can you imagine the consequences, if someone of dubious character, were to infiltrate this world of weird secrecy?

The combination of the strong room lock was changed every week (for security reasons obviously) and only 3 people had the combination, the Brigadier and the two sappers who had to open his door for him every morning. It goes further. During this time, as I was a bloody good draughtsman, word got round the different sections (via the officers) that a top notch draughtsman was working for the REs, and if they needed one, they would loan him out. (Sorry to blow my own trumpet, but nobody else will). Consequently I ended up doing various strong rooms of different departments, e.g. R.A, REME, RAOC and Logistics, and doing highly classified drawings and maps of the whole of Germany. I also had to recce all the autobahns in Germany, mark all bridges on maps with a guesstimate of how much explosive it would need to blow up each one in the event that any of my ex. Hungarian, Russian, Pole, Czech inmates in the ex- serviceman's club decided to invade Germany.

Now, in the Big House, a big security door also divides each section. But because I was working in different sections by now, I could pass from one section to another so no problem. Then, one fine day, early 63, the sh\*t really hit the fan, I was in my office when the Sgt came in looking very agitated and said, "Ridgway, go see the WOI immediately. I went to his office and he said, "We have a serious problem." (I like the use of the word we) "I have been looking through records and your security rating does not mean that you are actually security cleared; in fact when I checked the ratings, yours does not even reach Zero." (Well I can't remember his exact words, but that was the gist of it)

He must have got my rating and just assumed that it was security clearance. The upshot was that I was immediately relegated to work in the civilian architectural office in a non-security part of the Big House. I spent the next few weeks wandering between the D.O. and the bar. (The German civvies had their own bar, open all day) I was in the army, but the army wouldn't touch me with a bargepole. I heard rumours that the brass upstairs had gone bananas. A guy with no security clearance had been working on top secret documents in half a dozen different departments, Maybe the whole of Germany's defences had to be changed because of me, but maybe they just said, "Glad the little bastard has gone," 'cos by then I had applied to join the Sqn, where nobody seemed to give a toss about my past.

Which brings me to my last short tale (During recruiting in BAOR.)

I was driving Garth in Germany when he said to me, "Geordie, when we get back to U.K. you have to do an education course in Aldershot." "Bullsh\*t, I said, "I don't want or need any more." However, the army was adamant that I needed map reading. It had escaped their notice that I had previously been an AI TARA. (Technical Assistant Royal Artillery) My job in the R.A. command post was to calculate ranges, trajectories, etc, for the 25-pounder field guns from information supplied by the O.P. So I had to know maps inside out. And who taught me? The army!

So the army in its infinite wisdom forced me to go to the education centre in Aldershot, each Tuesday afternoon for three months. They gave me a bus pass to get from Crookham to the NAAFI CLUB- whoops, sorry, - the education centre. I went to the education centre 3 times, first to sign on the course, 2nd half way through just to show my face, and third to take the exam. I passed with flying colours, and got pleasantly mellow every Tuesday afternoon.

Oh! happy days!

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# Angola- The Forgotten War

Mike Ellery

I completed my final contract in Angola working as a Safety Manager for a French Construction Company (who were installing a Gas Compression Module on an Offshore Oil Installation) eventually arriving home on the 11th December 2002, having endured all the usual hassle encountered as you progress through the many immigration check points in Angola. After a 7-hour flight from Luanda I arrived at Paris and from there it is a short trip to Aberdeen. Only then can you finally relax knowing that all your troubles have been left 5000 miles behind in Africa. That is, unless you happen to bump into some officious little customs official at Aberdeen Airport who wants to search your bag for undeclared duty trees- such is life!

Angola is a country that has been at Civil War for the past 27 years, having gained its Independence from Portugal in 1975. Having worked in Angola for 5 years I saw nothing of the troubles, although only 70km from the capital Luanda, major battles were being fought. The charter flight that took us to the oil base at Soyo in the North (which was overrun by the UNITA forces in 1986 and totally destroyed) flew well out to sea. This was to avoid the possibility of being hit by a ground to air missile. Abandoned missile batteries with their missiles rusting on the cliff tops are still visible from the air. The war for Independence began in 1961 and the three main parties involved in achieving this independence were the (MPLA) The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, (UNITA) The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, and (FNLA) The National Front of Liberation of Angola. The first two parties became the main players in the struggle for total control of the country. The MPLA supported by the Cubans, both with military hardware and personnel and backed by the Russians, became the dominant party and set up a Marxist Government led by President Eduardo Dos Santos.

The USA, UK, South Africa and the West in general initially supported UNITA led by the rebel leader Jonas Savimbi. UNITA controlled the diamond producing areas, whilst the Government had control of the oil producing areas. This fed the war machine whilst the majority of the population starved.

Angola is in the top 10 lists for the most corrupt countries in the world, corruption starting at the top and filtering down to the lowest Government official. It is inevitable that you experience the effects of this corruption at some point during your stay in Angola.

UNITA became the outcasts by failing to observe the various peace initiatives imposed by the International Organisations. The Marxist Government gained acceptance by the West (I wonder if this had anything to do with the huge oil potential being exploited by the International Oil Companies) but continued the military struggle in order to gain political acceptance and power sharing responsibilities. The situation changed dramatically with the death of Jonas Savimbi in a clash with Government troops on 22nd February 2002. This led to further peace talks and the eventual ending to the Civil war, which had been raging since 1975 to 2002.

The legacy of this war is an abundance of land mines, scattered indiscriminately by both sides throughout the country. The use of land mines by any commander in the field as a tool for Land Denial or to slow an attack down may be justified, but civilian casualties will occur once the local population return to their homes. Large numbers of limb-less beggars can be seen in the streets of the country's capital, Luanda. Beneath is a list of the 10 anti-personnel mines and 5 anti-tank mines most frequently found in Angola:

## Anti-Personnel Mines

PPM-2	Former East Germany
PMD-6	Former Soviet Union
PMN	Former Soviet Union
POZ-2 & POMZ-2M	Former Soviet Union
OZM-4	Former Soviet Union
OZM-72	Former Soviet Union
Mai-75	Romania
PN-1 (plastic box mine)	Cuba
T-72A	China

**Anti-Tank Mines**

TM-46	Former Soviet Union
TM-57	Former Soviet Union
TM-62M	Former Soviet Union
T-72	China
PT-MI-BA-III	Former Czechoslovakia



PPM-2 anti-personnel pressure operated blast mine.  
Sensitivity 11-15 kgs  
Explosive content 110 grams TNT  
Height 63 mm  
Diameter 125 mm  
Total weight 371 grams



PMN anti-personnel pressure operated blast mine.  
Sensitivity 8 - 25 kgs  
Explosive content 240 grams TNT  
Height 56mm  
Diameter 112mm  
Total weight 600 gram



OMZ-4 Anti-personnel bounding fragmentation mine, iron casing.  
Explosive content 17 grams TNT  
Height 140mm  
Diameter 91 mm  
Total weight 3.2 kgs

76 different mine types have been found or reported in Angola, 11 of which have not been confirmed by the United Nations although they have been reported as found or seen in Angola by the NGOs, FAA or African Watch. Due to a lack of reporting procedures since 1996, some more mine types may have been found that have not been registered by the UN.

The mammoth task of clearing these mines from the countryside continues. Progress is slow and dangerous; the task being hampered by the lack of financial aid and lack of fully trained personnel. Who knows? In the near future, an international request for Army Engineers to assist in the removal of these devices - we may see the Squadron out in Angola performing this task.

## Previous Article Response

Don Newman

Ex Airborne Forces Association WA (Inc). (Pegasus)

In answer to the question posed in issue No. 8 of the AEA Journal, dated December 2002, concerning Phil Hyatt.

I personally shared his company over a few drinks on occasional meets having been introduced to him on joining the Association in early 1973. Phil was a self-employed person. He went back to Arnhem In 1981, left his miniature medals at Hartenstein Hotel Museum. Died 28 August 1962. However, Mr John Hatley (Arnhem Vet) Ex GSM, 2 Para has produced the following for me.

### CITATION

Military Medal - 827060 Sapper P. Hyatt 4th Parachute Squadron, Royal Engineers On September 22, 1944, Sapper Hyatt was personally responsible for breaking up a strong attack on 4th Parachute Squadron RE defensive position.

The enemy advanced to within 50 yards of this position under heavy small arms fire. Sapper Hyatt jumped out of his trench and ran towards the enemy throwing hand grenades, killing three of four Germans. The enemy attack was checked and Sapper Hyatt continued to throw grenades until they withdrew.

He was a tremendous example to the rest of the squadron, even when wounded during the withdrawal to the over. He is recommended for an immediate award of the Military Medal.

(London Gazette, March 1, 1945)

Phil was a founder member and first standard-bearer of our association. Initially he was good company, enjoyed a beer [or two] and played the harmonica well. He had a lot of ill health, and later on drifted away, except for a few personal friends. When six of us went to help clear up his extensive property in Coogee (Australia), he didn't once come out of his room to welcome us. He passed away rather tragically some 20 years ago, still a comparatively young man.

(Extract from a letter written by an ex-glider pilot and published in the Pegasus Journal in 1979).

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# The Army's Armed Helicopter Concept

P J Myatt former OC Helicopter Weapons Flight AAC

This subject has been subjected to more hot air than any other within the Army Air Corps. Maybe this probably stems from the fact that during the early formation of the Army Air corps candidates were only recruited from teeth arms who, by nature tended to be aggressive. (9 Indep Para Sqn Cooks etc)

Early attempts at arming helicopters were tried by the French in Algeria and then by the Americans in South Vietnam. Although these earlier attempts were carried out in a hostile environment it was in areas that offered little in the way of Light Air Defence Opposition. Even so the South Vietnamese still caused considerable casualties to the American Helicopter force with the use of small arms fire.

Various attack profiles and direct fire weapons systems have been tried in an effort to ensure high survivability to the helicopter crews Cannons and unguided rockets fired over ranges in excess of a 1,000 metres have a large 'beaten zone' coupled with the instability and vibration characteristics of the helicopter, have proved unacceptably inaccurate against point targets.

Without wishing to insult any ones intelligence, the 'Beaten Zone' of rockets/guns can best be visualised with the analogy of a torch whose beam is focussed to a point. If you hold the torch 5ft in the air and point it vertically downward so the beam is perpendicular to the ground you get a small intense spot of light (i.e. a small beaten zone). However as you reduce the angle and lower the torch closer to the ground, still maintaining a distance of 5ft, you can easily see that the spotlight becomes elongated covering a much larger area. This is similar to the 'beaten zone' of direct fire weapons.

A typical attack profile for a fast fixed wing aircraft (FGA's) is normally to approach the target at low level to avoid AA defences. It then pulls up at an Identification Point (IP) and dives onto the target, usually under the directions of a Forward Aircraft Controller, in order to reduce the size of the beaten zone. As the FGA is flying in the region of 450kts it is not an easy target to hit. Flying any faster than 450kts and the pilot will not have sufficient time/airspace to readjust his aim, if required. If the pilot pulls up too high prior to diving into the attack in order to improve his acquisition he leaves himself vulnerable to triple 'A' and shoulder launched missile systems.

Unfortunately the current generation of helicopters and the immediate future ones are flying as fast as there's ever likely to. The pure helicopter suffers from four characteristics that prevent them going any faster than about 150kts. These are basically as follows and cause a phenomenon known as the dissymmetry of lift.

'Running out of forward cyclic stick movement to prevent phenomena known as 'Flap back' (This could be reconciled with 'Fly by wire controls')

Advancing blade exceeding the speed of sound. The rotor blade that is going forward has the velocity of the aircraft's forward motion and the rotational velocity of the rotating blade added together and they can exceed the speed of sound at approx. 160kts.

Flow reversal on the root of the retreating blade. The inboard section of the retreating rotor blade is in fact, travelling slower than helicopter's forward speed thus destroying lift.

Retreating blade stall. During forward flight the retreating blade is moving backwards relative to the aircraft's movement. This means there is less air velocity over the blade and therefore producing less 'Lift' than the advancing blade. The advancing blade has the addition of the aircraft's forward velocity and its rotational velocity and so it produces more 'Lift.' To offset this dissymmetry of lift between the advancing and retreating sides of the disc the angle of attack of the retreating side is increased to produce more 'Lift.' This is called 'Cyclic feathering.' Unfortunately all aerofoil sections Stall at about 17 degrees of angle of attack. All the rotor blades have a collective pitch setting commensurate to its weight and speed of the helicopter. The higher the speed and weight the more collective pitch has to be applied and therefore the less there is available for cyclic feathering. The faster a helicopter goes the greater the dissymmetry of lift and the less pitch there is for cyclic feathering.

This is the helicopters Velocity Not to Exceed (VNO) to exceed this speed could be catastrophic

Just to enlarge of that last statement if the pilot is flying heavy' and fast he will be using a considerable amount of collective pitch (the pitch that is applied to all rotor blades) to do so. E.g. He may be pulling about fifteen degrees of pitch angle of attack to provide the thrust to counter drag plus a vertical component (Lift) to balance weight. This leaves him with only about two to three degrees of pitch available for cyclic feathering. It therefore follows that any further increase in speed is going to require more collective pitch (angle of attack) to offset the increase in drag leaving none available for cyclic feathering and hence causing the retreating blade to stall. If this should happen it will almost certainly be catastrophic.

This limited forward speed has been the main reason for not using the helicopter in the direct fire role. To the man on the ground shooting at aircraft it is no more difficult to hit an old fixed wing Biplane of World War One costing say, a couple of thousands of pounds sterling. Than it would be to shooting down a modern helicopter costing seven or eight million pounds sterling. The diving speeds of both aircraft are much the same. To reinforce the points above it is worth noting that the helicopters forward speed has not increased by more than 10kts over the over the past thirty years.

A further disadvantage of the helicopter is it cannot sustain high 'G' load factors at fast speed which means that the aircraft can't be thrown around the sky making evasive manoeuvres. However at slow or medium speeds up to say 100kts the helicopter is extremely manoeuvrable. These characteristics have channelled the helicopter into being used as a fast ground attack vehicle rather than a slow FGA.

Initially when tasked with bringing armed helicopters into service the biggest threat to Western Europe was the massive tank threat of the Warsaw Pact Alliance. These Tank Regiments were also equipped with highly effective Light Air Defence Systems e.g. The ZSU-23-4 SPAA It was decided to employ the helicopter in the anti-tank role flying low level making maximum use of ground cover and the helicopter's good low speed manoeuvrability. To reduce the helicopter's vulnerability it was decided that the weapon must have a good stand-off range and at the same time be accurate. Enter the guided missile concept.



**Author using one of the original helmet sights used to manoeuvre an under slung machine gun system.**

Initially, the long range requirement coupled with a high degree of accuracy posed something of a problem until the introduction of a stabilised sight. The sight was stabilised against the inherent vibrations that all helicopters are subject to and it had two degrees of magnification – x2 112 for the initial guidance phase and XI 0 for the terminal guidance. The procedure was to fire the missile and then using a small control stick similar to that used with a model aircraft to acquire and manoeuvre the missile until K was superimposed on the tank silhouette. Then change the magnification of the sight to XI 0 to stabilise and maintain the missile on the tank until impact. End of tank.



As the missiles had a range of three thousand metres plus it gave the helicopter a high chance of remaining hidden during the engagement making it difficult for the tank to locate the helicopter. Due to the stabilised sight being mounted in the roof of the helicopter it enabled the chopper to remain behind cover with just the main rotors above cover this made R almost impossible to detect from ranges greater than two thousand metres.



**Air Gunner operating the Avimo/Ferranti AF120 stabilised sight.**

The tactics and deployment of the weapon system was formulated from the aircrew up through the higher echelons rather than the other way as is normally the case. It was decided that the ATGW helicopter would be used to counter the rapid break through threat that was the philosophy of the Warsaw Pact. The greatest chance of success against rapidly moving armour is with the assistance of a reconnaissance helicopter which 'shadows' the enemy armour. In this role the art is to fly as low as possible making use of basic field craft to avoid detection from the enemy radar, yet still position the aircraft to be able to see but not be seen. By making use of the ground cover and anticipating the tank movements which are being relayed by the recce' helicopter the anti - tank helicopter can be manoeuvred around the battlefield like a hundred mile - an - hour anti - tank gun, set up ambush positions and hit the enemy tanks as soon as they come within range. Once the tanks moved off the road/tracks to bypass their knocked out colleagues their rapid advance has been slowed sufficiently to enable a friendly Armoured Battle Group to be moved into position to plug the breakthrough. Without wishing to teach people how to suck eggs. Tanks on roads can average about 30k/h (Don't forget the hills). However, cross country particularly if the going is heavy their speed is reduced to about 10-15km/hr.

The exact tactics during such missions will depend on the conditions existing at the time but a was never the intention to have a slugging match between helicopters and tanks. Once the tanks had stopped to return fire or take up defensive positions the helicopters disengage and set up new ambush positions. The basic principle in using the ATGW helicopter is to use it as a fast and flexible ground vehicle rather than a slow FGA.

The initial guided missiles required considerable skill in guiding them onto the tank which even at X10 magnifications is still a small target to hit. The next generation of missiles coupled to the Army's Lynx helicopter was the TOW system which was a semi-automatic guidance system. The missile controller simple kept the cross wire graticule of the sight superimposed on the tank. There was an optical infra-red source in the base of the missile which was monitored by a goniometer located within the sight and co -aligned with the stabilised sight's graticule. Any deviation between the graticule (centred on the tank) and the infra-red source of the missiles was immediately corrected by telemetry signals passed down the wires trailing out the base of the missile. These signals corrected any displacement during flight keeping the missile superimposed on the tank thus ensuring a direct hit.

The latest missile system being brought into service with the Apache helicopter is a system called Hellfire which is termed automatic. There are no telemetry wires being paid out by this missile. The target is illuminated by a laser designator which is sought by a detector unit in the nose of the missile. There are two systems employed by the Apache; one is a, Lock On Before Launch (LOBL) and a, Lock On After Launch (LOAL). In the first instance (LOBL) the gunner gets a firm indication in the cockpit of a missile laser lock on before firing the missile which is used during shorter ranges but the LOAL can be fires from behind cover. The missile is programmed to climb and then the helicopter can break cover to finish the guidance. The latest version of the Apache is the, Longbow, variety which is capable of engaging many targets in quick sequence. Most of the information on this system is still classified.

The Apache is a formidable aircraft which is supposed to be able to accept small arms fire up to 23mm calibre without suffering serious damage. Personally 1 would not like to be flying it when it's getting hit by 23mm cannon shells, even the rotors blades are claimed to withstand this sort of fire! The cockpit is surrounded by a Titanium armoured bath which protects the crew and the fuel tanks are all self-sealing. All this protection and ordinance makes the Apache a very heavy helicopter weighing in at over 21,000lbs a shade heavier than the present Sea King. Needless to say it requires quite a large administrative tail and lot technicians to keep the beast flying.

Future helicopters weapons are (as are all weapons) influenced by technical progress but it seems unlikely that anyone is going to produce a helicopter that can fly any faster than the present ones due to the problems

highlighted at the beginning of this article. Fitting stub wing to off load the lift requirement of the main rotors as with the Russian Hind 'D' is one way but this incurs a penalty when trying to hover. The down wash from the main rotor blades impinges on the stub wings and holds the aircraft to the ground; (A bit like standing on your shirt tails and trying to stand up) this limits it to running take off - however it does give the Hind a relative top speed advantage. But its top speed is still only that of a World One Bi-plane in a dive. This would seem to relegate choppers to the guided missile role for the foreseeable future.

The Americans are still trying to get the Tilt Wing and the Tilt Rotor concepts off the ground and into the air. The tilt wing trials have been going on for at least thirty years which gives one some idea how complicated this concept is. This aircraft has two engines mounted in the wings and when required to hover the wings are tilted until both engines are pointing vertically upwards to provide the thrust to hover. As the wings have also been tilted into the vertical plane the down wash does not aerodynamically hold it down. Once clear of the ground the wings are slowly tilted forward which provides forward thrust. As the speed increases the wings are continually tilted forward and begin to produce 'Lift.' When they are parallel to the horizon the wings are now providing all the vertical lift required opposing the weight of the aircraft. The engines now provide all the thrust for forward flight and since there is no rotor system providing lift there is none of the four disadvantages mentioned earlier. The tilt Rotor version called the 'Osprey' has two engines one mounted on each wing tip and works to the same principle but only the rotors tilt not the wings. Having the engines mounted outboard of the wings helps to negate the downward aerodynamic effect of the down wash on the wings. However these aircraft appear to be developed as short range transport rather than attack machines. It's worth noting that both these concepts have now been under development for the past thirty years and as yet are still not deployed in service. As it would appear that pure helicopters are not going to have any significant increment in forward speed over the foreseeable future it would seem that they are going to be used mainly in the Antitank role using the standoff distance afforded by the guided missile system. Any aircraft cruising around the battle field at speeds below three hundred knots is going to get badly clobbered. Although the Americans had great success in Iraq with the Apache where they could stand off at long distances with an uninterrupted field of fire they quickly withdrew them from Bosnia where the dissidents were able to hide and fire on the aircraft from hidden positions at close range, i.e. the old adage: the most dangerous enemy is the one you don't see. E.g. a 9 Squadron Sapper hiding in a thunder box equipped with stinger missile. (The one you fire not the one you play with!)

Many of the new dedicated armed helicopters are fitted with direct fire weapons which are usually coupled to a helmet sight. The system consists of an optical sight that is located in front of the pilot's master eye (usually his right one) and is so arranged that as he turns his head the weapon system points in the same direction. The weapon system; usually a chain gun (cannon) or a mini gun is used against soft targets but more importantly if the helicopter comes under fire from infantry then they can be used to lay down covering fire whilst the helicopter uses its mobility to extract itself from the hazardous situation. These mini guns have a rate of fire of up to 6000rpm when firing for effect. Without wishing to overstate the obvious that's the equivalent of ten of the old Bren guns shooting at you. It goes without saying that with that much lead coming in your direction most people would be inclined to duck for cover. This is when the helicopters hope to exit stage left and live to fight another day.

The most effective vertical Take off and landing aircraft today is of course the Harrier and its updated version the AV8. Although the Harrier/AV8 is used mostly in the Short Take Off role to increase its payload (Vertical take-off requires a tremendous amount of power and burns fuel at an alarming rate) the cost of these aircraft is pricing them out of the close battle field support role that most soldiers want. The cost of Vertical Take Off aircraft seems to vary from where one gets the information but it seems to range from, £8,000,000.0 to £17,000,000.0. So you have been warned. If you are attacked by an Iraqi tank your chances of getting a Harrier to help you out are going to be as rare as, 'Rocking Horse Sh\*t.'

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## News from the Branches

### Aldershot

Betty Gray – Secretary

Since our report for the December issue of the journal things have not stood still for members of the Aldershot Branch. We have enjoyed three Sunday lunches following our bi-monthly meetings, which continue to be well attended. It was decided that the International Hotel, formally the Officers Club, would be given another chance to win back our custom after some miserable service and food in the past. They have kept to their promise of better service all round and once again we can enjoy our lunches in the comfortable surroundings at a reasonable price that we expect.

In November nine members of the branch made the long journey north to Wick on the north east coast of Scotland to attend a Memorial Service to remember those Sappers and air crews who took part and died on "Operation Freshman." The journey north only had one hic-up when the train doors refused to unlock at York. We had to change trains and then change again at Newcastle. Apart from that it was an extremely good five-day trip. From Inverness we travelled north by hire car and six of us, John and Glenda Smith, Ron and Daphne Day and Fred and Betty Gray made a short stop in the remote village of Helmsdale to have tea and buns with Gordon and Gwen Ogilvie. A very pleasant hour was spent reminiscing before going on our way. The service at Skitten was held at the roadside cairn in extremely blustery, and at times wet conditions.

Controlling the standards by the six Standard Bearers was almost impossible in the high wind but Chris Chambers, carrying the association standard did an excellent job under very difficult conditions. On the return leg Maurice Metcalfe, Chris Chambers and Fred Gray met up with Bidy MacMillan in Inverness. During his Squadron days he was well known as the "mad piper" for his practice of playing the pipes at any time of the day or night. Once again reminiscing of the good times was the order of the day. Having met up with Bidy in Inverness, Tam Robertson (ex 3 Troop) at Skitten and Gordon and Gwen in Helmsdale and other members of the Yorkshire Branch in Wick made the journey all the more worthwhile. The ninth member of the branch to make the long journey was Tony Manley. He made the journey by car over a three-day period but considered the trip well worthwhile. Reg Emberson made himself extremely popular with the tiny tots of 9 Para Squadron when he played Santa Clause at their Christmas party. Reg arrived on a Squadron vehicle from the plant yard dressed in his bright red costume and with a flowing white beard. The children assembled outside the Squadron club gave him a great reception. After giving the children their presents he left by the same means to go back to where ever Father Christmas goes until next year. Reg has now set himself up as Santa for as long as he can get into the costume. The New Year dinner was held in the Holiday Inn, formally the Queens Hotel, Farnborough. Forty-four members, family and friends attended. John and Glenda had done a lot of hard work, first of all selecting a suitable location and then some hard bargaining to get us the best deal available. I'm sure everyone appreciated what turned out to be an excellent evening. There was a slight glitch in that one or two people were unhappy with the main course but that was outside of John and Glenda's control. Just about everyone brought something for the raffle and even people not able to attend donated a prize. With the number of gifts available most people won something and branch funds benefited greatly.

During the evening it was announced that our serving officer, Captain Dick Brown had been selected for promotion to Major. Our heartiest congratulations to a very popular member of our branch and we look forward to seeing him and all members of the Squadron in the not too far distant future on their return to Aldershot from overseas duty.

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## Birmingham

Nev Collins - Secretary

On the 31st November our entertainment member, Roger Howies and his wife Kay, kindly invited the branch members and their partners to a Halloween party. The evening dinner and drinks were all in keeping with the occasion. The pre dinner drink of hot mulled wine preceded the starter courses of 'devils on horseback,' spooky cheese nugget dips and honey sausage angels on sticks. A main course of pumpkin soup, cauldron hot pot and broomstick bread was washed down with witches brew beer and Halloween wine - the other 'spirits' could be found in bottles! A firework display was organised by Ozzie Holdsworth and our vice-chairman Gordon Page who provided the culmination point to an excellent evening.

Our annual branch Christmas dinner was held on the 7th December at the Holiday Inn in Elmdon Warwickshire. The bishop of Gloucestershire officer and our member Alan Brough gave Grace. Our president; Major Bernard Hooper, read the Queen's message followed by the loyal toast which was proposed by our National Chairman, Bunny Brown. Major Hooper later proposed the toast to absent friends and to our guests and hard working president. Colonel Chris Davies, our intended guest of honour was regrettably unable to attend the function and the branch wished him well. Our principal guest accompanied by his daughter Ruth was John Holmes (more affectionately known as 'Pop' Jones). Master of Ceremony for the evening was Nev Collins. Sincere congratulations and thanks are extended to our entertainment member Roger Howies for all his hard work organising the premier event of the year and making it a huge success.



**In party spirit- front to rear: Nev Collins, Mike Holdsworth & Alan Brough**

Latest reports from the Regimental Aid Post reveal that our chairman Brian Care has had a new knee operation and that Rip Kirby has had a new ankle fitted. Both are OK for a waltz but no good on the quick step (just yet!) we wish them a speedy full recovery.

Sadly our branch secretary; Bunny Brown is standing down from the post he has so admirably filled over many moons. However, our loss is the Association gain, for Bunny has been elected as the Association Chairman, and we extend our hearty congratulations and wish him every success in the post.

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## Chatham

Eric Blenkinsop – Secretary

Our very active and interesting year drew to a close in grand style without annual Christmas lunch at the King Charles Hotel on Sunday 15th December. The receipt of warm best wishes from the Aldershot and Yorkshire branches enhanced the occasion. Thank you for your kind thoughts.

The lunch was very well attended and as usual it was very much a family occasion with the Gibson's and O'Connor's vying for the lead in the numbers game. Lunch was served in the Cavalier restaurant this year which has its own bar, so we didn't get to use the Pegasus bar. However, this was well compensated for by the Christmas decorations.

Unfortunately our branch president (John) and his good lady Sue were unable to attend as John was recovering from a recent double knee replacement surgery. Our padre, Bernard, and his wife Jean were also unable to join us - as of course Sunday is a working day for them.

So to conclude 2002, we are pleased to report that whilst several of our members and ladies kept the medical authorities both public and private at full stretch throughout the year, all have come through their ordeals in good order.

Quite remarkably, our most caring Welfare Officer (Keith King) has managed to keep pace with the demands for get-well cards and flowers.

We received an unexpected kick-start to event in 2003 from the other sources as follows:

- a. The visit by a young art student (Alexander Wright-Gibbins), from the Doncaster College of Art as producer of a video film of the Airborne Engineers initiated by the Yorkshire branch. Fortunately we were able to present for interview several members with interesting airborne experience, namely, Norman Swift, Jack Hobbs, Jim Rogers, Bill Perry, Ben Taverner, Bob Seaman, John Elliot John Stubbs and Tom Gilks.
- b. The presentation of a water-colour painting from 1st Parachute Squadron RE to the Royal Engineers museum. Eric Booth made the presentation to the Regimental Colonel, Col Malcolm Croft, with those other 1 Para Sqn die-hards, Norman Swift, Jack Hobbs and Arthur Hendy in attendance. It was possible to combine the two events thanks to the co-operation of the museum curator Ms Rebecca Cheney and the attendance of several other branch members suitably attired to make the whole procedure a most memorable occasion. It all became really high profile with the attendance of the Yorkshire branch president, Tom Thornton.

Our chairman, Arthur Cheesman (unable to attend on the day) did however organise lunch for all in the WO's & Sgt's Mess and accommodation for Eric Booth and party along with the art student. We convey our thanks to the Corps RSM Chris Barton for his tremendous support.

We now look forward with great anticipation to our taking part in the 3rd Parachute Brigade Normandy Pilgrimage on 4 - 8th June. The cost per head is £217 but with a single room supplement of £62. There are 3 vacant seats remaining on the coach if any member is interested in joining us. Must close now in order to meet the deadline.

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## Southwest

Bob Runacres – Secretary

The Remembrance Day parade in Monmouth brought together an interesting collection of people whose paths have not crossed for many a year.

In the photograph, are two retired Joint Honorary Colonels of The Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers (Militia) Colonel Ted Smeeden and Brigadier John Hooper) and the current Joint Honorary Colonel (Colonel Tony George) together with WO1 Bob Runacres who was Colonel George's RSM when he commanded the Regiment some 20 years ago.

Two D Day veterans, Charlie Wilbourne and Cyril Haslett who were part of the airborne assault on Normandy in 1944 are also in the photograph with some very much younger airborne engineers in the shape of Tom Brinkman, Bob Runacres. Ray Richards and John Hooper who are Chairman and Standard Bearer, Secretary, Treasurer and President respectively of the SW Branch of the Airborne Engineers Association.



**Back Row:** Ted Smeeden, Ray Richards, John Hooper, Bob Runacres, Charlie Wilbourne, Cyril Haslett

**Front Row:** Tony George, Capt Guy Hayward (HMS Monmouth)  
Ken Ridley Jones & Tom Brinkman

Bob and John, being Royal Navy trained divers as well, kidnapped the Captain of HMS Monmouth (to get their own back for some punishing training many years ago) and got him into the photograph!

Some other Red Berets were spotted on parade and were caught in time to get in the photograph but a few others like Eric Childs and Fred Singleton (another D Day veteran) were missed. Ken Ridley Jones, a retired local veterinary surgeon, joined 1st Airborne Division just before the Arnhem drop but was too late to be included in the operation, was rounded up in time for the photograph. Colonel George also won his Red Beret when he served with 10th Bn The Parachute Regiment but had his Hon Col duties to perform so was appropriately dressed.

It is understood that the phrase "Do you remember old?" was much in evidence in the bar later!

We close on a sad note in announcing the passing of two of our members. Chas Haskins died in December and Eric Thorne passed away in January of this year. We extend our sincere condolences to the families and friends of both men.

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## Yorkshire

Bob Prosser – Secretary

We have moved again! Although the Pontefract venue was very good, with the East & West Riding Regiment, we could not get overnight accommodation. So with the efforts of the Chairman Bill Rudd, he was able to get us into the Sgts Mess at Queen Elizabeth's Barracks, Strensall, York with overnight accommodation. This enables us to have a good meeting without the worry of drink driving. Anyone passing through York is welcome to join us for a very pleasant Happy Hour.

A fantastic Christmas lunch was had at the Unicorn Hotel, Ripon on the 14th December 2002, a total of 46 attended. We all celebrated the Ruby Wedding Anniversary of Dorothy and Bill Rudd who cut the beautiful cake provided by Lorraine Dunk. The lunch lasted about 6 hours and then Dorothy and Bill went off to Tenerife for yet another honeymoon.

Christmas came and went with cards to-ing and fro-ing from members throughout the Universe. So Happy New Year to you all.

One of the Big Days in the Yorkshire Branch calendar is the Annual Dinner which we held at the WO and Sgt's Mess of 38 Engr Regt at Ripon on Saturday 8 h February 2003. A total of 112 people attended, our Guest of Honour was Brigadier Ian McGill CBE, President of the Association. 45 beds were made available and all used for a very short time! We were very pleased to have as our guests, 14 members from the Birmingham Branch and 6 from the Aldershot Branch.

The next get together is at Elvington, the Airborne Engineers week-end, 21/22 June 2003 when we hope to see as many of you as possible. We promise another slap-up time like last year.



**Colonel.... I wondered if this was a good time to discuss those changes to my Confidential Report?**

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## Operation Freshman On The Air

Jack Braithwaite G3PWK

I applied to the Radio Communications Agency for a special amateur radio call sign to commemorate the 60th anniversary of Operation Freshman. To get the special call sign I had to get support from the institutions that were organising or had an interest in the Commemoration Ceremony.

I obtained letters of support from the Aircrew Association Highland Branch who organised the event at Wick, HQRE at Brompton Barracks, Chris Davies on behalf of the AEA, and the REA Radio branch.

The application was successful and I was issued with the call sign GB 60 Operation Freshman. Part of the requirement to secure the licence was that the station must operate from a location that was open to the public. Contacted was made with Ian Reed, Director of the Yorkshire Air Museum, where there is a Halifax Bomber and an Airborne Display. Permission was given to operate from the museum, and Tom Quinn, a volunteer who looks after the Air Gunners display, was asked to act as liaison.

I advertised the event on the Amateur Radio news broadcasts across the UK and in Norway through Elizabeth Johannessen, a Norwegian radio amateur.



The operation took place on 20th November between 0900 and 1700 hrs. 230 stations were worked in 29 countries from Argentina to Canada, and Spain to Russia using voice and Morse code. Details of Operation Freshman were passed on air to the stations, and via a QSL card confirming the contact.

Some of the contacts had connections with the later successful attack by the Norwegian resistance, and some were ex pilots of Halifax Bombers.

Many telephone calls; letters and e-mails were exchanged to people who made this event possible. Their help was much appreciated and all have been thanked.

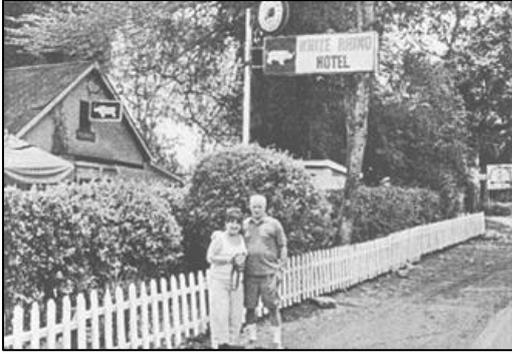
Operation Freshman was a very daring operation. It was the longest glider tow attempted, certainly up to that stage of the war and, crucially, it was attempted just as the fierce Norwegian winter was getting into its stride. The objective - the Heavy Water Plant at Rjukan - would have been daunting in our 21st century age of 'smart' weapons and precision bombing. To aim to tackle it having crash-landed in a glider and then to man-pack explosives on a 5-6 hour forced march over mountainous terrain was nothing short of heroic. Those who survived the attack were then expected to escape on foot over the mountains to Sweden. Thirty Royal Engineers from 9 Field Company and 261 Field Park Company were despatched on this raid in two Horsa gliders piloted by 4 pilots of the Glider Pilot Regiment. None survived. Of the two RAF towing aircraft, one crashed killing all on board and only one returned. This heroic attempt to scupper the German work on building an atomic bomb was a failure but does not lessen the undying respect we have for the men who willingly risked their lives in the cause of a noble mission.

The courage, which the members of the Freshman party displayed, has been an inspiration to Airborne Sappers ever since.

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## Kenya

Brendan Snoddy



I have lots of good and happy memories from my day's in the Squadron, and one of them is Kenya. In recent years Ann (my wife) and I have been back several times, the most recent being last September. While on tour in Nairobi I mentioned previous visits to our driver and mentioned the hotel The White Rhino in the town of Nyeri. He informed me that it was still going strong. Several days later en-route to an overnight stay at Treetops we took a detour in order to revisit the inn. It's still up and running, although a bit run down since our time in the late sixties - but it still sells Tusker beer!

I'm sure the photo of the old inn will bring back some happy memories to some of the lads.

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## The Way I See It

X9

**Bunny Brown, our new Chairman** - Bunny sure is a strange name Bunny! I only hope you are more of a Bugs Bunny than a children's TV hoppity type bunny. Good luck as Chairman, I know you will keep up the good work of your predecessor. Bunny Brown... surely that should be Brown Bunny!

**Rogues Gallery** - The photo of Phil Ecclestone brushing up to go out somehow doesn't ring true. It looks to me as though he has just come in and he has had 'something' in his mouth he should not have had! Why else would he be brushing his mouth out with VIM! Really Phil, been fly-fishing again!!!

**Toots in BAOR** - Toots reckons 35 years ago himself and the Brig, looked like Swartzenegger and DeVito. All I can say is that 35 years on they resemble the winning duo in a dwarf-throwing contest! No prize for guessing which one is the dwarf! You should be more careful Garth; it looks as though on one of your throws the poor dwarf landed on his face!

**Story of the Matelot** - Nice one Taff, glad you had the Goolies to tell it. Just one thing puzzles me; you referred to Bob Fettes and Gobble Turk as being ugly when you yourself have a face that resembles a sack full of assholes! If you need proof that 2 Troop were, and maybe still are, a bunch of fairies look at the photo of them in the Willy Wiltshire article. After morning parade the other Troops went about doing manly things while 2 Troop went around the back of the spider and played Simple Simon says! Remember, Simple Simon says put your hands on your head.... I must admit that it is hard to imagine Gobble Turk as a fairy with wings, a wand and a tutu! Taff also mentioned the "Sebastopol Bell" incident, which involved the Sqn's own food and fuel cartel. Namely Mogg Scott and Edwards. By the way Taff I will not leave my closet as I do not want to get into a battle of wits with an unarmed man!

**Remembering A Bridge Too Far** - Isn't it great to see all those old Arnhem war-horses gathered under the Arnhem Oak. Makes a guy feel proud. Mind you, they don't want to stand under it for too long or too often as trees survive on Carbon Dioxide not Methane Gas! When I first glanced at the picture I thought it was a croquet club outing with all those sticks present! Great stuff lads, you are the ones that earned 9 its reputation and thankfully those who followed kept it up. That is a great tribute to you all.

**Never Volunteer.** - Always was your trouble Fred, didn't know when to keep your mouth shut. You always tended to engage the mouth before the brain. Maybe you didn't have the option! Good article though. I was transported back many years when you mentioned your "long skinny legs" I recall one time when we were all adorned in PT kit and a certain Terry Mulligan pointing out to me that you were wider across the knees than you were across the chest. It was true! Mind you, that criticism came from someone who himself was built like a Gypsies dog! If you don't know how a Gypsies dog is built, ask the editor.

**Waterloo to Queen Elizabeth Barracks** - I don't know if Willy Wiltshire keeps a diary, has a good memory or has never fallen foul to the excesses of alcohol. I know we all have photographic memories; it's just that some of us have no film! One thing for sure, his article did recall some good times. He mentioned the march back from Thetford to Aldershot but it must be said it was more of a slouch than a march! I remember as we slouched Indian file through Epping Forest passing some ladies stood at a bus stop. One of them was heard to say as she wrinkled up her nose, "Phew, did you smell them"? I also recall Charlie's ¼ ton cooking trailer. I stuck with my compo rations! We should have sent it back to Russia and Charlie with it! He also mentioned 1 Troop's spell in Slim Barracks in Dhekelia, Cyprus. I heard many tales of the happenings there. Wasn't it the Green Jackets involved? Surely some members can recall and tell us about it. I believe our very own Membership Secretary was present. C'mon Chris.. "Come Outside." There was also something I heard about a curry bar, which involved 1 Para. Let's hear about it lads! By the way Willy, I know for a fact that Nee Soon Barracks consisted of more than one thatched bamboo hut!

**Exotic Places** - Kenya 1971 - I do not like to pick on names or disabilities but the names of three of the guys in the photo are unusual. They sound like something from a Lewis Carroll book.

“Could you move a little faster” said the Olive to the Brain, “There’s a Leach not far behind me and he’s eyeing up my vein”

Sorry Derek, couldn’t fit you in but you did have the best tan! I’m sure the four of you will agree that Kenya was a great posting. Note to editor: Why has this photo had a re-run?

**Libya 1968** - The picture of Fred and Bidy reminds me of an incident Bidy had in Bahrain, which involved a swill bin. Can anyone elaborate? All of the incidents I mention have been related to me in the past. I would like to write about them but it is better that someone who was there at the time does so as I am sure I will not get all of the facts right. So c’mon you guys, as Bill Rudd would say, “Put pen to paper.”

**Keeping the Adrenaline Flowing.** - I am convinced that Jim Brierley has a death wish. Here he is at age 78 still leaping out of planes. I am nowhere near that age and I don’t even leap out of bed anymore! Keep it up Jim, after all growing old is inevitable, growing up is optional! Just think, when you reach 100 you can do 1 jump on the first day and then take 2 days off!

**Sqn Rugby Team 1964.** - What a great team that was. One thing about the photo that puzzles me is why everyone can produce a smile except Taff Lougher! He actually looks in pain! Maybe it’s that false nose he was wearing that makes the difference, or was it Charlie’s cooking at work again!

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## Membership Secretary

Chris Chambers

Since the December edition of the Journal, a further 4 members have joined our Association. They are as follows:

<b>Member</b>	<b>Units Served</b>	<b>Dates of Service</b>
James (Mac) McKenna	9 Indep Para Sqn	1959-1963
Kenneth Berry	9 Indep AB Sqn	1953-1955
Marc Dorkings	9 Para San RE	1992-still serving
Paul Sims	131 Indep Para Sqn	1968-1993

**Gentlemen, welcome to the "Airborne Engineers Association"**

All members can assist in recruiting new members to our Association by spreading the message in your clubs, bars and at social gatherings. If each and every member were to actively seek out a new member it would dramatically increase our numbers. We all appreciate that there are hundreds of former RE Airborne colleagues out there who are totally unaware of the Airborne Engineers Association. So let's get active and bring a little cheer to their hum-drum lives!

For those of you on the internet, if you are not already aware, there is an excellent 9 Sqn website. Details are as follows: [www.ninepara.co.uk](http://www.ninepara.co.uk) and do check out the guest book, you may even find a message published from a long lost friend.

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## Association Shop

Description	Price	Post & Packing (UK Post Rate)
<b>Association Ties</b> (Pegasus logo)	£12.50	£1.00
<b>Association Blazer Badges</b>	£13.00	£1.00
<b>Association Jumpers</b> (sizes 38-48) Maroon or blue with Pegasus logo embroidered 'Airborne Engineers'	£24.00	£3.10
<b>Association Sweatshirts</b> Maroon or blue logo - Med/Large or extra-large	£16.00	£3.10
<b>Association Polo Shirts</b> - Fred Perry Style Maroon or blue logo Medium/Large or extra-large	£15.00	£2.50
<b>Association 'T' Shirts</b> - Maroon only - Large or extra-large only	£9.00	£1.80
<b>Association Shields</b>	£17.50	£3.30
<b>A Memoir of 9 Para Sqn RE in the Falklands Campaign 1982</b> by Maj C.M. Davies MBE (now Colonel)	£12.00	£2.10
<b>Anniversary Ties</b> (silk with Wings & Pegasus logo)	£15.00	£1.00
<b>Christmas Cards</b> (pack of 6) Association badge on cover	£3.25	£1.00
<b>Association Cuff Links</b> (slightly smaller than the lapel badge)	£8.50	£1.60
<b>The Shiny 9th</b> (1939-1945) by Patrick Pronk The history of 9 Field Company (Airborne)	£9.00	£1.80
<b>The 9th</b> (1787-1960) by the late Tom Purves (Special offer while stocks last)	£10.00	£3.80

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

Please note my address when submitting your orders:

**Jan Chambers** [REDACTED]

My thanks for your continued support,

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