



# THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS JOURNAL



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# The Airborne Engineer

December 2005, Issue No. 17



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**Publication Deadline - April 2006 Edition**

Members submitting material for publication in the April 2006 edition of the Journal are advised that the closing date will be Monday 23 March. **(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.**

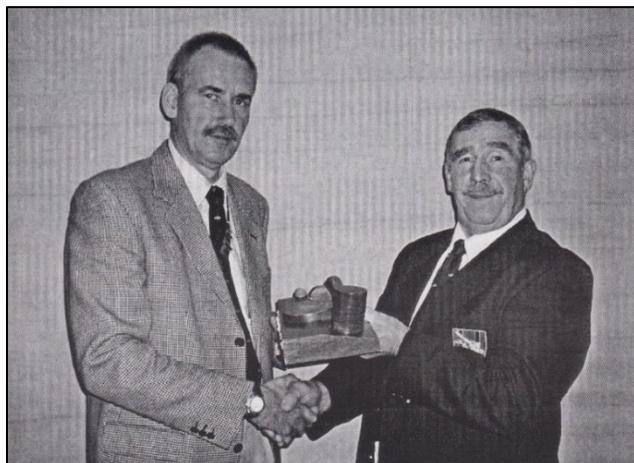
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## Chairman's Address

Michael (Mick) Humphries



Becoming your Chairman started as a very daunting task, but after a few hours became a humbling and enjoyable experience. I was overwhelmed by the support and congratulations offered to me at the recent AGM/Reunion in Coventry. As I am sure many people have said before, I am honoured to have been given the pleasant burden of responsibility.

**Mick accepting the 'Chairman's Gavel' from Bunny Brown**

The Association has been through a period of turmoil recently, and I would like to publicly thank Bunny Brown the outgoing chairman, for managing to keep us going in the right direction through

these turbulent times. We have now come out of this period a more united and stronger association. I have spoken to many people about the AEA recently, and it has the full support of "The Sqn," "The Regiment" and "The Corp." I hope to be able to build on these solid foundations in the next few years and hand over a very strong association to my successor. This is probably the last time that I will be able to officially say "The Sqn" in these notes, as there will soon be another parachute squadron. However to those of us that served in nine it will always be "The Sqn." The increase in size of the Airborne Sapper family is good news for all of us. This gives the serving soldiers better career opportunities, with more time spent wearing the right coloured beret, it also gives our new membership secretary, Billy Morris, greater recruiting opportunities.

We have had a good year in 2005 with some memorable events around the branches. The most memorable of which was the opening of the John Rock Exhibit at The Corps Museum. This was a magnificent achievement for everybody and the culmination of several years' hard work and fund raising. A big thank you to all of the individuals at The Chatham Branch for their dedication and perseverance in pulling off this magnificent achievement. On the subject of perseverance and magnificent achievements, I must congratulate Mick Ellery on reaching the summit of Mt Kilimanjaro and for donating all of his sponsorship funds, totalling £741 to the Association.

I received the news (4 November) that 9 Sqn has returned to Aldershot following a successful tour in Iraq. The only serious injuries were sustained by construction materials (nothing new there then). LCpl Bailey and Spr Drummond are reported to making steady progress and we extend our good wishes for their full and speedy recovery.

By the time you receive this publication the Sqn lads will no doubt be scattered around the UK enjoying a well-deserved leave. Welcome back lads, it's good to know you are all safely home.

We have our usual busy year coming up with many branch and national functions to look forward to. Please do not forget to support the Aldershot Branch trip to Normandy organised by John Smith. Places are going fast as I write this.

Next year I will try and make the Snowdonia Weekend, (I will join Louis on the bike).

We have a volunteer to run a golf day in the summer so look out for details in the Journal and around your Branches.

Along with our new President Bill Rudd, I hope to meet and enjoy a beer with many of you during 2006. I am planning to visit the New Zealand members next summer, but at the moment I am having a problem getting the committee to sanction my expenses.

I wish you all a very pleasant Christmas and a Prosperous New year and I look forward to a good year for The Association in 2006.

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## Situations Vacant

National Secretary required for a forward thinking military charity.

Eligibility: Must own a PC, must know how to turn it on, and most importantly, must have the patience to put up with the tantrums of the Chairman and other AEA committee members. Start date 1st Jan 2007 Any able volunteers please stick your hand in the air.

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## Journal Subscriptions - Standing Orders

Sincere thanks to those members who have now opted to pay their Journal Subscription by Standing Order - many of you have contacted me by letter or e-mail requesting to follow their example. If you've not received a Standing Order mandate it's because your account is in credit, but I will send you the necessary document when the time comes. There is no need to contact me as I've ear marked your personal Journal account and will post the mandate on with the August edition prior to your credit expiring.

May I once again remind members that continue to opt to pay by cheque that all payments should be made payable to "Airborne Engineers Association" and forwarded to yours truly (editor) and also, kindly inform me of any change of address that may occur.

If your bored during the winter evenings, why not write an article for the Journal?

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## Rogues Gallery



1961 – Aldershot

**Standing:**  
Jock Anderson,  
Fritz Bedford,  
Bob Cooper,  
Brummie Greensill,  
Gobble Turk, John Wall,  
Jock Mearns,  
Fred Robson, ?,  
Jim McKenna, Jim Ridley

**Middle row:**  
Keith Sillet,  
Tom Downie,  
Terry Mulligan,  
Jock McCarther

**Front row:**  
John Lowther,  
Jim Brown &  
Geordie McCarthy

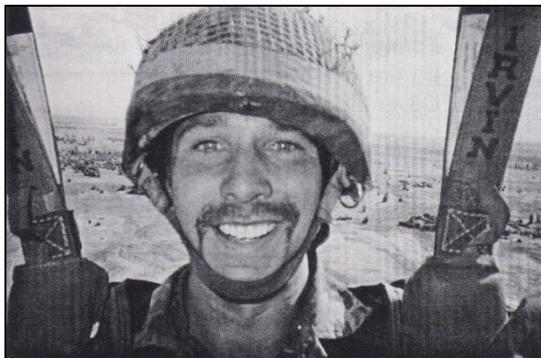


**Standing:** Pete Burgess, Stevie Stevens, Bill Peel, Harry Sutcliff & Sandy Shields.

**Kneeling:** John Prince & George (Jock) Brown



Back from Iraq - Sgt 'Scotty' Scott, Cpl 'Muz' Davies & SSgt 'Dixie' Dickson



LCpl Gardiner (51 Fd Sqn) under the canopy



So where's the kitchen sink?

## 2 Troop 1982 Reunion

Mick Humphries

On 26th April 1982 2 troop sailed with 2 Para on MV Norland towards the Falkland Islands . As 2 troop were being detached from the rest of the squadron it was given a plant section and made up to 52 men. After the conflict the troop returned to Aldershot ahead of the Squadron and held a troop dinner at The Bush Hotel in Farnham. The dinner was attended by all of the 51 that returned plus the widow of Scotty Wilson who was killed in action during the battle for Mount Longdon on 12th June. We even managed to smuggle the troop casualty out of "The Cambridge" for the evening. Billy Morris has found the original menu from that evening which includes such 80's delights as Prawn Cocktail and Duck L'orange. We would like to hold a reunion for the 25th Anniversary back at The Bush Hotel and are keen to contact all of the old troop. The Original dinner was held on Sandra Ferry's 21st birthday August 3rd. We are proposing to hold the reunion the day after Sandra's 46th birthday on August 4th 2007. We are looking for volunteers to help us.

Details from Mick Humphries e-mail: [REDACTED] or Billy Morris e-mail: [stevmorris3765@aol.com](mailto:stevmorris3765@aol.com)



**2 Troop February 1982**

**Rear Row - L to R Kev Borthwick, Stubby 704, Mick Leather, Taff Preston, Scouse Smith, Murray Mint, John Chetwynd  
Third Row - L to R Geordy Robson, Wildthing, Dill Rodgers, Kev Cowling, Ginge Moore, Semi Lobbon, Steve Gabbitas, Kev Lillicrap  
Second Row - L to R Thislewhite Scotty Plug Tes Wooley Mick Humphries, Squat Spud Murphy C-T Pully  
Front Row - L to R Taff Sweeney, Pete Guerin, Troopy Burns, Brian Lacey, Scotty Wilson**

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## 2 Troop - Blast from the Past



Former 2 Troop members of the 1957 - 60 era met up at the 2004 reunion in Coventry.  
Robin Taylor, George Tipping, John "Tich" Hughes, "Willy" Wiltshire & Baz Henderson.  
George Tipping made the long trip from Las Vegas to attend the reunion

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# Xmas Bloody Xmas

Harry Barnsley

Now Xmas comes but once a year,  
And people wish you well,  
You get a week of right good cheers,  
Then you can go to hell.

Surprising all the gifts you get,  
The things you don't require,  
You fume and stamp, and swear, and fret,  
Fling wrappings on the fire.

To wear those gloves from auntie Blod  
Deformed, you'd have to be,  
Just look at this pair of bloody socks,  
Way up above the knee.

They know I never smoke these fags,  
This after shave is putrid,  
All packed up in fancy bags,  
They think I'm bloody stupid.

And take those Xmas cards again,  
Now there's a flaming racket,  
A pen just cost me forty pence,  
And a pound for one small packet.

To hell with Santa, I would say,  
Cos him I'd gladly stuff.  
For every Xmas wish, I pay,  
I've just about had enough.

Those mince pies are hard as hell,  
The Xmas pud is soggy,  
The Turkey's in that pooches guts,  
Xmas is not for us oldies.

My grandkids tell me I'm a square  
And I ought to stay in bed,  
But even that robin with friendly stare,  
is a sparrow painted red.

Tis called the season of goodwill,  
You must be sodding joking,  
Cos when you see the price of things,  
You are bloody near choking.

Those flaming kids are back again,  
My blasted head is ringing,  
I'm wishing it would pour with rain,  
They call it carol singing.

I've chased them up the path once more,  
But now I'm limping badly,  
Pursuing them I've stubbed my toe,  
And strangle them I'd gladly.

And now I know where the Turkey's gone,  
I chase the dog so briskly,  
I trip, I stumble, and then I fall,  
AND BREAK THE BLOODY WHISKEY

---

## Benny Benson

Roy Gambrill



This photograph should exclude any further confusion about Benny. The snap was taken in Sharjah 1961/62 period when 3 Troop were on exercise between construction duties in Bahrain. Benny's nickname was 'Rat or Weasel' - might have something to do with the fact that when on home soil; Benny with others, frequented the 'Rat Pit' pub in Aldershot, or it could be the way this great chap used to scurry about.

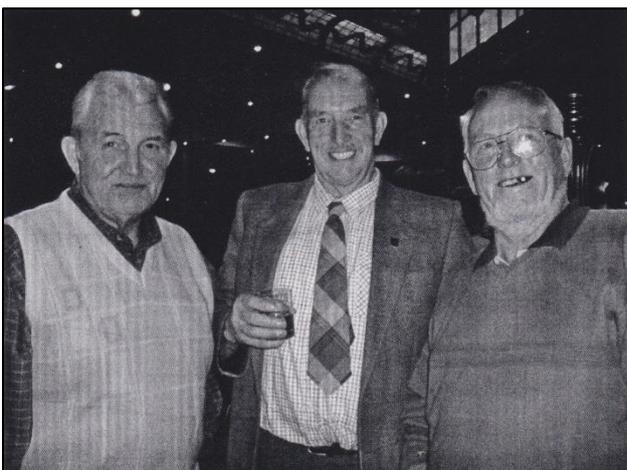
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## Don Newman (Australia -writes)

There was more than one Benson in the Sqn during the period 1960-62, two in fact, both were attached to 3 troop - one a more taller man with glasses was John 'Taff' Benson a REME vehicle fitter, the other was the (late) moustachioed lean and hungry looking lightly built, tough as they come SAS guy who served in Plant Troop under Rick Mogg. Not sure if he came back to the Squadron for a holiday - or returned to the SAS for a change.

Other 'Down Under' News - Eddy Carnegie, good to see he has joined the AEA - he is presently on the Pegasus committee and hopefully our secretary elect.

Ken Barnes has relocated to Sydney and is now a chef for the Australian Engineers.



## Guys from North of the Border at the 2005 Reunion

Jimmy Simpson, Ian Muirhead & Tom Robertson

## Belize - 2 Troop 51 Fd Sqn RE (Air Assault)

Spr Brook

After a long and arduous journey 2 Troop 51 Field Squadron (Air Assault) finally arrived at Price Barracks, Belize. During the first 2 weeks, the Squadron was to carry out basic jungle training, a jungle live fire package and to give engineer support to the Green Howard Battle Group during Exercise Tropical Storm.

After a few days admin, including a bit of volleyball and making the most of the pool we deployed into the jungle. With a day of briefings behind us and a couple of hours trying to erect hammocks comfortably and sort our kit we settled down to our first night in the trees. With the sun going down at six in the evening and not rising again till six in the morning everyone was looking forward to twelve hours of head down. Unfortunately this was disturbed a few hours later by the unearthly growls of Howler Monkeys - the sound of machetes being quietly unsheathed could be heard all around the harbour area. Another of the night sounds to get used to was the thud and swear words followed by loud sniggering as people tried unsuccessfully to get used to sleeping four foot above the ground in hammocks.

The first day began with survival training. We were taught the main elements of finding food and water, setting traps and erecting shelter but the highlight of the day was the merciless slaughter of ten chickens and a pig, which were barbecued on an open fire for lunch.



The next phase was jungle navigation. This was also a good day and was our first opportunity to get out into the trees on our own as a section. Navigation in the jungle is extremely difficult and requires a lot of concentration, with paces having to be counted and a bearing taken every twenty or so meters not to mention the lack of identifiable features, but all check points were reached within the time limit.

**OK - Where's the butcher?**

The third phase was routine drills. The drills were quite different from those used in a non-jungle environment and took a bit of practice to get used to. This also gave us an insight into how difficult a jungle environment is for a fighting patrol - everyone moving in total silence, all communication done by hand signals, continual checking of bearings and pacing, an awareness for sound and sign, all combined with the heat and thickness of the jungle really do make this one of the hardest terrain for a soldier to move in.

For the final phase of the jungle training each of the three engineer sections joined either A, B or C Company The



**Taking a well-earned breather**

Green Howards. These three days were devoted to practising the contact drills in a live firing package. Starting in fire teams on the first day, moving to section drills on the second day and culminating in a live company attack with the Green Howards on the third day. With speed, aggression and slick drills all three engineer sections proved themselves as more than competent in an infantry role and showed the Green Howards we were more than just bridge builders. One exasperated Green Howard GSM was heard to ask one of his sections why couldn't they be more professional like the Engineers.

Overall this was a very interesting training package. Although physically demanding the jungle training was extremely enjoyable with many of the skills learnt in the trees in Belize being transferable to other environments that we may find ourselves in the future.

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## Great Reunion at Coventry

### John (Paddy) Moorhouse

Well that's it Coventry no more, just as I had mastered the directions in getting there, the venue has now changed to Southampton for 2006 .... Brilliant! What is it about reunions and 'get togethers' that drag people from all around the UK to attend? It is obvious before the weekend starts that one's system will have problems coping with the hotel food and the vast intake of alcohol. Yes it was a smashing weekend. The war stories were the same as last year and even the bits in the middle that needed group prompting hadn't changed.

It's not the venue that makes the weekend good, but the company that makes it great. It was noticeable that quite a few from last year hadn't made it, but the weekend was saved by others who had. It was great to see my old Aldershot trapping mate Pat Neal, and many thanks to his daughter for dragging him to the hotel bar. Hopefully next year down south there will be a large attendance from the Chatham Branch and a replen of guys from my era in the Squadron.

What is it about reunions and 'get togethers,' is it we see other people getting older yet inside we still feel 19. Is it because we can laugh together and occasionally hold back that threatening tear, and why after all these years do I still feel an emptiness in the stomach when it's time to bid farewell. What is it about reunions and 'get togethers' Its camaraderie, being part of an exclusive club, The Airborne Brotherhood.

God willing see you all next year.

### Don 'Doc' Doherty

The greeting of old friends, the meeting of new, saying of "cheers" and sinking a few. What a great time was had! Next year Southampton and so to all, let's do it again and have us ball! Thanks to all at Birmingham Branch for a great time.

### Tommy Handley

I was pleased I was finally able to attend the AGM at Coventry, my first two attempts being thwarted on medical grounds. I was very taken with the venue and felt they did well to cater for our needs. This, of course, was also due to the prior organising by Dave Clarke and Bunny Brown. Well done fellers.

It was great to catch up with old friends and meet new ones, old ones like Bert Gregory, Tom Brinkman and John Elliott to name just a few, and new ones like Bob Seaman, Barney Rooney and some whose names I have momentarily forgotten. I must of course mention another old friend, Bob Prosser, who I'm sure, was disappointed at not being a member of '1 Troop' (good on ya Bob).

I look forward to seeing you all again at the 2006 AGM/Reunion in Southampton.

### Mick Leather

Another great weekend at the AEA AGM and reunion and many thanks to Bunny Brown and the Birmingham Branch. For those of you who don't go, I have to ask the question, why? Where was it you had the most fun? Where do all your great memories and stories come from? And what about all those promises you made to people with whom you forged a unique bond with? Be there or be talked about! Southampton in October 2006. It's great fun with some great people!! "

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## 1 Parachute Squadron Reunion

Yet another excellent reunion organised by Eric and Nina Booth was held in Donington during the weekend 25/26 September. Great company, excellent food (especially the reunion cake) and a plentiful supply of alcohol.



Sgt Norman Swift jokes with Eric Booth prior to calling up the parade for the short march from the Red Cow pub to the local church.



Col Chris Davies MBE with Harold Padfield and Norman Swift - with more than a few medals shared between them!



An immaculate Arthur Hendy (Standard Bearer)

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## The Burma Campaign

Major General I.H. Lyall Grant, MC

Japan, our firm ally in World War I, had a long-standing enmity with Russia and since 1937 had very unwisely been trying to conquer China. World opposition to this war, led by the USA who provided military supplies to China, had induced Japan to make an alliance with Germany. Then came World War II. France and Holland were quickly defeated and it looked as if Britain would share the same fate. The European colonies in SE Asia, rich in oil and minerals and now weakly defended, looked very tempting, and control of them would close the American supply lines to China and bring that war to an end. When in 1941 Germany attacked Russia and looked like winning there too, the Japanese military felt that they were presented with a unique opportunity. The only snag was the US and British Navies.

In mid-1941, Roosevelt imposed, with British agreement, an international embargo on the supply of oil to Japan until she withdrew from China. To the Japanese this was an ultimatum. Japan had only twelve months' supply of oil in storage. The only alternative to a humiliating submission to the US demand was to go south and seize the oil in Indonesia. So, with half of its army embroiled in China, and nearly a quarter facing the Russians in the north, the Japanese decided to attack Britain, Holland and the USA. It was a fantastic national gamble.

For the first few months they were extraordinarily successful. The American and British Pacific fleets were temporarily neutralised, Malaya and Singapore were overrun in six weeks and the British forces suffered there their greatest ever land defeat. Indonesia and its vital oil was quickly captured. Six weeks after their first attack, Japan invaded Burma with the initial aim of seizing Rangoon and thus closing the last American supply line to China. In ten weeks they eliminated the small British and American air forces, and in four months of fighting they drove a Chinese force back to China, and a weak British force back 1,000 miles to India. In this campaign two generals particularly distinguished themselves; the British General Slim and the Japanese General Sakurai. They were to do so again.

The British were determined to re-conquer Burma, but a great barrier of forest-covered mountains divided Burma from India. There were only three practicable points of entry. To the west was a coastal area, the Arakan, with no roads or railways, and poor access to central Burma. In the north-west a cart-track led, from the railway at Dimapur, through the mountains to the plateau of Imphal, and from there a bridle path led down to Tamu in Burma. This was the Central Front and was the only practicable route for a major advance into Burma. In the far north, a bridle path led over the mountains into Burma from the railway at Ledo. General Stilwell's American-Chinese army planned to use that route.

In 1943 the British attempted a limited offensive along the coast in the Arakan, aimed at capturing the small Burmese port of Akyab. General Irwin conducted the campaign on conventional lines. Repeated frontal attacks by much larger British forces on two small Japanese covering positions failed. General Sakurai counter-attacked, and the campaign ended in disaster and a humiliating defeat. Japanese courage and skill in defence, and their extraordinary mobility and daring in attack, convinced some that they would never be beaten. Morale plummeted in the Arakan, and in Whitehall confidence in the Burma army was lost. However, a fortunate result of the campaign was that Admiral Mountbatten was sent out to form a new SE Asia Command, General Auchinleck was appointed to command the India base, and General Slim was promoted to command the 14th Army. These three appointments were to transform the situation.

After his debut against the Japanese in 1942, General Slim had seen clearly that to win the next round, the British needed, firstly, tough and fully trained infantry, and, secondly, supply from the air to counteract the bold Japanese encircling tactics. Except in the Arakan, his ideas on training had been accepted and hard realistic training took place throughout 1943. Meanwhile many airfields were constructed in India, and modern aircraft at last began to arrive for the RAF, while there was a huge build-up of US transport planes for supplying China. On the Central Front, a motor road was constructed through the mountains from the railway at Dirnapur to Imphal and on to Tamu, while around Imphal four airfields were built and stores accumulated. On the Northern Front the American General Stilwell commanded three Chinese divisions and aimed to build a road and pipeline across northern Burma to China.

In Britain the Chiefs of Staff were convinced that to recapture Burma from the North was impossible, and Churchill talked of the folly of going into the water to fight a shark. However, a limited advance in 1944 was authorised, as well as the dispatch of the Chindits, a powerful British raiding force, into the forests of northern Burma to cut the supply line of the Japanese division opposing Stilwell.

The Japanese knew that the British were planning an advance, so they decided to strike first. General Sakurai, now an army commander, was ordered to launch one division on a daring attack in the Arakan to draw the British reserves to that area. He succeeded in encircling one of the three British divisions and cutting the only road to the rear. However, following Slim's new tactics, the British units, supplied by air, stood firm and the attack was decisively defeated. However, Sakurai did succeed in his strategic aim, for Slim, determined to avoid another defeat, committed his two reserve divisions to the Arakan.

Next General Mutaguchi, commanding the Japanese 15th Army, launched the main attack on Imphal with three divisions, one of which was sent across the mountains to capture Kohima, a staging post between Dirnapur and Imphal, and thus prevent any reinforcements from reaching Imphal. Slim had three divisions based on Imphal, two of them in Burma well to the south. He decided to withdraw these two to Imphal and fight the battle there. Although one division was surrounded by the Japanese in the mountains 170 miles south of Imphal, this division, fully trained and supplied by air, fought its way back to Imphal through the Japanese roadblocks in 25 days, while a fourth division was flown in to Imphal from the Arakan. For the next 86 days these four Indian divisions, cut off and supplied entirely by air, repulsed all the desperate Japanese attempts to capture Imphal. The RAF and USAAF gallantly kept up the air supply despite the monsoon when flying over the mountains was often highly dangerous.

Meanwhile a brigade reached Kohima just in time to help the local garrison meet the Japanese attack, and managed to hold out for two weeks until first the 2nd British Division, and then an Indian division, arrived up the railway to relieve them. After three months of very heavy fighting in the forest-covered mountains the road was opened to Imphal, the three divisions of the Japanese 15th Army were virtually destroyed and the road to Burma lay wide open.

These two battles in 1944, in the Arakan and at Imphal/Kohima, were the turning point of the campaign. Before them we had nothing but defeats; after them we had nothing but victories.

Giving the Japanese no time to recover, and ignoring the drenching rain of the summer monsoon, General Slim led the 14th Army back into Burma. In a brilliant campaign of manoeuvre, his forces, largely supplied by air, surrounded and overwhelmed the main Japanese army and, racing south, in May 1945 captured Rangoon. Heavy losses were inflicted on the Japanese as they struggled back towards Thailand until in August two atom bombs on Japan brought the war to an end. Out of some 300,000 Japanese soldiers who went to Burma, 185,000 never returned. It was the biggest ever land defeat in Japan's long history.

## General Comments

For a Britain fighting for survival, Burma was a low priority. Modern equipment was scarce and the great victories in 1944 were totally overshadowed by D-day and the defeat of Germany. Journalists and photographers had better places to go to than Burma and the "forgotten army" syndrome was felt by all. The climate was good, though sometimes very wet indeed, in the hills, but hot, and sometimes very hot, in the Arakan and Burma. In some areas leeches were a pest, but mosquitoes and ticks were the main enemy. Insect-borne diseases, and dysentery, caused many times more casualties than the Japanese. Supply problems were huge, troops were often on short rations and comforts of any sort were rarely available. This was not too great a problem for the Indians and Gurkhas, mostly small tamers used to living a hard and frugal life, but it was tough on the urban British. It is a great credit to the spirit of the UK troops, and to their leaders at every level, that they stuck it so well. These hardships were, of course, shared by the Japanese, and their administrative system was much weaker than ours. When things went wrong, as at Imphal/Kohima, hundreds of them literally starved to death.

It was a savage war. The Japanese were remarkably brave and favoured close-quarter fighting at night. Even when badly wounded, they would fight to the end rather than be taken prisoner. This culture worked well when they were winning but it led to heavy losses when they were losing and could not evacuate their wounded. In May 1944 our weekly divisional Intelligence Summary once commented, only partly tongue in cheek, "The 4th Indian

Division (fighting in N. Africa and Italy) has just captured its 100,000th prisoner. 17 Ind Div (who had been fighting the Japanese for three years with increasing success) has captured one (since died)".

## Airborne Comments

Parachute troops were little used. In 1942, the Japanese dropped parachutists to capture a vital oil refinery in Indonesia, and had a parachute brigade ready to drop in Burma, but an American submarine sank the ship carrying its parachutes. In 1945 an Indian parachute battalion was dropped at the mouth of the Rangoon River to seize a battery there. They were successful, but the effect was not great, as the Japanese had already withdrawn from Rangoon.

The most effective ground action by parachute troops was at Sangshak in 1944 when, in a grave emergency, an Indian parachute brigade, training nearby, was rushed forward to meet the Japanese advance on Imphal. They held up the leading Japanese brigade for five days of violent fighting before the survivors were ordered to withdraw, and this delay was to cost the Japanese dear. On this occasion the Japanese treated humanely the 150 badly wounded Indians and Gurkhas who were perforce left behind.

The greatest airborne, as opposed to parachute, operation was the second Chindit expedition in 1944. Two brigades (and later two others) were flown by glider on moonlit nights to remote clearings in the great forests of northern Burma, far behind the Japanese lines. The first echelons included US engineers to prepare airstrips for Dakotas (and later Spitfires) to land. The idea was to form 'strongholds' in areas difficult for the enemy to reach, from which powerful columns could emerge and attack the enemy communications. Dramatic, daring and successful as these landings were, surprise was lost by the time that the Chindits, days later, reached their targets. Although the troops were tough and courageous, results were not great. The railway supplying the division opposing Stilwell was successfully blocked, and Japanese attacks were beaten off with many casualties, but there was little effect on the Central Front. In spite of this help Stilwell did not capture his objective, Myitkina, until long after the main battle had been won.

All agree that the outstanding Chindit commander in the field was a Sapper officer, Brigadier Mike Calvert, whom many thought deserved a VC.

## Sapper Comments

Fighting in an undeveloped country requires plenty of Sappers, and Burma was no exception, though nearly all the Sappers were from the Indian Army. The withdrawal from Burma in 1942 was an exciting time with endless demolitions of every sort, many in the face of the enemy. A major disaster occurred when the Sappers were ordered to blow the only bridge over the wide estuary of the river Sittang, with two brigades still on the wrong side. This sealed the fate of Rangoon, and with it Burma. Later in the retreat, the demolition of the great Ava Bridge over the Irrawaddy was probably the biggest bridge ever demolished by a British force.

In 1943 the main emphasis was on advanced training, but Sapper effort was also deployed on building roads and airfields for the proposed advance. In the forward areas all units were sometimes involved in this task. For instance, 17 Indian Division built 17 miles of road through a rocky gorge in the Chin Hills, the Infantry and Gunners cutting and blasting the road while the Sappers felled trees and built the many bridges and culverts.

1944 saw heavy fighting with Sappers involved in nearly every battle, sometimes as Infantry. In the tactical withdrawal to Imphal, mines and demolitions were particularly effective in delaying, and sometimes destroying, the enemy tanks and heavy artillery. In attack, assault demolitions were tried against enemy bunkers, and this highly dangerous procedure was successful in a few cases. Less spectacular, but very effective, were zigzag paths cut rapidly up the hillside behind attacking troops to enable ammunition mules, and sometimes tanks, to strengthen the captured position to meet the inevitable counter-attack.

The main features of the great 700-mile advance in 1945 were the river crossings. First came the very long Bailey floating bridge over the River Chindwin, and then the four opposed crossings of the mile-wide Irrawaddy, with Sappers manning the assault craft. Mine and booby-trap clearance was followed by much Bailey bridging, brought in by air to hastily built airstrips, to replace the demolished bridges as the XIV<sup>th</sup> Army raced south for Rangoon.

## Tailpiece

Most leading historians now believe that General Slim was the best British general of World War II. Tough, intelligent and capable, he had original ideas, took risks and shone in all the phases of war from defeat to victory. A sturdy, modest man, he was admired and respected not only by his multi-racial Army, but also by the RAF and USAAF, his essential partners in this land/air campaign.

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## Airborne Engineer Portraits

Brigadier John Hooper

I suspect that many members of AEA are unaware that, despite the very large number of impressive oil portraits of famous Sappers owned by the Corps we do not possess any portraits of airborne engineers. When one considers the way in which airborne engineers have enhanced the reputation of the Corps over the last sixty odd years it seems totally unacceptable to let this serious deficiency continue. There should be one or more portraits of famous Sappers wearing a red beret.



Many members of AEA will have met the nationally known artist, Richard Wins, when he took part in the Arnhem pilgrimage last year. Richard was so taken with the whole ethos of airborne forces and airborne Royal Engineers in particular that, amongst other things, he took some photographs of Lt Col Johnny Humphreys OBE, OSTJ, DL and has since painted a portrait in oils of Lt Col Johnny. Many will have seen the portrait in Chatham at the recent opening of the Airborne display in the Royal Engineers Museum. So, there is now a portrait of a famous Sapper in a red beret and one, which should prove inspirational to all Sappers.

To have started as a "Beachley Boy," manned a Bren gun in the school at Arnhem, been captured twice and escaped twice and reached the rank of Lt Col should inspire most young Sappers. The Corps does not yet own the portrait and I seek to remedy this and, moreover, get two more painted for the Corps.

Having canvassed opinion quite widely there is strong support for two more portraits. Brigadier Sir Mark Henniker DSO, MC who was CRE 1st AB Div and later became CRE of 2nd Indian AB Div is one who has been suggested for portrayal. At the time of the Arnhem operation Brigadier Henniker was CRE of one of the Divisions of 30 Corps, which tried to relieve the airborne forces at Arnhem and was on the South side of the river when many of the 1st AB Div Sappers returned across it.

The second suggestion has been Major General Eric Mackay CBE who was a captain during the Arnhem operation. He fought in the school with Johnny Humphreys and they were captured together when all food, water and, at last, ammunition had run out. They later escaped together and got back across the river together and it seems entirely appropriate that in due course their portraits should hang together. It has been suggested that all three portraits should hang in the new John Rock barracks at the discretion of the CO of 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Assault)

Where the portraits will hang eventually is of less importance than getting them in the first place. We can argue that point later but now we come to the tricky bit. Richard Wills, because of his huge regard for Airborne Sappers, has agreed to paint any, or all, of the portraits for a fraction of his normal fee. He will paint who ever we want for £5,000, which would include the frame, which is no cheap item. I have had discussions with the Regimental Colonel, Royal Engineers and I have reason to believe that the Corps will match any money we can raise pound for pound.

So, on the assumption that we go for three portraits we're looking at £15,000 of which I hope the Corps will contribute

£7,500. The response so far has been such that I am opening an "Airborne Sapper Portrait Fund." I have already had promises of between two and three hundred pounds from individuals. Although, clearly only a limited number of Airborne Sappers will be able to contribute that kind of money I am sure that a very large number will wish to contribute something.

If you feel this is a worthwhile endeavour and would like to see portraits of Sappers with red berets please let me have your contributions by cheques made out to "AB Sapper Portrait Fund." Cheques should be sent to me Brigadier John Hooper, [REDACTED] All contributions will be acknowledged and I will keep a record of those who contributed. I will eventually publish a list of all who contributed but not the amounts they contributed. The account will be available for audit by AEA auditors.

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## Minefield Casualty - Ken Lea

David A. Jewell

I write with reference to the visit of Messrs Rogers, Gibson and Sullivan headed 'Back to the Rhine and Ardennes' - August Journal, Issue 16, Page 19 Paragraph 4.

LCpl Ken Lea was a friend and colleague of mine and we served in the Airborne Division for many years. I am sorry that our reporters did not find his resting place; he was a good friend, unassuming, quiet and a good soldier, a comfort if he was taking care of one's back.

I remember Ken's premature death very well, as the mine he was lifting that exploded and killed him, also wounded me. My stay in hospital, with convalescence, lasted five long months before I was able to rejoin the Squadron. I missed the trip to the Far East (Sumatra and Java) but served in Palestine and Egypt.

Back to Ken Lea and the Ardennes. As we all know, the Squadron was taken by ship from Folkestone on Christmas day. It was an emergency; the Germans had broken through the Ardennes and were jeopardising the finish of the European war. The trip was not exactly a holiday and we all suffered many privations until we reached our destination.

Our job was to halt and repulse the Germans. I cannot say how long it was before we were given the job to lift some anti-tank mines on a road leading to the front. The weather was dreadful, it was cold and the ground was covered in deep snow which was frozen rock hard, a sight enough to frighten the bravest of the brave.

The offending mines were located and each one of us designated the task of disarming and lifting the mines. The mines were booby-trapped. No other warnings were necessary; the dangers were apparent and worsened by the weather conditions. We were told to keep quiet.

As common practice, we got down to our task, back to back, facing outwards. I remembered my school motto "Never Give In" and started chipping away the iced snow. Booby traps on anti-tank mines were always placed beneath the mines to make it harder to disarm. I cannot find words to describe how I felt, it was frightening and intimidating, all we had was a trench tool and our hands. I thought the task was impossible under the prevailing conditions, it was nerve wracking but it had to be done.

I was doing my best and was making some progress. Ken Lea had his back to me and I had my back to him. We were barely four feet apart; I could hear him chipping away but not a word was spoken.

Suddenly, without warning, there was a flash between my legs and I was sailing through the air. I fell to the ground, completely numb. I could not feel my arms or legs or any other part of me. Death seemed to be the reason. The wait for someone to help me seemed never ending. Everyone was waiting for the bombardment, which usually followed a mine explosion.

At last, help arrived. I was conscious of receiving first aid. Everybody was in a hurry. I looked to my side and a body lay beside me, it was Ken Lea, he was dead. I felt very sad and then realised it was his mine that had exploded, hence the flash between my legs. He was in a terrible state. I do not need to elaborate. I was whisked away on a stretcher. My arms and legs were intact, but full of holes caused by the flying tarmacadam. My back was in a similar condition, but my right buttock was blown away. However, no bones were broken - how did I get away with it? Believe it or not, to this day, pieces of tarmacadam are still surfacing on my body. I am now 81 years of age and still going strong.

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## Memoir

Harry Stokes, 9 Fd Coy RE (Airborne Division)

Andrew Fussell (Son-in-law)

Sapper Harry 'Saint' Stokes (Army No. 207422F) died on 24th September 2004 aged 85. He joined the Territorials in 1938 and a year later, at the outbreak of war, he was called up and enlisted into the Royal Engineers (Field Park Company). Like many early conscripts, he soon found himself embarked for France as part of the ill-fated British Expeditionary Force. There he saw service in Northern France and Belgium in the difficult early days of the Second World War, as the Germans launched a full scale offensive in Western Europe. Driven back to the beaches of Dunkirk, Harry had the doubtful pleasure of celebrating his 21st birthday, beside a lorry, exposed to enemy bombardment. He was amongst the last to be evacuated across the Channel to the relative safety of England.

A little later, Harry was transferred to the 9th Field Company, Royal Engineers. Based for a time in the South West, he worked on coastal defences, placing charges in the cliffs of the South Devon coast in preparation for a possible German invasion. He also trained in infantry fighting. Forty-mile route marches every Wednesday in full battle order, bayonet fighting and a general toughening up were part of his routine.

When the 9th Company became part of the Airborne Division Harry became driver for Second in Command, Captain B.S. Beazley and together they spent much time travelling the country looking for equipment suitable for carrying in gliders, such as trailers, compressors and the like. Gliding practice followed, in Hotspurs towed by small twin-wing planes, from Netheravon in Wiltshire. This was Harry's first experience of flying and he once vividly described the experience of gliding around the soaring spire of Salisbury Cathedral on a clear sunny day.

At the conclusion of glider training, Harry embarked with 9th Company for North Africa. Although he didn't know it at the time, this deployment was part of the build-up for the liberation of Europe from the south. Doubtless, the nature of further training during the following two months gave some inkling of what the purpose of this deployment was.

Then, on the evening of 9th July 1943, "Operation Husky", the invasion of Sicily, began. Harry took off in a WACO glider, together with Major Beazley, a radio operator and pilots Lt. Dale and Sgt. Baker. Their principal equipment was a motorcycle and sidecar and a compressor. Their objective was to remove demolition charges from the key strategic bridge of Ponte Grande. Capture of this bridge, intact, was an essential requirement if the invasion of Sicily was to be successful. The bridge gave access to the port of Syracuse across a narrow arm of sea. It was a vital link on the route to be taken by the ground forces of the 5th Division of the 8th Army, which had been chosen to spearhead the assault on Syracuse, following American and British seaborne landings in the south.

In his book, "An Image of War," Brigadier Sir Mark Henniker wrote: "The capture of Syracuse was essential to our purpose, as without its harbour the heavy equipment and supplies necessary for the campaign could not be unloaded from the ships."

The vicissitudes of the airborne invasion of Sicily have been well documented. Some commentators and historians have described it as a disaster. Certainly it did not go entirely to plan and there was considerable tragic loss of life. But in Harry's words, "Sicily was not all failure." In his later years, as he reflected on the events of July 9th and 10th, 1943, he wrote:

"We took off from Tiersville aerodrome. It was a terrible trip. All of us, including the pilots, were violently ill. The motorcycle came loose from its moorings but nobody worried because we felt so unwell. There was lots of flack, and tracers, but we made it to the Dropping Zone. I remembered that at the briefing we were told to look for a house with a large "Y" on the end of it, and there it was. We landed among a hail of small arms fire. We tried to raise the nose of the glider to get the equipment out, but the firing was so concentrated that Major Beazley decided we would leave it and make our way to the bridge.

By this time it was getting light. As we crawled along ditches and hedgerows we kept being shot at. When we got near the bridge Major Beazley could see 'Red Berets' already there. This gave us confidence and we soon made it to the bridge where the infantry were in charge. Major Beazley and I inspected the bridge and found the

charges were only tied to it and covered with bundles of raffia to protect them from the weather. We were able to cut the ties and drop them into the river. Later in the morning, lorry loads of Germans arrived and a real battle took place. During this engagement, Major Beazley was shot in the head and died immediately.”

Ponte Grande Bridge had been secured, albeit at considerable human cost and sacrifice. Enemy demolition charges had been removed, the structure was intact, the route laid open for ground forces to advance on Syracuse. The objective had been achieved.

Shortly after the death of Major Beazley, Harry, and ten or fifteen others were taken prisoner. However, their captivity didn't last long. As they were being marched along a towpath, they encountered a naval picket of about twenty men who overcame the guards and freed them. This turned out to be fortuitous, for at the Headquarters of the leading Brigade of the 8th Army the Commander, Brigadier Cooke Collis, was still awaiting news about what had happened at Ponte Grande and whether the bridge was still intact and would take tanks. Brigadier Henniker, who was at H.Q. at the time, writes in his book "An Image of War," that he exclaimed to the Commander, "Find me some transport and I'll jolly soon find out and tell you." But transport was in short supply and the Commander couldn't give him the jeep that he wanted and replied, "The Lord must provide." He goes on to write: "And that is almost exactly what happened. At that moment there emerged from apparently nowhere a Sapper of 9th Field Company (Sapper Stokes) on a motorbike with a sidecar. I knew him by sight, Stokes must have information about it, I thought, and I cross-questioned him Ponte Grande had been captured intact As far as Stokes knew, Beazley had pronounced the bridge fit to carry tanks just before he had been killed." Of his encounter with Harry, Brigadier Henniker wrote: "It was as though St. David had appeared at the Arms Park in Cardiff to referee a rugger match against Scotland. I had no doubts about the future and I addressed him thereafter as 'Saint' Stokes."

After acting as driver for the Brigadier for a while, Harry returned to North Africa when all airborne forces were withdrawn from Sicily. Thereafter, he took part in the invasion of mainland Italy, but whilst training for the assault on the great mountain stronghold of Monte Cassino, he broke his back. He was repatriated on board the "Monarch of Bermuda," which, en route for England, was in collision with another vessel off Gibraltar. Harry eventually disembarked in Liverpool, just before Christmas 1943. Then, following a brief and insufficient period of treatment and convalescence, he was deployed as part of the decoy operation to mislead the Germans about where the D-Day landings were to take place. He was demobilised in February 1946.

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## 23 Engr Regt (Air Assault) Reconnaissance Concentration 2005

LCpl S Hart

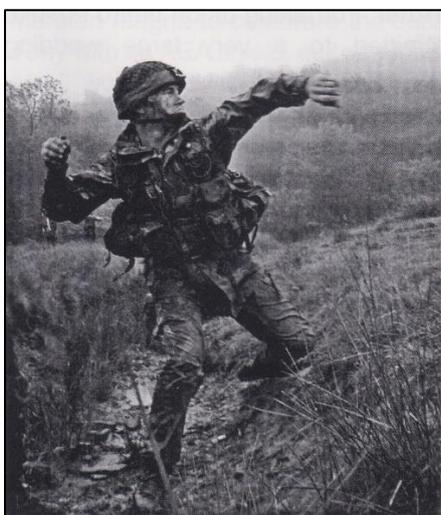


The first week of the course started with some lessons on basic skills such as map reading, patrolling and signals. They turned out to be good revision for some of the overnight exercises we faced later that week. There were lessons on OPs and immediate action (IA) drills as well as an introduction to air photography and how to use the stereoscope to get a 3D view of the ground using two photos of the same area. The first week ended with a vehicle-borne close quarter battle exercise using the WMIKs (weapons mounted installation kit) where the lead vehicle was engaged and disabled. We then had to

dismount and extract back through Imber village towards the second vehicle using the buildings and any other cover available. The exercise was good practice for the patrols showing the need for a lot of communication between patrol members to make sure there was no movement without fire.



The second week included lessons on close target recce, river crossing drills and an individual navigation exercise before we moved on to the live firing stage. The live firing was the most enjoyable part of the course with a good spread of different ranges and different shoots. After zeroing the weapons there was a snap shooting range from different fire positions, and a 2-man fire and manoeuvre lane.



Next was the live grenade throwing practice which was in pairs going forward into cover, when the targets come up one man gets in cover, preps and throws the grenade shouting "grenade!" while the other continues firing until the grenade lands then gets into cover. There was a pair's fire and manoeuvre with GPMGs which was a brilliant shoot, the front man being engaged and returning fire while the second man moves out to one side to get a view of the target; you then pepper pot back until you're out of the contact. The last shoot was the immediate action drill, whilst patrolling in arrowhead the lead man was contacted from the front and returned fire, after fanning out into two teams we extracted to a baseline. The patrol then continued extracting back with the gunner having a number 2 for feeding the belts and also for improvised fire positions i.e. while the no 2 crouches down the gunner can then rest the bipod legs on his back so that he still has a stable position to fire from.



The third week was the vehicle-borne phase of the course. This started with lessons on cross-country driving and recovery procedures for when one of the vehicles gets bogged in. There were lessons on vehicle movement and LUPs and then we were given a route recce exercise to prove a route between two nominated places.

The last few days of the course were live immediate action drills on the vehicles. First we carried out the drills blank then moved down to Castle Martin for the live firing. The first shoot was with 2 GMPGs mounted on each vehicle from a static position. Targets

came up at different distances and both guns engaged in turn until the targets fell. The second shoot was with the vehicles starting in cover until the targets came up, then moving out and the driver turning off so the guns could engage for a set time then extracting back to cover. Both of these shoots were scored and most teams returned with ammo left and a good score for hitting the targets. The last shoot was with the vehicles patrolling in bounds until coming under contact then extracting with one giving cover as the other moves. After a few bounds one of the vehicles was disabled and the patrol had to dismount and break out of the contact on foot while the other vehicle continued to give covering fire.

After the 3-week course I think that as a patrol we benefited a lot from all the lessons and training we had been taught and that the patrol was communicating a lot better as a result.

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# Lt Col John Rock RE and Airborne Engineer Display

Eric Blenkinsop

Thanks to the Airborne Engineer Association, the tremendous achievements of the founder of Airborne Forces (Military) Lt Col John Rock have at long last been put on public display at the Corps of Royal Engineers museum and the contributions made by the Airborne Engineer in WW2 have found a rightful niche in a gallery of the museum. On a day, glorious in terms of weather, support, the very warm welcome by the Regimental Colonel and the RE Museum management and staff, coupled with the presence of our piper Frank Menzies-Hearn, this was destined to be a most memorable occasion.

We in the Chatham branch were privileged to be entrusted to organise this event and have only one regret that our Branch President Lt Col John Grosvenor and wife Sue were unable to be with us on the day.

Maj Gen Peter Wall CBE with Brig Ian McGill

We were once again privileged to have with us the most senior serving Airborne Engineer, Major General Peter Wall CBE who opened the display and gave the ceremony the status that the achievements of our founder deserved.

Within the branch we do not have any (dinner ladies) but are well blessed with coffee ladies who so willingly turned their hands to on the day. Thank you Sylvia, Sue, Pauline, Freda and Beccy.

Due to the demanding programmes in both the RE Museum and the King Charles Hotel it was necessary for us to use some 'nudgers.' (See foot note).

The opening ceremony completed, it was a stroll over to the King Charles Hotel to be welcomed with a glass of red or white wine or something stronger from the bar, by the management of our Association, Vice President Bill Rudd accompanied by his wife Dorothy and our Chairman Bunny Brown.

Then at 12:30 the curry lunch - more socialising and eventually fond farewells.

## Credits

Finance:

2001 -The inception of the Museum Fund - Brigadier Garth Hewish and Capt Bob Prosser.

2004-Major John Shave / Nick Gibson's reprint of John's book, "Go To It".

2004-A further injection of funds- the AEA President, Chairman, Executive Committee and Ray Coleman.

## The Display

Conception & Presentation:

Credit for this must go entirely to Nick Gibson who has worked tirelessly and selflessly to produce a wonderful display. Despite the adversity of a badly broken ankle, plated and pinned, his father Smokey; undergoing major heart surgery, Nick remained steadfast. He has been supported by John Stubbs our model maker, whose models were not on view as a suitable housing has yet to be designed for them.

## Donation of Artefacts.

Major David Breese, Lt Col Nick Nichol GPR, Norman Swift, Bill Shield, the late Terry Porter, Smokey Gibson, Marjory Hall ( Barr), Paul Shave, Eric Richards and Ken Trego.

## The RE Museum

Tremendous support has been received throughout from the Director, Richard Dunn, the Curator, Rebecca Cheney and all staff.

At the opening ceremony: Colonel Angus Cross the Regimental Colonel.

## The King Charles Hotel

For taking us on board despite being already committed to a very large wedding ceremony and reception that afternoon.

**The AEA members:** Thank you all for a magnificent attendance and last but by no means least, to Fred Gray (association archivist) for the DVD recording of the event.

Let it not stop here. Remember the Falklands? The RE museum is still growing and there is a World Cup soccer tournament in 2006 - You only need the money and museum space!

## Footnote

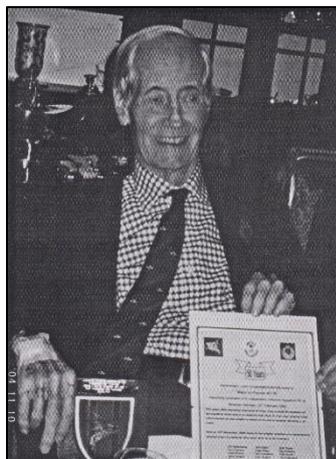
‘Nudging.’

This is an ancient sophisticated English Martial Art, which must not be confused with Bouncing. It starts with a delicate nudge but increases slowly depending on the resistance that is experienced. If total resistance is met then of course it becomes quite painful and borders on the bouncing. We are most fortunate in that we have in the Chatham branch 3 highly qualified ‘nudgers’ in Bill Shield Bill Perry and Bob Woolley.

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## Tony Poynder- Tribute of an old Friend

Col Dennis Eagan



Tony Poynder took over command of 9 Indep AB Sqn in the Canal Zone, Egypt on 23 Feb 53. Fifty years later, on 23 Feb 03, seventeen members of the Squadron, gathered together at a bar in Charing Cross, London, at Tony's invitation, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of his assuming command.

Unfortunately Tony was unable to attend because he was in hospital, following a car crash in which he had been a passenger, nor could Dennis Eagan because he was in Spain.

Then on 26 Oct 04 the following gathered together, by very kind invitation of his queen consort Mrs Margaret "Hadders" Mackay, at her beautiful home, Marston Court, Marston Magna to celebrate the occasion and to present Tony with an AEA shield, suitably inscribed and a mounted scroll wonderfully designed and produced by John and Liza Elliott:-

Eric and Beccy Blenkinsop, David Brooks, John Chappel, Ron and Daphne Day, Dennis and Helen Eagan, John and Liza Elliott, John and Sue Grosvenor, John Hooper, Mike Hutton, Pete Myatt, Bob and Sheila Prosser, Paul Scoble, Tom Sherwood, John and Glenda Smith, Don and Sylvia Spiers, Tom Thornton\*, Peter Wade\*, Roy Whittaker\*.

\*Regrettably unable to attend on the day.

Before receiving his scroll and shield Tony listened very patiently to a few words from Dennis after which Liza and John presented them to Tony.

" Some 53 years ago, on 18 October 1952 I joined 9 Sqn in Nelson Lines, Moascar to discover to my consternation that 1 was to be acting OC for the next few weeks. It transpired that the OC, Maj(later Maj Gen) Ian Lyall Grant MC was running a pre Staff College course in Fayid, the 21C, Capt(later Brig) Fergie Semple MBE MC had just been posted to command a Fd Sqn in 36 Fd Engr Regt elsewhere in the Canal Zone and his replacement, Capt (later Lt Col) Derek Eales had yet to arrive, the senior Troop Comd, Capt (later Maj) Peter Wade was on UK leave and the third Troop Comd, Capt (later Maj) John Chappel, having fought through Italy had left the Army and on rejoining had lost seniority much to his dismay but to my advantage!

That first evening SSM Bill Powell MM (a truly magnificent man among men) suggested that it might be a good idea if we probed 1 Troop's position in the desert, which we did. I have never learnt so much nor been so knackered in such a short time. Bill Powell was supported by an incredibly war-experienced bunch of senior NCOs so the Sqn was in good hands!

Derek Eales arrived and I was able to become what had been intended from the beginning, a Fd Tp Comd. It was my great good fortune to be given 3 Tp with the two best Sgts in the Sqn, Eric Blenkinsop and Tom Thornton as my Tp Sgt and Tp Recce Sgt.

When Tony Poynder arrived he was preceded by his reputation as an extremely gallant armoured engineer who had fought from the beaches to Berlin and gained an MC en route but we all wondered how he would adapt to the relative freedom of thought and spirit of the parachute engineer after having been encased in 50 tons of steel!

We need not have worried because he soon made it abundantly clear that we had to produce our own fun because no one else would do it for us. We soon got the hang of this even to the extent of ensuring that we gained and maintained a friendly domination of 2 PARA with whom we shared Nelson Lines. We worked hard, played hard and above all had fun not least by being barred by the Bde Comd, Brig (later Maj Gen) Desmond Gordon DSC, from competing in the Warrior Trophy (the Bde skill-at-arms competition) because we consistently beat the parachute battalions and that would never do, would it?

Anyway we were detailed off to take part in the Bde parachute exercise in Cyprus, which was to be the largest parachute drop since the war. We flew in East - West over the middle of the island and as a stick commander I was standing in the door with the unbelievable sight of a snow covered, moonlit Mount Olympus almost within reach or so it seemed. GREEN ON, GO and my reverie was shattered by the reality of floating down through cool, grass-scented air - pure bliss after months of the hot smells of Egypt. On my way to the RV I came across a body lying on its back but not making any effort to move. I said, "Are you OK, because if you are get a bloody move on" and realised it was Tony overcome by the sheer beauty of the occasion."

Some 7 years later I was OC 25 Fd Sqn, part of 2 Div Engrs in BAOR and about to move my Sqn to 4 Div Engrs to come under Tony's command for the second time. Those of you who served in BAOR may remember the emergency deployment exercise QUICK TRAIN in which all units had to deploy to their respective emergency deployment areas complete with full G1098 scales, including ammunition and explosives. We were in the last week of the designated time during which the exercise would be called but 25 Sqn were excused because of our move to 4 Div in Paderborne that week. So we called out the Gunner Regiment with whom we shared the barracks. The trouble was that the Bde Comd was also a Gunner, Brig (later Gen Sir) John Sharp OBE MC\*, who had a complete sense of humour failure and promptly put me on a charge. The CRE 2 Div, Lt Col (later Maj Gen) Griff Caldwell OBE MC\* gave the task of gathering the Summary of Evidence to his 21C Maj (later Maj Gen) Erié Mackay MBE.

To cut a longer story short, Tony, upon hearing what had happened, immediately phoned Brig John Sharp to remind him of the time when he (John Sharp) was the MA to Monty and accompanied the Great Man to Berlin immediately after the cessation of hostilities. The Russians could not stitch up Monty, a teetotaler, but his MA was a different kettle of fish, who had to be carried onto the C-in-C's Dakota and locked in the lavatory in the tail of the aircraft. John Sharp objected to being locked away, so promptly drew his revolver and fired all six rounds through the fuselage. Fortunately his aim was slightly impaired and no one was hurt! But not even that softened the Bde Comd's heart so I duly appeared before the Div Comd, Maj Gen Robbie Williams, with Erié Mackay as my escort. The former then announced that as I had pleaded guilty, he could only but find me guilty and awarded me the minimum sentence, a Severe Reprimand but that he wished to see me in the mess in ten minutes! The whole of BAOR, except its Gunners, were highly amused!

The scene changes to 1980, and to a small pub in Knightsbridge, London, (Paxton's Head with Crystal's Wine bar on its first floor) where I was having a quiet "pie and a pint" when John Chappel walked in. We had not seen each other since 9 Sqn days in the Canal Zone some 26 years before. We both worked close by so we agreed to meet again the following month and to bring as many old 9 Sqn friends with us: Tony Poynder was one of the first on our list. So began TTLC the Third Thursday Luncheon Club, which as many of you will know still thrives today.

That it does is due to that special 9 Sqn spirit, which of course always existed but was made into something special by Tony Poynder and those who served with him in the Canal Zone in 1953-4.

The whole point of this personal tale is that Tony Poynder inspired loyalty in those under his command but that he gave them his loyalty and fullest support in return and we all had fun so doing.

Bless you Tony, so au revoir until we next meet.

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## The D-Day Dodgers

Doug Phillips

The following lyrics are of a song my brother taught me. He had been fighting all through the Italian campaign and came home in 1945. I can't be sure of the accuracy because it was 60 years ago. It used to go down well when we used to sing around the bar! It may bring back memories to some of the lads and maybe they could correct some of the details. I have sent this, because I would hate these words to be lost forever.

This song is sung to the tune of Lillie Marlene and was the 8th Army's way of Satire, because although after a long time fighting in Italy, after D-Day they felt they had become the forgotten army.

Lady Astor suggested that service men returning from the far or Middle East should wear yellow armbands to warn women that they may be carrying some sexually transmitted diseases.

We are the D. Day dodgers, way out in Italy,  
Always drinking vino and always on the spree,  
8th Army skivers with the Yanks,  
6th Armoured Div. with their tanks..

Chorus.

We are the D. Day dodgers, the lads that D-Day dodged.

We landed at Salerno, Holiday with pay,  
Jerry bought the band down to cheer us on our way.  
We all sang songs and the beer was free,  
We kissed all the girls in Napoli.

Chorus.

We are the D-Day etc

It's tough the boys in France do not get home on leave,  
after 6 months service it's a shame they're not relieved.  
But we all carry on for several years,  
because our wives have shed their tears.

Chorus.

We are the D-Day etc.

Oh! Lady Astor listen please to us,  
don't stand on the platform  
and make a lot of fuss.

You're the Nations sweetheart, the Nations pride,  
the trouble is your mouths too wide.

Chorus.

That's from The D-Day etc.

If you look around the mountains,  
through the mud and rain,  
you'll find some battered crosses,  
some which bear no name.  
Heartbreak toil and suffering gone  
the boys beneath will slumber on.

Chorus.

They were the D-Day etc.

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## Speedy Recovery Doug Phillips

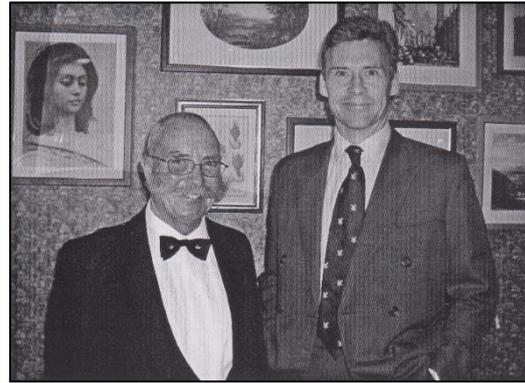
It was during late Saturday evening or was it early Sunday morning at the annual reunion? Doug decided to attempt a forward front parachute landing down a short set of stairs - which I might add led to the bar, when he failed to keep his knees bent, feet appropriately turned off and ensure his feet and knees were tight together! His forward heap unfortunately resulted in a broken hip and more importantly, the need to leave the bar before closing time! Sincere good wishes for a full and speedy recovery Doug.

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## Coventry Reunion- 2005



WOII (SSM) Bill Baugh & Harold Padfield



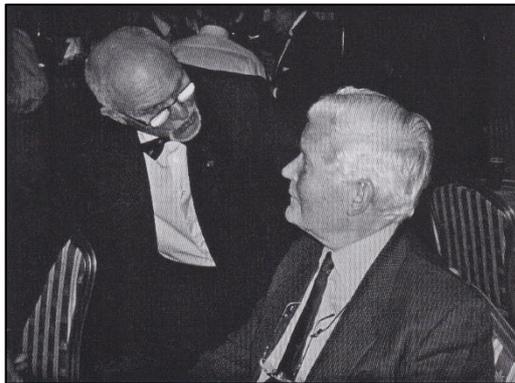
Master of Ceremonies Nev Collins & Lt Col Ian Hutchinson  
Commanding Officer 23 Engr Regt (Air Assault)



Mick Fisher, Bill Perry & Bill Shields



Bernie Rooney & Tommy Handley

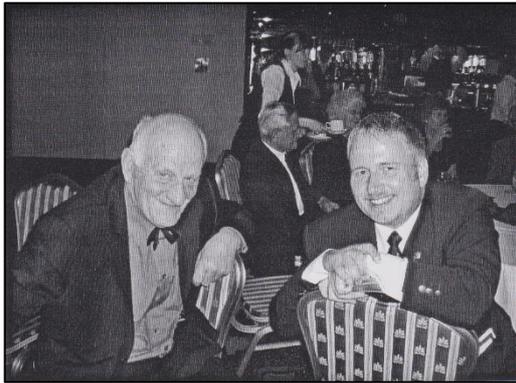


John Parker & Col Dennis Eagan



Ken & Leah Turk with John (Geordie) McCarthy

More Evidence from Coventry



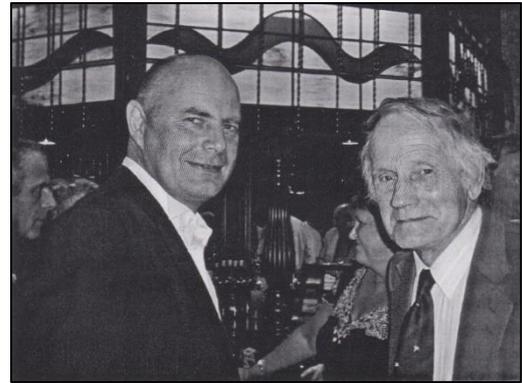
Tom Gilks & Terry Bark



Monty Wooley & Olive Holmes



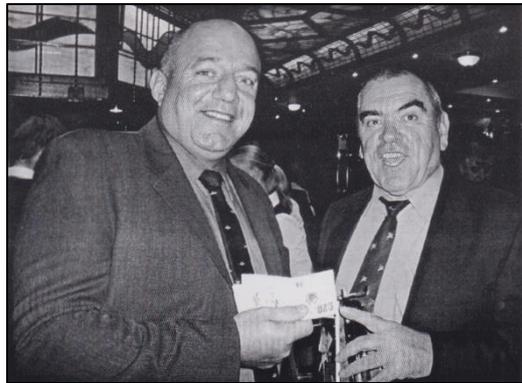
Mick Robertson & Mick McGrath



Jim Harrower & Charles Barker



Harry Mennie & Steve Brown



Dick Brown & Bob Ferguson - Please note the treasure (Dick) is accepting a bribe!

Caught on Camera – Coventry



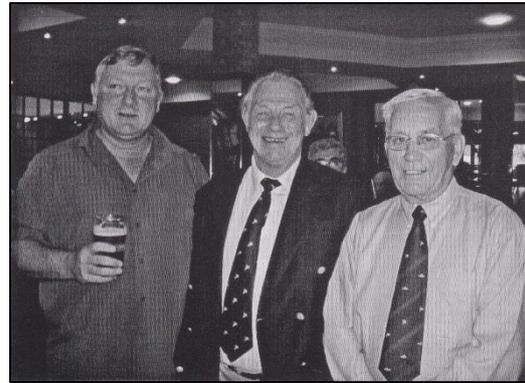
Demanding fair pay for the fire service - Steve Sutton, Mick Mathis, Tristan Bohanan, Duncan Keys & Craig Marshall



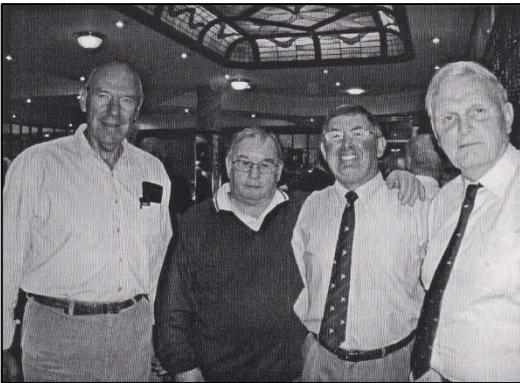
Smokey Gibson demonstrates that you're never too old to enjoy yourself



Pete Kershaw, Pat Neal & John Moorhouse



Mick Leather, Harry Lockwood & John Hughes Probably talking 'golf'



John Smith, Joe Stoddart, Dusty De Ste Croix & Fred Gray



Nat Haig and a relaxed Tom Dolan

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## Snowdonia Marathon

Bob Chatterton

On the 30th October 2005, Billy Morris and I ran the Snowdonia Marathon. This is an event in its 23rd year and involves participants running 26.2 miles around Mount Snowdon and the neighbouring peaks via roads and tracks. Apparently it is known as the hardest Marathon in Europe. Is it really the best choice for my first one! Time will tell.

The pair of us hadn't had the opportunity to meet up for any training since we ran the 30k North Downs Run back in June; however we were following our own individual training regimes. I can't speak for Billy but I normally start off with a solid plan which normally falls to bits and slips away to nothing in the last couple of weeks, with me saying "I'll be OK, it's not that far really."

The plan was to travel up the day before and stay over in Snowdonia for two nights. We were fortunate to be offered two nights' accommodation by Matt Wells who has been MD of Outlook Expeditions () since 2001. The Company has excellent adventure training facilities in the heart of Snowdonia, just 10 minute drive from where the race was organised. Billy picked me up from my house in Basingstoke on the eve of the race. There was a brief delay in getting underway because Billy couldn't find my house. After a brief conversation on our mobiles it became clear that after 23 years of taking taxpayers money, Billy still couldn't read a map, he had it upside down!

We soon got underway and commenced our five-hour journey to North Wales. As soon as we crossed the border into Wales the usual happened. Yes you've guessed it, it started raining.

The journey went smoothly until we neared our destination and it was my turn to be geographically challenged and embarrassed after ripping into Billy 5 hours earlier. We were soon on our way once we had shown the map to a couple of 15 year old local girls with superior map reading skills.

As soon as we had made ourselves comfortable in the accommodation, we drove around the course. This gave me the opportunity, being my first time, to see how challenging and long the course really was. The course starts off with an ascent of 900ft over 5 miles, followed by a descent of a 1000ft over 7 miles, undulates for 8 miles, a further climb of a 1000ft in two miles with a rapid descent into the finish.

After that stunning eye opener and reality check, it was time to think of a cunning plan to get out of the run without losing face. I knew Billy wouldn't fall for the old pants on the head and pencils up the nose trick, so I was stuck 'til the end.

The weather early Sunday morning was the same as the night before, strong gusting winds and heavy rain, ideal weather for the locals, but no good for two English gentlemen used to a bit of sun down South. This weather lasted throughout the day, I actually got wet then completely dried out at least four times during the race. We had a quick breakfast and cup of tea, then rushed to the start in the car to claim a good space next to the finish line. I thought Marathons were 26.2 miles. Not this one. There was a 1 1/2-mile walk to the start in the driving rain. Once the warm up was completed and our soaking wet after race clothes were stored for later, it was time to get down to business.

The pair of us got off to a steady start. I myself don't usually have a race plan; I just take it as it comes. Billy had set his sights on beating his previous time for the course so I urged him to go on. Billy kept saying, "no, we will do it together," but I knew I wouldn't keep up. For a Planty he's actually quite fit, all these years I thought they just spent their time down MT eating all the pies. Billy gave it a good 40 minutes before deciding I was the weakest link and waved goodbye. I cannot account for the rest of the Billy's race so anything he has told me cannot be verified; however he finished just under four hours beating his last time for the course and said, "It was just like a training run."

When Billy left me it was at the top of the first climb. I found a comfortable rhythm and settled into the downhill stretch. During the downhill, I had a bit of time to take in not only the stunning scenery but also some of the

other people taking part. It always amazes me all the different shapes, sizes and abilities of the people taking part in these events. It proves that you should judge people by what they do not the way they look.

I had plenty of time to ponder this over the next 4 and half hours as they came streaming past me, as I began to fade faster than the batteries in my MP3 player. By the eleven-mile marker I was firmly in tabbing mode, setting my sights on markers along the route and running and walking in between. By the time I started the 1000 ft accent, I was actually finding it more comfortable going up hill, so I had a good 45 minutes where I overtook quit a few people who were looking a bit worse for the experience.



Once the summit was reached it was a rapid slip and slide to the finish and the worried look on Billy's face because he thought I was lost or maybe had thought it was a two lap race and had gone around for some more. I finally completed the race in five hours twenty-four minutes.

**With a sigh of relief, Bob crosses the finish line**

The Snowdonia Marathon definitely lives up to its reputation and now I know what it's like I will be prepared for the next one. If you think you couldn't possibly go any slower and would like to challenge me to a race next year, or you would like to join the Airborne Engineers

Sports Association to take part in other sporting events, please contact:

Bob Chatterton [REDACTED]

Billy Morris [REDACTED] or Reg Grantham [chrisgrantham@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:chrisgrantham@tiscali.co.uk)

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## Reflections from the August Edition

X9

Once again the season of goodwill is upon us so let me start by wishing all members of the AEA and their families a very Merry Xmas and a Happy and prosperous New Year. Boy, how the years are flying by!

Sorry to see you go Brown Bunny. You have been an able and hard working Chairman for the AEA.

The Editor has to beg for subscriptions to the magazine. Come on you Scrooges, dig deep and do the proper thing! He talks of bank accounts and standing orders. Whatever happened to the POSB? (Post Office Savings Book)

The two Georges, Jones and Bell, look to have been neighbours for the past fifty years. It's amazing that not having seen each other for the past fifty years that half Century was wiped out and apart from the expanded waistlines and the white beards they were the old buddies they used to be. I don't know how they got in touch with each other but I would like to think that the AEA played a part in it. Talking about old friends, it looks as though Paul Dunkley and Jim Harrower are into some serious 'male bonding'!!

Joe, Jim and John all dressed for the drop. Did I look like that at one time? Heaven forbid! It really goes to show that clothes do not make the man.

9 Para Sqn: Tell me Capt. Lowe, don't you think the stop barrier would have been a little more effective if it had been written in Arabic! I doubt many Iraqis can read English. Moascar Garrison: KD's 303's and ranks of three. Aah what memories they recall! Oh yes, and cap badges over the left eye!!

The group photo would imply that Wade was taking some sort of hormones, as his breasts look rather large! Must be round his waist by now!

I do hope that the proposed formation of an AEA sports club will not take anything away from Dad's Army and their annual pilgrimage to the Welsh mountains. Aside from that the idea looks to have a lot of potential especially in recruiting serving members of the Airborne Engineers.

Benny Benson: Benny was one of the many characters the Sqn. produced over the years but as for his involvement in selling the two D8's, that's anyone's guess. Like the mystery of who stole the 'ding dongs' I think it should be a case of let sleeping dogs lie.

No Den, there has only been one Benny Benson, wasn't that enough?

Wally Clift still on the team sheet? Shouldn't that be, Wally Clift still on the 'sheet' team? He never was much of a footballer!

Taffy: You see young Harry Barnsley all that was needed was a 'Tugger for the bugger'! I'd guess Harry that you are at that age when actions creak louder than words! To show I have nothing against the Welsh Harry, Nadolig Llawen a Blwyddyn Newydd Dda.

Pinky in New Zealand: Glad you enjoyed your stay in Kiwi land. It's good to see you getting around. You did mention that you were entertained in the Sgt's Mess which was far too good for Sgt's. Yes Pinky, I remember that the British messes were only good for slopping the Moggs!

Tommo: I did not compare you to Walter Mitty because his was a secret life, that is something no one can accuse you of being with your long winded narratives!! Glad to see you went out of your way to pay your respects in Aden.

Last of the Winter Wine: For some who are no longer eligible to fire weapons in anger now take out their frustrations by shooting our wildlife! Tsk!

Snowdonia Venture: They're at it again! Dad's Army trying to prove a point by trying to re-live the past! I see some have now resorted to wheels instead of heels! Soon it will be bath chairs and ear trumpets and the golfers

playing croquet! Still, I have to admire you all as you sure have a good time of it. A case of sore feet from the shoes and sore head from the booze!

Fort Riley: Baz, I'm afraid you have been misled by your version of Custer's last stand. Let me tell you what he really said. Some year's back an artist was commissioned to depict on canvas the last words of General George Custer. On completion of his work he contacted an official to view it. On seeing it the official almost had a fit. The scene at Little Big Horn showed the ground dotted with 'pooh' with little halo's above. In between was shown thousands of Indians fornicating. 'What the hell is this' croaked the official. 'This,' said the artist 'is a true rendering of Custer's last words...Holy s\*\*\*, look at all those \*\*\*\*\* Indians.

Don Newman: Don, you sure have a thing about the English language! That said I'm glad you are learning to talk 'Strine'! I think he's a brother of Alfred E. Newman!

RCWK: Reading, or trying to read, LCpl Lee's account of 51 's action at Wyke Regis is like trying to decipher a code! To the uninitiated, such as myself, it comes over as so much gobbledegook! What does all this mean...JNCO's teaching MGB, MGOB, APB and HGOB at WRTA!! Only Jack Braithwaite talks that way!

It's sad to hear of the untimely death of Henry Morgan. A true soldier and one who was surely borne to the Gods astride the back of Pegasus.

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# Kilimanjaro Challenge

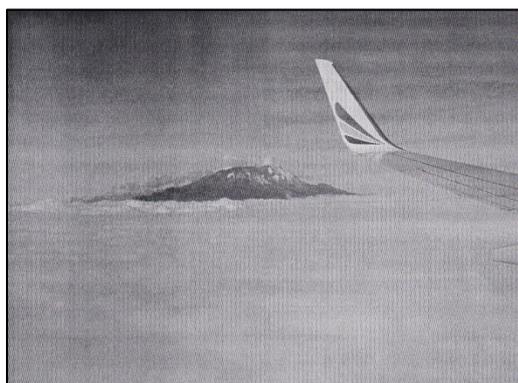
Mike Ellery

Who said life begins at forty? Was it Barney Rooney on his way to making his first million? I think not, but no prizes for guessing the right answer! For me, it was when I retired. If like me you were lucky to take early retirement, then that was a bonus. It enables you to enjoy all the things that you had been putting off or just didn't have time to do. One of my ambitions was to climb a big mountain, having failed miserably trying to climb Mt Kenya during a bit of R&R after the Ramisi bridge operation. Any altitude climber will tell you, 'slow and easy will get you to the top.' Our trek was like a "P" company tab - no wonder we all suffered from altitude sickness, but that's another story!

I decided to climb Mt Kilimanjaro in Tanzania because it was the easiest of the big mountains to climb, as it didn't require any technical climbing skills.

At 5895 metres high (19,340ft) it's still a big hill. Having carried out research on the Internet I decided to take the easy option and book the trip through a Trekking company. It arranged everything from flights, accommodation and guides plus took care of all the minor problems. The dates were booked 24th June - 3rd July 2005. Visas were obtained and jabs updated. Kit was kept to a minimum as porters are restricted to carrying 20kg only (in theory) Yes, all we had to carry was a day sack with our waterproofs and lunch. Barney Rooney had lent me his all singing, all dancing GPS for the trip. Unfortunately it didn't work. Poor satellite coverage (so it said). However I did manage to swap it for a sheepskin rug with one of the roadside traders, (only joking!).

A morning flight took me from Aberdeen to Heathrow where I met an old climbing mate Tom, who was doing the climb with me. Tom was from Liverpool and over 60 but a very fit lad. It turned out we were the oldest



members of the group. In total our group was 15 strong, of which 4 were woman, the youngest being 20, making the most of her gap year before going to University. The flight to Kilimanjaro airport was by Ethiopian airlines, stopping off at Addis Ababa to change planes. I was amazed at the excellent service afforded by the flight staff and would certainly fly with them again.

Our first sight of the mountain materialised as we approached Kilimanjaro airport. Flying at 22,000ft we could see the summit appearing out of the clouds just below us. Incredible to think that in 4 days' time we would be standing on its top.

We were met at the airport by our tour guide and driven to our overnight stay at a lodge in Arusha. By now it was very dark and I had been travelling for 36 hours.

A quick meal, a few beers and then bed as we were up at 5am for a 2 hour drive to the park gate.

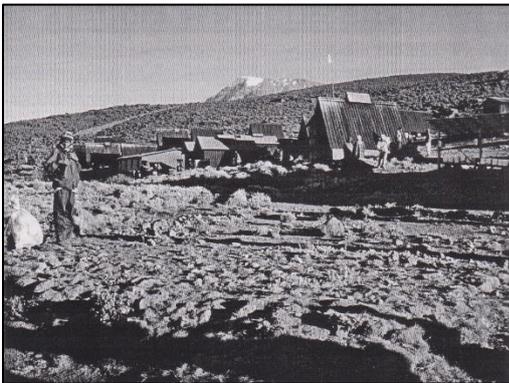
## Day 1.



Kilimanjaro is in a designated National park and no one is allowed to climb it unless they have a climbing permit and have the requisite porters, cooks and guides. Our little band consisted of: 1 lead guide, 3 assistant guides, 30 porters and two cooks. I never did find out what they all did but they certainly made our trek more comfortable. Maybe it was because we had to tip them at the end of the trip, (tipping is obligatory and a set amount is assigned to each job). Having obtained our permit, a guard carrying an AK47 let us through the park gate. Guns are necessary as a friend of mine who climbed the mountain in 2002 was robbed on his second night when robbers stole his rucksack whilst he was sleeping

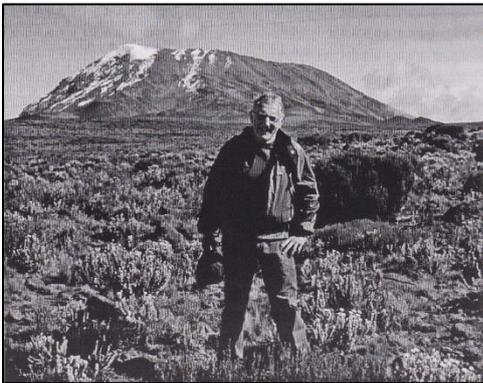
in his tent. There are many routes to get to the top, however I had chosen the Marangu route, also known as the tourist route, being compared to the tourist route up Ben Nevis. The beauty of this route is that the overnight accommodation is in comfortable wooden huts. The other routes all required tented accommodation, so robbers were not a problem for us. We were already at an altitude of 1970m, our first night stop being the Mandara hut at an altitude of 2700m. We were to gain altitude of approx. 1000m per day, walking between 5 and 7 hours between huts. This allowed for acclimatisation and catered for the slowest walkers. The day had started with rain so our first leg entailed tramping through a wet tropical forest, with the occasional glimpse of a monkey scampering around the treetops. A good path had been constructed through the forest and had been well maintained. Vegetation was primeval with algae growing on all the trees. Soon we were at the huts where our porters were already cooking our evening meal; hot water was brought to us for a quick wash (this was to be the norm throughout the trip). By now it was dark (6.30pm) Power is supplied by solar panels and low wattage bulbs, but it soon fades and head torches are soon switched on. Although altitude is not a problem at this height some people were starting to feel the effects.

## Day 2.



Next stop the Horombo hut at an altitude of 3720m. Soon after leaving our hut, we make a small detour and visit the Maundi crater, extinct volcanic craters of which there are many on Kilimanjaro. Soon we emerge from the forest to be greeted by changing scenery, best described as moor land, with shrubs, trees and bushes. Wildlife is still short on the ground with a few birds and not much else. People in our group are starting to get to know each other a bit better. They come from all walks of life, shapes, sizes and ages. Of the 15, 13 make it to the top, one fails miserably (the young gap year student and a surgeon who only made it to Gillmans point). As we approach

Horombo hut we get our first glimpse of the Summit in the distance however it seems a long way off! Another ritual we are getting used to, is that when reaching our designated hut, we have to book in and are then allocated a bed for the night, like booking into a Youth hostel.



Author - with still a long way to go to the summit

Day 3 is designated a rest day (ha ha!!!) which entails walking up to 4500m and then returning to Horombo. It is called acclimatising but it seems to work (better chance of getting to the top). Our destination is a point called Zebra rock (the rocks are striped, just like a zebra). From this vantage point we can see our final hut in the distance, Kibo.

## Day 4.

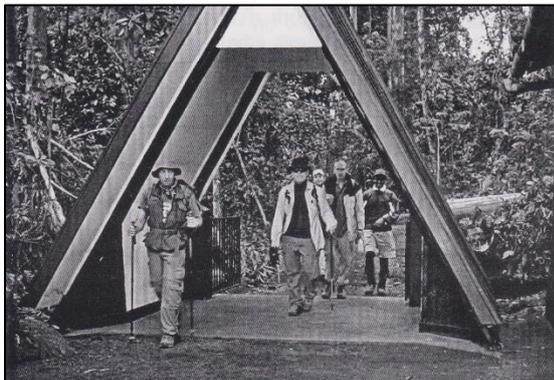
Leaving Horombo, the scenery changes yet again. Soon we are walking through volcanic dust with the landscape taking on a moonlike appearance. The summit cliffs can be clearly seen and look totally impregnable. The upper regions appear to be covered in snow, although once on the top there is very little snow to be seen. Altitude is now starting to bother some people, mainly headaches at this point. I had got some little help in the form of some pills called Diamox, which helped overcome the altitude problem but did have some strange side effects. Fortunately for me they work a treat. While everybody suffered badly on the summit, I have no problems at all. We reach Kibo at 4700m late in the afternoon, the plan being to get a meal, some rest and then a midnight bid for the summit. The reason for this is that access to the top is up a very steep scree slope, which is frozen during the hours of darkness. We are woken at 11 pm for a hot drink and prepare for the summit.

## Summit Bid.

Not much sleep was had and people are very apprehensive-the temperature is -10 degrees It is very cold so I have five layers of clothing on, but your hands become frozen if exposed for more than a few minutes. Other groups have accumulated also intent on a summit bid. There must be over two hundred people climbing the mountain. It's pitch black and all you can see is an endless procession of head torches snaking up the mountain. Within an hour our water bottles are frozen solid, but I had filled a thermos flask with boiling water so I had water to drink. Two hours into the climb a cry is heard from one of the girls 'Nelson (our head guide) I want a wee,' Nelson just ignores her! A second cry, 'Nelson I want a wee NOW!' Nelson is seen leading her off to the side



as a hundred head torches follow their movements. There is no privacy on a frozen scree slope and she later told me that she had lost all her dignity by that time! Whenever we stopped, and that was frequently, glancing up, all we could see was an endless line of lights, wondering how much further to the top. Six hours later we reached Gillmans Point, at 5685m the second highest point, the sun was just starting to rise over the horizon and the batteries were just beginning to fade on our head torches. Another two hours would see me on Uhuru Peak, the highest point in Africa at 5895m, a truly emotional feeling.



It would take other members of our group another two hours to reach the summit, all suffering badly from altitude sickness. The time was 8am, a quick photo shoot, a glance round at the amazing scenery and then back the way we had come. Seeing the scree slope in daylight was amazing and it was a wonder that we ever managed to make it to the top. By 10.30am I was back at the Kibo hut, having run down the scree slope-so much easier. A quick kip, some lunch and we were off again heading back down to the Horombo hut for our overnight stay. I had been walking for over 14 hours with very little sleep so that

night I slept for 12 hours, as did the rest of the group.

## Walkout.



The rest of the trip was a bit of an anticlimax. The bus met us at the park gate, the guides and porters were paid off and we had a further two days at the Lodge in Arusha, just unwinding. As we flew out of Kilimanjaro airport, once again we got a glimpse of the mountain still looking stunning surrounded by cloud. Due to a late arrival at Heathrow it meant a stay at Dave Rutter's house before the onward journey back to Aberdeen. Many thanks Dave, although I think you overcharged me for the B&B!! I also used this opportunity to raise some funds for the Association through sponsorship. I would like to thank all those, both individuals and Branches who gave most

generously. In total nearly £750 was donated, all proceeds going to our Association. Well done!

## Calling All Airborne Engineer Golfers

Being from the airborne fraternity, you have conquered P Company, fear and every other challenge that you have been faced with, **Except Golf!!**

So come and join the AEA for the inaugural Golf Competition On Saturday 27th May 2006 At Draycote Hotel & Whitefields Golf Course in Thurlaston Near Rugby

Coffee & Biscuits on arrival

9 Holes a.m.

Light lunch

18 Holes p.m.

3-Course Evening Dinner

Prizes including the 'Pegasus Champions' Trophy.

Buggy & Trolley Hire at extra cost.

£50 all inclusive!!!

NB. Extra £50 if want overnight accommodation

All interested parties please contact:

Michael Leather

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Tel: [REDACTED]

e-mail:- [REDACTED]

50% deposit required on booking (made payable to Mr. M. Leather)

There are limited places available - so HURRY - book now!

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## AGM/Reunion 2006

The Aldershot Branch was tasked with organising the 2006 AGM/Reunion and the search was quickly under way to find a suitable location. Initially it was suggested that the 2006 event should be held just prior to the move from Aldershot of 9 Parachute Squadron RE. However, it was soon evident that no suitable venue in or around the Aldershot area (within a reasonable price range) was available. So the net was cast wider and eventually having trawled through various locations, the city of Southampton was soon short-listed. Further enquires and investigations showed that the City could accommodate all of our needs. The City is served by land, rail and air.

By road network - the M27. By air - (cheap flights with Flybe) from Dublin, Belfast, Jersey, Leeds (Bradford), Manchester, Newcastle, Edinburgh and Glasgow. By National Express coaches and by British Rail.

Two hotels have been selected for the weekend 20th - 22nd October 2006 - the Novotel and the Ibis. These are part of the same group and are located 25 yds from each other and share the same 300 space free car park facility. We have initially reserved 60 double rooms in each of the hotels. Each room offering a Queen size bed and a sofa bed.

The rates and conditions of each are as follows:

### Novotel (3\*\*\*)

Friday and Saturday - to include Friday evening dinner - double occupancy - full English breakfast on Saturday and Sunday morning and Gala dinner on Saturday evening: £264-90

Single occupancy for the same package is £221-90 (we therefore strongly recommend double occupancy)

Saturday Only - to include bed/breakfast and the Gala dinner (double occupancy) - £135-95

Single occupancy for the same package is £113-95

### Ibis Hotel (2\*\*)

Friday and Saturday - to include Friday evening dinner - double occupancy - Continental breakfast only on Saturday and Sunday morning and Gala dinner in the Novotel on Saturday evening: £238-90

Single occupancy for the same package is £183-90

Saturday Only - to include bed/breakfast (Continental) and the Gala dinner in the Novotel on Saturday evening £122-95 (double occupancy)

Single occupancy for the same package is £93-95

The breakfast meal will be served in your accommodating hotel.

The hotels will be allocated on a first come first served basis - they are on the same site and share the same car park and although the prices vary between them; they are both well up to Continental standards.

N.B.

It is the policy of both hotels that all bookings must be guaranteed by credit card - cheque deposits are not acceptable.

### Location of the Hotels

The hotels are located approx. 300metres from the city central railway station - 250 metres from the National Coach station and approx. 5 miles (8kms) from Southampton airport. By sea into the Ocean Terminal approx. 900 metres and by car using the M27 exiting at junction 3 and following the signs for West Quay.

### Things to See and Do

Town Quay - with its marina, busy bars and restaurants, is a chic and popular destination. Whether it's shopping, eating out there's always something to see and do on Southampton's waterfront. The famous cruise liner Queen Elizabeth II is a frequent visitor to Southampton.

Ocean Village - is more than just a Marina - it is a thriving waterside community of shops, restaurants and entertainment.

Maritime Museum - Dedicated to the port of Southampton.

Shopping at: West Quay Shopping Centre - Bargate Shopping Centre and Marlands Shopping Centre.

All of the above facilities and many more; are within 15 minutes' walk from the hotels.

Further details will be published in the April edition of the Journal and a loose leaf Booking Application will also be enclosed.

Coventry 2005 was great - and with your attendance, Southampton can be even better!

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## News from around the Branches

### Aldershot

Joe Stoddart

Since our last entry into the journal the Aldershot Branch has been very active supporting various functions, parades and Association gatherings.

We again held our annual BBQ at Westover Road, Fleet the home on Betty and Fred Grey and thanks to the help from John and Glenda Smith, Dave Rutter, Tony Manley and others, the day was a roaring success. Our guests of honour were Harold Padfield and John Morton both veterans of great esteem. Both can be described as most suitable and worthy guests and we have no hesitation in extending a welcome to the Aldershot branch at any time. The weather added to the success of the day and with Wally Clift prising money for raffle tickets from all attending our coffers have once again been topped up. Regrettably Mrs. Sandra Ross wife of the OC 9 Sqn was unable to attend due to family commitments.

Our meeting in July was entertaining as the key to the John Rock room failed to materialise, so we decided that an alfresco meeting would be held in the BBQ area behind the squadron bar. The members sat on typical BBQ seating, a table with seating for 3 either side - unfortunately 3 of our members sat on one side allowing it to tip and they ended up flat on their backs, fortunately with nothing damaged other than their pride (plus smears of mud) The key eventually arrived and we were able to continue in more comfortable surroundings.

John Smith continues to give us excellent service as our entertainment's rep. Always coming up with new ideas. His latest venture will be a trip to Normandy, which he is co-ordinating with Majors John Mason, John Shave MC and Bob Sullivan MBE and Major RE. If this tour is as successful as the trip to Arnhem for the 60th Anniversary, it should be a terrific outing.

During the quiet period prior to the AGM at Coventry we were asked to look into locations for the 2006 AGM/Reunion. We believe we have found the best location in the South and hope that the 2006 reunion based in Southampton will prove to be a wonderful weekend and urge each and every to support it. Full details of the exact location with travel information and an application booking proforma will be enclosed in the April Journal.

On a sad note we lost one of our stalwart members, Reg Emberson. Reg was great character that joined the Association some 15 years ago and was a regular attendee at our meetings and annual reunions. For the past 3 years he had performed the task as Father Christmas at the 9 Sqn children's party. All his friends and colleagues will sadly miss him.

Lastly I would like to thank Eric Blenkinsop and members of the Chatham Branch for the opening of the John Rock display in the Corps museum. It was a superb day with good friends and a great lunch afterwards - well done to Eric and the Chatham Branch.

On behalf of the branch, I take this opportunity to wish all our friends and colleagues best wishes and good fortune for 2006.

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## Birmingham

Bunny Brown

Greetings - The Branch has been busy over the summer months, 12 of us attended the opening of the John Rock display at the RE Museum Chatham, well done to the Chatham Branch, the day was well organised and all who attended thoroughly enjoyed the occasion.



### **Cromwell Lock Ceremony**

September brought us to the Cromwell lock Memorial, where 10 men of 300 Troop 131 Parachute Squadron RE (V) tragically lost their lives going over a weir on a night navigation exercise on the river Trent 30 years ago. The day was well attended by both the Birmingham Branch and members of 299 Troop from Hull. The day was organised by the Major Karl Parfitt OC of 131, with 131 in attendance and a guard of honour, with a team firing a volley over the stone, thanks also to Frank the AEA Piper who played the Lament.

October brought us the AGM in Coventry the branch filled 5 tables plus, and as far as I know we have had no complaints, I guess we will have to attend the next AGM to apologise. Thanks to the entire Branch who made it happen, without support these "Do's don't get done."

Looking forward; Roger Howies is busy organising our Christmas Dinner Dance, to be held once more at the Holiday Inn Birmingham Airport, on the 3rd December, It's always a good one. After the Christmas festivities we settle down to our old favourites; St Valentines Dinner Dance, at the Birmingham United Services Club, and St George's day Dinner Dance at the Britannia Hotel Birmingham City. It seems that the Branch cannot go more than a couple of months without a get together of some kind or other.

With that I will sign off, with the Birmingham Branch wishing all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

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## Chatham

Eric Blenkinsop

Summer did not start too well for us, as we had to bid farewell to one of our members Terry Porter.

Thanks to Steve Collins and Jim Rogers we were able to enjoy a branch BBQ on Saturday 20th August at 221 Sqn RE TA Fort Clarence Drill Hall and it proved to be most enjoyable and very successful. The numbers were down a little due to a last minute change of date to suit the availability of the chef however we did attract a few more new faces in Argy Argent, Tony Dalton and Lofty Baron.

This was my first visit to the Fort and I must say I experienced a warm welcome and felt an affinity with it. So wandering around the building I came across the Opening Plaque on the wall. Opened in 1984 by the E in C Major General Mike Matthews C B E the Association Founding President. Plus the fact that EOD have an Airborne Troop serving with 23 Engr Regt (Air Assault).

Double Hills 25th September - There were three of our members with their ladies in attendance at this most reverent ceremony, which, as always, was a most memorable occasion. This year it was a joy to be in the company of next of kin of those who had only recently learned of the ceremony and who were attending for the first time, which was thanks to a supreme effort of Peter Yeates and his team. It is always a joy also to meet up with other AEA members Don Doherty, Wilf Brown, Wallace (Curly) Chapman, Tom & Yvonne Brinkman, Jan Chambers, Paul (Boris) Ratcliffe, (ex 4 Para Sqn at Arnhem) and last but not least, the Association 'Piper' Frank Menzies-Hearn.

Any further news from Chatham will have to wait for the Spring 2006 Journal.

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## Edinburgh

Mick Walker

An obituary for Jimmy Lowder appears elsewhere in the Journal. Jimmy was the third member to leave us in the last year and for a small Branch this leaves us with a relatively large hole. So if anyone has any AEA mates north of the Border who is not a member of the Branch please give them a heavy nudge in our direction.

Some of us joined our friends in the local PRA on a trip to an open day at the Aviation Museum in Dumfries where there is a section devoted to the Airborne Forces. This was a particularly good day with the local dignitaries out in force, a free fall display and a fan for those fit (and light!) enough to try it. This was mainly a family day with lots of kids' activities and the red berets were made very welcome, particularly by one local publican who was hospitality personified.

Incidentally, if anyone is really into planes they might like to tie a visit to Dumfries with another to the Museum of Flight at East Fortune (about 70 miles away) where amongst other things Concorde tests.



Early in September some of us again joined our friends in the PRA for their annual fun day at bowling. Actually "some of us" is a misnomer as we almost outnumbered our hosts with whom we are pictured below. Anyway it was a grand day - one of those lovely sunny autumnal days with good food and drink and everybody entering into the spirit of things.

Even the proper bowlers ignored certain AEA ladies doing a conga on the path beside the rink en route to the other end.

Our September meeting was one of the more interesting as Mike Ellery came along - he is a member of our Branch but lives over 100 miles from Edinburgh - and gave us a talk on his ascent of Mt Kilimanjaro. The talk was pitched at exactly the right level and Mike was a font of knowledge and fielded all queries and questions. Well done, mate.

As I write the ladies are dusting down their finery in anticipation of us joining the local PRA at their Christmas dance. We are also looking forward to early December when we are to be guests of one of the local TA units at a range day and have the opportunity of firing the current weaponry.



Mick (right) and Colin (left) congratulating each other.

And finally, the matter of the Branch golf championship is unresolved. This had aroused such interest that the finalists had to play at the private course of the Earl of Roseberry as no local course could cope with the expected galleries and the police were stretched due to a little local side-show - Hibs v Hearts. The final between Colin Reid and Mick Walker was played in good spirit on the shores of the Firth of Forth virtually in the shadow of the Forth Bridges. Colin took an early lead but was soon pegged back by Mick and at the end of the round they were level in all respects. Neither match play nor stroke play formula could separate them and the better inward half also revealed them equal. So the match will have to be replayed early in the New Year. The photo shows

## Yorkshire

Bill Rudd

Just a short note to let you know all is well up North York's. The Branch continues to move in the right direction. It was pleasing to note that we had a record attendance at our last meeting of 26 with 18 apologies, well done the members but we are always looking to increase our membership. Two PRA boys have joined the Branch, Ted Jones and Terry Duke, both ex 2 Para; we welcome them both as associate members.

A very hectic year all told with VE/VJ functions along with our Arnhem visit, Crete, the 30th Anniversary of the Cromwell Lock disaster, followed by 1 Para Sqn Dinner. Our highlight of the year and very memorable occasion was the opening of the John Rock Exhibition in the Corps Museum - congratulations to the Chatham Branch for an excellent organisation and thoroughly enjoyable day. On the subject of thankyou's I thought our AGM at the Royal Court in October was a roaring success thanks to the Birmingham boy's and girl's - a special thank you to Bunny Brown, a nice swan song Bunny! Some happy hours and the food was tremendous, you did us proud.

Several members attended the Wales weekend organised by Chris O'Donovan, well done Chris, it's now an annual pilgrimage - keep up the good work.

Our Xmas Dinner, which will be held in the Unicorn Hotel on the 17th Dec (Lou Gallagher, don't be late!). A short reminder that our Annual Dinner will be held in the WO'S & Sgt's Mess in Ripon, late March or early April, it goes without saying that all Association members are more than welcome to join us.

We congratulate Dave Ruddock on hearing the news that he is going to be a father, never did look over 60!! Also congratulations to John Waite on his two hip replacements, he is now jumping around like two-year-old ready for his BFT! Lastly, congratulations to John Parker on his 50th wedding anniversary.

The latest rumour is that Yorkie Davies is losing weight, however, it's only a rumour!!

A Very Merry Xmas and Happy New Year to all members and family of the Association.

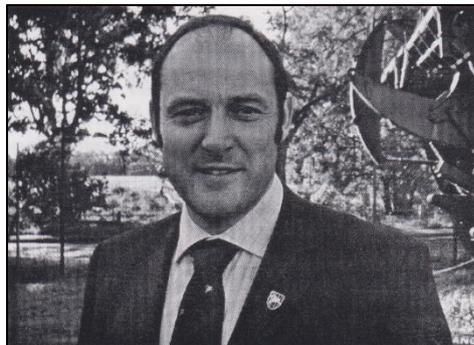
CONGRATULATIONS Bill Rudd MBE

We are delighted to inform the members, that Bill was installed as the Association President at the Annual General Meeting held in the Royal Court Hotel on Saturday 22nd October 2005

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## Membership Report

Steve "Billy" Morris MSM - Membership Secretary



Billy Morris left the Corps of Royal Engineers as a Warrant Officer Class 2 (ROMS) in December 2001 after completing over 23 years' service. He served in 9 Para Sqn from 1979 until 1984. Deploying with 2 Tp during the Northern Ireland tour at Castle Dillon and the Falklands War. On leaving the Sqn he was posted to 22 Engineer Regiment and then on to serve in BAOR until returning back to the Sqn as SQMS in 1993 till 1998.

On promotion to W02 (ROMS) he completed his service at the Central Volunteer Headquarters Royal Engineers Gibraltar Barracks.

Billy looks forward to the new post as membership Secretary and also the new challenges it will bring, as with the Sports Club and new members joining around the country and overseas.

We welcome to the 'Airborne Engineers Association' the following new members:

Maurice 'Griff' Griffiths	131 Indep Para Sqn	1968- 1977
Alan Smith	9 Para Sqn	1946
Michael 'Mick' McGrath	9 Indep Para Sqn	1974-1977
Robert Potter	301 Para Son	1959-1964
Thomas 'Tom' Dolan	9 Para San	1973- 1978/1982- 1984
Darren 'Daz' Greatrex	59 Indep Cdo Sqn / 9 Para Sqn	1993 - Still serving
Jordan Clifton	23 Engr Regt (Air Assltl	2003 - Still serving
John 'Geordie' McLachlan	9 Indep Para Sqn	1953-1956
Peter (Ginge) Houghton	2 Para / 9 Para Sqn RE	1973-75/1975-1979

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## Association Shop

Ray Coleman

Description	Price	P&P (UK Post Rate)
Association Ties (Pegasus logo)	£13.00	£1.00
Association Blazer Badges	£14.00	£1.00
Association Jumpers (sizes 38-48) Maroon or blue with Pegasus logo embroidered 'Airborne Engineers'	£25.00	£3.10
Association Sweatshirts Maroon with blue logo - Small/Med/Large or X Large	£16.50	£3.10
Association Polo Shirts - Fred Perry Style Maroon or blue logo Medium/Large or X Large	£15.50	£2.50
Association 'T' Shirts - Maroon with logo - Small/ Med/Large or X Large	£9.00	£1.80
Association Shower Proof Maroon Fleece with embroidered 'Airborne Engineers' logo - Medium/large/X Large	£28.00	£3.00
Association Shields	£18.00	£3.30
Anniversary Ties ((Silk with Wings & Pegasus logo)	£15.00	£1.00
Association Cuff Links (slightly smaller than the lapel badge)	£8.50	£1.60
The 9th (1787-1960) by the late Tom Purves (Special offer while stocks last)	£7.00	£3.80
Bow Ties (silk woven with Wings & Pegasus logo)	£9.50	£1.00
Lapel Wings - Blue Enamel S/C	£3.50	£1.00

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 that all shop orders should now be sent to:

Ray Coleman

E-Mail:

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The Ladies also enjoyed Coventry



Elsie Barrett, Bette Gray & Dot Rudd at Coventry 2005



Edie McCargo with Olga & Olena Thompson at the Reunion

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