



THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS JOURNAL



The following articles were originally published in the printed version of the Journal in December 2019, Issue No. 52

Contents

President's Update	3
Chairman's Update	4
Letter of Appreciation	5
NHS - Veterans Awareness	6
Resignation as the AEA Journal Editor	7
Airborne Riders	8
3 Para - Ride of Respect 01-05 July 2019	8
Arnhem 75th Anniversary Commemorations	11
Berets & Badges Appeal	13
My Memories of D Day - Maj Alan Graham MiD	14
Cromwell Lock Service 2019.....	16
Memorial Service to the 1st Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers	17
Dutch town grants citizenship to fallen WW2 soldiers	19
Nostalgic Prompts from the June 2019 Journal	20
Thus It Was	22
AEA Website	23
Double Hills Commemorative Service	24
Op Banner Tales	25
299 Memorial Parade & Service.....	27
2019 AGM/Reunion Weekend at Banbury.....	28
"Gentlemen, Welcome to the AEA 2019 Fergie Semple Golf Competition"	30
Presentation of Certificate of Congratulations - to Tom Hicks -100 Years old!	31
Arnhem 75.....	32
News from the Branches.....	35
Aldershot Branch.....	35
Birmingham Branch.....	37
Chatham Branch.....	39
Scotland Branch	41
Wales & the West Branch.....	43
Yorkshire Branch.....	44
Airborne Sappers at the Cenotaph.....	45
Airborne Engineers Association Links with the Past	47
23 Parachute Engineer Regiment Update	48

President's Update

John Lee

This year has been an eventful one, especially with the 75th anniversaries held in Normandy and Arnhem where the Association was well represented. Our outgoing Chairman, John Ferry, having being at the helm for seven years, formally handed over the reins to his successor, Steve Wallis, at the AGM in October. Also, at the AGM, a proposal for a new Branch, the Wales and West Branch was put forward and I am pleased to say an inaugural meeting to which I was able to attend was held in late October to get things going, so watch this space. The Association has many members in the area covered and I am sure it will be a success and wish it all the best.

The usual commemorations were held for the Falklands campaign, Double Hills and Cromwell Lock were held and articles on these events are elsewhere in this Journal.

I am pleased to say that the Royal British Legion allocated us 30 places for this year's Remembrance Day Service and Parade at Whitehall and all places have been taken. Hopefully, the Association will be featured in the BBC coverage as they have contacted our Chairman for a possible interview on the day. I will be attending the 101st Anniversary commemorations of the ending of the First World War in Ypres, Belgium on the 11th November and will lay a wreath on behalf of the Association at the Menin Gate memorial there.

We had the Association's AGM and Gala Dinner held in Banbury, courtesy of the Aldershot Branch and it was an excellent event all round. We were able to welcome the CO of 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment, Lt Col Jez Robinson, WO1 (RSM) David Hird and a number of other members of the Regiment, and it was good see quite a few red jackets being worn. At the Gala Dinner on the Saturday evening, there was the usual raffle which raised the sum of £1,915.00 which has been forwarded onto Combat Stress the nominated charity for this year and which was a splendid effort by all and many thanks to all who contributed.

With winter now virtually upon us and the festive season approaching I take this opportunity of wishing all members and their families the season's greetings.

Chairman's Update

Steve Wallis



At this year's AGM in Banbury I had the Honour of taking over as AEA Chairman from my good friend John Ferry.

I have known John for nearly 42 years having first met him as a young 18 year old Sapper on Pre-Para. John was a LCpl at the time and helped the pre-para staff 'beasting' us around the Aldershot training area. Later in my Squadron Career I took over as 2 Troop Recce Sergeant with John as the Troop Staffy. I could tell many stories about John, but they are best left to the Bar after a few beers. I would like to pay tribute to him for the way that he has filled the role of AEA Chairman for the best part of 8 years, he will certainly be a hard act to follow.

I am immensely proud to have been elected as Chairman of the AEA and will make every effort to be a worthy successor to John. The AEA is a fantastic institution, it brings together Airborne Engineers of all generations from Arnhem to Afghanistan with all conflicts in between. We have a wealth of History and a lot of stories to tell and each generation can learn from those who came before or after - remembering the adage 'The older we get, the better we were.'

I am very keen to raise the profile of the AEA, especially with younger Airborne Engineers without whom we have no future. It is little known that there are six different Airborne Engineer Facebook pages, 3 representing differing generations of 9 Para Squadron, a 51 Para Sqn page, one for 299 and an Airborne Engineers Admin page. Together these groups have a membership in excess of 1000 Airborne Engineers. Spreading the word about AEA activities on these pages is a fantastic way of reaching the wider Airborne Engineers community.

I would also like to see a greater AEA presence at the many Memorial services held around the country. This year I have attended services at Hardwick Hall, Double Hills, Cromwell Lock, Donington for the 1st Para Sqn memorial service and the Cenotaph in London. I know that there are many others.

AEA attendance at these events, and others, has been mixed. Double hills is always well attended as is the Cenotaph. This year we were allocated 30 Tickets.

There was an excellent turn out from 131 Para Sqn and 299 Para Sqn at Cromwell Lock, on the other hand only a handful of members attended Donington and Hardwick Hall.

I would like to see National and Branch standards attend these services along with as many AEA members as possible.

I welcome the resurrection of the Wales and West Branch of the AEA. The first meeting of the branch was held in Hereford on the 25th October. Despite a deluge of monsoon proportions 12 members attended the inaugural meeting. Knowing the personalities involved, I am sure that the branch will go from strength to strength and I wish them all the best for the future.

The Aldershot Branch were excellent in organising the AGM and Gala Ball in Banbury, the location was outstanding, and it was great to see so many serving Airborne Engineers and veterans attending. I had the privilege of sitting with the CO 23 Parachute Engineer Regt, Lt Col Jez Robinson, who gave me a good listening to as we discussed the AEA and its plans.

We received a delightful letter from him after the event expressing his thanks and congratulating us on the strong 'Airborne Ethos' of the Association which he sees reflected in the young soldiers of the regiment.

In closing, Melanie and I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

Letter of Appreciation

Peter Yeates

Just a few line lines to say how grateful I am for the "Two Year" contribution of £300 from the AEA and received from Dick Brown the AEA Association Treasurer. The £130 raffle proceeds received from the Aidershot branch via Mrs Jeannette Rutter courtesy of John Ferry was a most welcome contribution to the Double Hills restoration fund.

The Presidential award, which is mounted in my hall with my two AEA plaques, one received in 1996 and the last one for the 40th DH from President John Lee and his moving presentation address left me a garbling mess.

The award made me especially proud of my almost 46 year association with the AEA. I think the Association invented and brought to prominence that term, it's meaning, and ethos with those reverent words "Airborne Engineers." The AEA made the difference from the beginning.

I know my close family friends and mentors Brigadier Henniker in particular, and Brigadier Eddie Myers who put me up for the Fowke award in 1984 would be so proud of you all in the AEA, to have made that resounding description so prominent and telling within Airborne Forces history.

Your cash went towards paying off some of the nearly £4000 the refurbishment of the Memorial. So it was especially important to receive at that time. It seems the local fame of Double Hills is to go on and there will be a "gathering" next first Sunday in September 2020. There are ambitious plans to enable access in the fields to be improved, and an extension fenced off for a permanent pathway, which will not then be interfered with by the cattle.

Talks with the Duchy and HRH are going on, and also a "Royal Unveiling" of the refurbished Memorial when it is finally finished, by HRH, and I have no idea when that will be. It will happen, then I shall need all "hands on deck"

I am enlisting the help of a local group of people "at last" (not a talking shop committee) to do stuff, and relieve me of the whole responsibility.

The AAC and 9 Parachute Sqn RE still want to be involved, and we have the original team of people including loyal AEA President, JJ, and "Jan Chambers Team" still in place. So it will 'go on'.

This is all above to assist to have some "DH succession." I am encouraged that the AEA are still so vibrant and lively due to the many, but lead by the faithful few. The REA locally are struggling so much, with one or two branches with some life in them. If I did not tell you before, I forgot Iain George of the REA did 'pick up' the costs of the Public Liability policy. It is an MOD thing, but they mucked it up by getting a new Insurance provider that seemed not to cover public military events. But I was grateful nevertheless as it cost £200 plus.

Many Thanks AEA what you have all done, in your attendance, travelling down on the day, and your support through all the years, it has made everything possible.

NHS- Veterans Awareness

Your local doctor should be made aware that you are a military veteran. It could mean you being given higher priority when seeking medical treatment or hospital admission. Recurring injuries caused during your service years may also entitle you to compensation or even a war pension.

Check out the following:

www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/military-healthcare/priority-nhs-treatment-for-veterans

Resignation as the AEA Journal Editor

Dave Rutter

Having selfishly held the post of journal editor for over 21 years, I feel it is time for change, and have decided to resign from my post after the publication of the **June 2021** edition.

Some nine or ten years ago, it was suggested at the then AGM that the association publish our magazine on our own website. Much debate followed this suggestion with some members violently opposed to the idea, stating that many of the more senior (in age) members were not computer literate and would lose contact with the Association in such a move.

Requesting a show of hands for those unable to gain access or have knowledge of the 'computer age,' it was surprising, that of those present, 25% raised their hands. However, I would suggest that in this day and age, very few of our members remain in that category.

I would strongly suggest that we move forward with the times as other associations have done, and put our publication "on line" by creating our own AEA journal website.

Over the past few years the dreaded annual postage increases have had a detrimental effect on the annual subscription and together with the declining number of subscribers has increased the cost of printing.

During our most productive era we were producing some 740 journals every 4 months. Regrettably we are now down to just over 400 subscribers with a production run of just two publications per annum. Ably assisted by Jeannette, we have gone through the stage of 'lick and stick' stamps and can now peel and stick. Technology by the postal services is a wonderful thing! But we're still left with peeling and sticking postal addresses then stuffing magazines into envelopes.

Over the years I have received some most enlightening and interesting articles and extend sincere thanks to all those who have submitted these inputs. Photographs too enhanced your inputs, but sadly, due to printing costs, we have to convert colour photos into grayscale, which would not be the case if we were to have our own website.

In the post as editor, I have had the pleasure of meeting and communicating with some fascinating and entertaining people. These include members from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, America, Thailand, Philippines and throughout Europe.

I have thoroughly enjoyed the up and downs of the editor's post, but it's time to call it a day and move forward with the times. How we proceed after the **June 2021** publication remains to be seen. But please, don't cancel your journal subscription just yet as we have a further 18 months before making that decision.

YOU could be the one to take us forward by volunteering to set up the AEA Journal Website.

Now is the time to give thought to submitting that personal story you've been promising to send me of adventure, woe and conduct unbecoming before our last publication in **June 2021**. The clock is ticking!

Airborne Riders

3 Para- Ride of Respect 01-05 July 2019

Maj (Retd) Paul Moore (9 Para Sqn RE, attached to 3 Para in1982)

As a group, the Airborne Riders are proud to be part of the annual commemorations of the Battle of Arnhem, where our specific role is to visit the outlying grave sites of men who fell during that epic battle in 1944. Some of their graves are over 100 miles from Arnhem itself. This gave me the idea of honouring the Falklands fallen in a similar manner, and as I was attached to 3 Para during OP CORPORATE, I decided that the graves of the 3 Para fallen would be visited first, and that the aims of the ride would be:

- Remembrance - to demonstrate that they are not forgotten.
- Respect - for their families, the pain of their loss continues.
- Awareness - to let people know where our fallen lie.
- Support - by fundraising for SAMA 82 whose support gives comfort to veterans and families.

I was encouraged by Jimmy O'Connell who had details of all the graves from the impressive research he did when writing his fantastic account of the Battle for Mount Longdon 'Three Days in June.' Jim called me one day and asked if I lived anywhere near Lanchester in County Durham. In fact I drive through that village almost every day and Jim told me that one of the 3 Para lads rests there, Stewart Laing, so I set off to find the grave.

Since then I have made it my task to honour Stewart every year on 12 June on behalf of all 3 Para and attached arms, the same as I do at the grave of my section commander and good friend - Scotty Wilson.

Jim's research made the planning of the ride fairly straightforward, and knowing that the new Airborne statue was going to be erected in Aldershot on 6 July and that the majority of 3 Para graves are in the military cemetery there, the week running up to this was the obvious date for the ride. The itinerary was fixed and from the start it was going to be a punishing routine:

Day 1 - 01 July 19		
0940 Hrs	Stewart Laing	Lanchester (Kitswell Road) Cemetery, Co Durham, DH70JQ
1100 Hrs	Phillip West	Hollywood Cemetery, Gosforth, NE3 5BT
1500 Hrs	Scott Wilson	Eastern Cemetery, Edinburgh, EH7 5NB
1700 Hrs	James (Doc) Murdoch	Arkleston Cemetery, Paisley

Day 2 - 02 July 19		
1030 Hrs	Anthony Greenwood	Southern Cemetery, Chorlton, M21 7GL
1215 Hrs	Stewart McLaughlin	Rake Lane Cemetery, Wallasey, CH45 5DE
1500 Hrs	Mark Dodsworth	St Peters Church War Memorial, Walsall, WS2 8EA
1800 Hrs	Alex Shaw	Shire Lodge Cemetery, Corby, NN17 2AE
1930 Hrs	Gerald Bull	All Saints Church Yard, Brixworth, NN6 9DF

Day 3 - 03 July 19	
1000 Hrs	Cross country movement to Pontypool.
1300 Hrs	Courtesy Visit to the South Atlantic Medal Association 1982 Office.

Day 4 - 04 July 19		
1000 Hrs	Timothy Jenkins	Tudorville Cemetery, Ross on Wye, HR9 5PZ
1230 Hrs	Keith McCarthy	Beckington Church Cemetery, Frome, BA11 6TG
1400 Hrs	Pete Higgs	Tidworth Military Cemetery, SP9 7JR
1700 Hrs	Christopher Lovett	Durrington Cemetery, Worthing, BN14 0AB

Day 5 - 05 July 19		
1000 Hrs	Depart Worthing for Aldershot	
1200 Hrs	Neil Grose, Jason Burt, Jonathon Crow, Pete Hedicker, Ian McKay VC, David Scott, Ian Scrivens, Richard Absolon, Stephen Hope, Craig Jones, plus brethren from other Airborne Units.	Aldershot Military Cemetery

Initially I was planning on doing the ride by myself, on the assumption that no-one else was going to be daft enough to ride a motorbike 1400 miles anti-clockwise around the UK. However, as soon as I made it known what the plan was, I soon had plenty of volunteers to come along for parts of the ride, and three amigos to keep me company for the whole event. They were: Andy (Charlie) McColgan (9 Para Sqn RE), Tony McKie (1 Para) and Paul Durnion (4 Para). I am truly honoured to have had their company during the ride as the banter was relentless, morale was kept high, but their quips about an officer and a GPS wore a bit thin after the third or fourth wrong turn !



Support for the ride came from a multitude of sources. Major Paul Raison at RHQ Para Colchester - himself a Tom in 3 Para on Mount Longdon in 1982 - was instrumental in contacting the families of the fallen letting them know our plan and route. Several family members contacted me before the ride and promised to meet us. This was a great morale booster for us and also gave us a renewed sense of commitment to the task ahead.

Lisa Waller, editor of Pegasus magazine published our plan to a wide audience, and the wonderful staff at SAMA 82 also sent the details to members. The Masonic Bikers - The Widows Son's - escorted us all the way to Edinburgh on day one, and the RBL Riders escorted us on Day 4. The Hells Angels UK also offered their support should we need it on our trek around the UK, Individual supporters are too many to mention, however we are very grateful and humbled by the support we received from so

many people - financial by way of donations to the South Atlantic Medal Association, practical support such as overnight accommodation, moral support such as messages of encouragement, and physical support such as bikers joining us for certain parts of the ride. Everyone's support - no matter how small - was fantastic.

As part of the aim was to raise funds for the South Atlantic Medal Association, I opened a Just Giving account in the hopes of raising £1000 for SAMA. I am pleased to say that due to the very kind donations of supporters we have tripled that figure to £3294.31 which includes £370 in cash that people donated on the ride itself. We used a Facebook page to keep people updated on planning and gave a countdown to the ride. The Facebook page became invaluable during the actual ride as we could quickly post pictures and progress updates as we went from one serial to the next, keeping everyone updated and informed.

It must be said that on Day 1 of the ride we were all a little bit nervous as we contemplated the scale of what we were about to do,



1400 miles around the UK, over 350 miles on the first two days and all the while keeping accurate timings to meet families and supporters at the grave sites. Over the total five days the latest we arrived at a grave was 25 minutes late, inevitably delayed by traffic. Usually we were a little early. Early in the planning I had decided that we would keep the time at grave sites to 30 minutes, and that we would keep the format at each one the same - arrive at the grave, meet the families and explain why we are doing the ride, lay a cross of remembrance and pause in silent reflection and move on. This format worked well and seemed to be appreciated by the families that attended.

Many supporters also laid crosses or wreaths, but also sadly, we attended a couple of grave sites where there was just us four. No family, and no friends of the fallen. Just a lonely grave and four Airborne Bikers paying our respects.

It was wonderful to meet the families who did attend, and it was humbling to hear them speak of their son, brother, husband or father. Many a tear was shed during the ride and I don't mind admitting that I weep now as I remember the words whispered into my ear by the mother of one of the lads "Thank you for remembering our son." This confirmed to me that we were doing the right thing and that we must continue to do so.

On Day 3 we had to move across country to South Wales from Northampton and we took this opportunity to visit the SAMA office where a cracking buffet was laid on for us. However, disaster struck early that morning as we got separated in heavy traffic on a short stretch of the M1. I made the RV with my old mucker Denzil Connick (3 Para) and George Firth (9 Para Sqn RE) only a little bit late and the other three had to use their ABI (Airborne Initiative) without my trusty GPS to make the next known RV - the SAMA Office and the sandwiches! The SAMA Office staff have been fantastic in supporting the ride and the buffet was much appreciated. George later took us to the grave of Cpl Shug Denbury MM QGM (9 Para Sqn RE & 22 SAS) located nearby and we paid our respects to a very brave man, and a friend.

The last two days of the ride were actually quite easy thanks to shorter legs between graves and volunteer guides who had previously recce'd routes and the grave sites for us. This saved a lot of time for us and enabled us to have more time to chat with families and supporters. As we approached Aldershot on Friday morning I was keen that we should arrive there right on time at 1200 hrs as I knew that the Airborne Riders and some families were going to be there to receive us. Then I took a wrong turn (again!) however, after some nifty riding we actually entered Aldershot Military Cemetery at 1159 Hrs and 50 seconds - smack on time considering the 1400 miles we had done in the previous five days.

The majority of the 3 Para fallen lie in Aldershot alongside their friends in 2 Para and other Airborne units. I invited families and friends to help us lay the last remaining remembrance crosses and we paused to remember all those who lost their lives in the Falkland Islands.

Next year we intend to do the same but this time we will visit all of the 2 Para graves. This will have the simple name of 2 Para - Ride of Respect. Our research so far shows that these are as far apart as Scotland, Northern Ireland and Devon, and we will end again in Aldershot where the majority of 2 Para lie. The dates will be 29 June to 03 July 2020 and I will publish the itinerary details once the plan is finalised.

The **South Atlantic Medal Association** continue to support Falklands veterans and their families, and particularly the families of the fallen..... for them the pain of their loss continues. In this 37th year since the short but intense Falklands war, let us not forget the sacrifices of our fallen whether on land, at sea or in the air.

Thank you for your support, Paul Moore, Charlie McColgan, Tony McKie & Paul Durnion

Arnhem 75th Anniversary Commemorations

Major (Retd) Paul Moore – President Airborne Forces Riders

I had the honour to be nominated as the President of the Airborne Riders on 6 July 2019 at Airborne Forces Day in Aldershot, only minutes before we paraded over 70 motorbikes past the Princess Hall, and witnessed the unveiling of the Paratrooper Statue. It was a momentous occasion which was made even bigger by the news being broke that I was also to organise our annual pilgrimage to Arnhem! Many thanks to Titch Cornish our outgoing President for dropping that one on me!

The Airborne Forces Riders have been an official part of the commemorations in Arnhem since the 70th anniversary in 2014. Since then we have built up an excellent working relationship with the people of Arnhem, the Town Council and Police, and the organisers of the whole event - The Market Garden Foundation. The 75th anniversary commemorations were going to be huge, with a lot more for the public to see and do, many extra events put into the programme, and all with the added problem of heightened security due to the Royalty and VIP guests attending. We normally have anywhere between 35 to 50 bikes attending Arnhem, however, we had requests from other bike groups to join us as well as our own invited guests, so by the time we deployed to Arnhem there were over 150 bikers attending the official ride outs and events. These included our guests from Poland - Motorcycle Clubs Monte Cassino and Hussaria - who are in the main all Veterans, and of course our own veterans from the Royal British Legion Riders.

Due to the large number of Riders we had to change our normal format of events considerably, firstly so that we completed our mandated task of the Ride of Respect, and secondly so that we did not cause traffic problems in the Arnhem area due to the large number of motorcycles trying to get from one place to another. At this point it has to be said that the Arnhem Police were extremely helpful in every respect and once we had agreed on the plan, they did everything they could to ensure all went well. It did!

Our main event is on Friday where we complete the Ride of Respect. Many people are unaware that there are graves associated with the battle for Arnhem some of which are up to 70 miles away from the town. These are sometimes where aircraft or gliders crashed, or where the bodies of men lost during the extraction phase over the river were found downstream in the Rhine. In every case, wherever the Dutch people found the bodies of our men they buried them in their own church yards as if they were their own sons, and they continue to look after the graves all these years. We deployed three groups of 16 riders out on the Ride of Respect led by our friends in the Dutch Motorcycle Association. At each grave location they held a simple service conducted by one of our Airborne Riders and laid flowers and a cross on each grave. The purpose of this is to demonstrate that they are not forgotten, to show our respect to the fallen and those who are left behind, but also most importantly to say thank you to the Dutch people for looking after them so well. All those who could not get a place on the official Ride of Respect conducted their own acts of remembrance on the same day. A group of 29 Riders went south and paid respects at the Commonwealth War Graves site in Nijmegen before riding to Overloon and visiting the Dutch War Museum there.

A second group of 10 Riders went far south to Eindhoven and followed the 30 Corps route back up to Arnhem, stopping en-route to pay their respects at the American war cemetery and visiting other locations, not getting back to Arnhem until well after dark. A third group of 30 Riders stayed in the Arnhem area and made an act of remembrance at the Dutch Military Cemetery at Grebbeburg, before heading over to Renkum to watch the Pathfinder Group jump, and then riding into Oosterbeek to visit the Cemetery, the museum and of course The Schoonard!

Our major change in plan for this year was that we had to split ourselves into three distinct groups so that we could attend all of the key locations while still adhering to the security plan for the VVIP guests. It was easy to sort: Group PEGASUS (30+ Riders) went to Ginkel Heath DZ, Group SOSABOWSKI - mainly the Polish contingent (about 50 Riders) went to Driel for the Polish Service, and Group HOLDFAST (about 25 Riders) also went to Driel onto the dyke for the service at the Engineer memorial. Anyone who was not in these groups were free to do their own thing. On reflection, this was a much easier day than normal because once we were in place we just had to wait for the 'security bubble' to either move away, or to move over us, so we did what all good paratroopers do when you have time on your hands and the weather is nice - we had a picnic, and some had a kip in the sun while we watched the aircraft circling for the drops on Ginkel Heath. All very civilised!

The new Minister for Veterans the Rt Hon Johnny Mercer MP attended the Engineer Memorial with the new Defence Attache to the Netherlands, Col Mark Maddick RM, and took time to chat with the Riders both before and after the Service. I had a speaking part in the service and spoke about my experiences of veterans as a young boy, during my service and now as a veteran myself. It was a rare opportunity to speak directly with a Minister in a public event and I did not let the opportunity slip me by, and I am reassured by Mr Mercer's response to my points that these will be dealt with in time.

On Saturday night we let our hair down - literally. Five of us had been growing our beards since Arnhem 2018 with the intention of them being 'auctioned off' for charity. I had also been growing my hair much to the delight of my grand-daughter but the pony-tail had to go for a good cause. The Great Arnhem Beard-Off was organised by Scotty 'Lumberjack' Lovegrove and our master of

ceremonies - Vic Thorn - saw to it that the well-oiled assembled bikers got their hands deep into their pockets. By the end of the night we had raised over £3000 for the Market Garden Foundation and over £800 for Combat Stress.

On Sunday morning I had the honour to lead the complete group of 150 bikes to the cemetery in Oosterbeek for the annual service of remembrance. As President I was expected to lay a wreath on behalf of the Airborne Riders but delegated this honour to Titch Cornish, after all, he is one of our founders and better looking than me! I also arranged for another two wreaths to be laid by Charlie McColgan (ex 9 Sqn) and Dave Pettitt (RBL Riders) on behalf of the Arnhem Riders and the RBL Riders respectively.

The children laid their flowers on each grave and tears were shed at such an emotional act of respect. An act that is sadly rarely seen in the UK. Charlie (minus the beard) gave one of the flower children his beret to wear and she was over the moon at this honour and this gave us an idea. In 2020 the Airborne Riders are attempting to provide every flower child with a red beret of their own, to wear during their act of remembrance. This is our way of saying Thank You to them and their parents for continuing such a beautiful tradition, and is another small way of cementing the everlasting bond between UK and Polish Airborne Forces and the people of Arnhem.

Berets & Badges Appeal

Charlie McColgan



My name is Charlie McColgan an Army veteran having served with 9 Parachute Sqn Royal Engineers. Six years ago I joined a group of bikers called the Arnhem Riders whose mission was to ride to Arnhem to pay their respects to the fallen during Operation "MARKET GARDEN" September 1944.

On parade at the military cemetery in Oosterbeek together with my brothers and sisters from the Arnhem Riders I offered a young girl (stood next to me) my beret... I don't speak Dutch but she looked overwhelmed and wore it with such pride it planted a seed and I started thinking, "Wouldn't it be a lovely idea to be able to present all the children who take part in the remembrance service with a maroon beret to wear as they lay the flowers."

It would take about 1400 to cover the children present... this could be achieved by donating an old beret that has just sat in the corner of the cupboard gathering dust.

Present serving Airborne soldiers could approach men to donate their old berets or for the QM to donate a few from the clothing stores.

This appeal is to try and achieve that goal for the 2020 commemoration service ... The money raised will pay for berets and cap badges for all of these children... the cost of a beret and badge combined will be around £7... Please help if you can... these children have been honouring our fallen since 1946.

Wouldn't it be a wonderful gesture to be able to thank them in this way. I thank you all in anticipation.

Berets can be purchased on E Bay for around £7 and the address to send them to is:

Charlie McColgan
The Beautiful Shutter Company,
95-97 Acklam Road, Middlesbrough,
North Yorkshire TS5 5HR

Or you can donate by sending a cheque made payable to Arthur McColgan at the above address.

Kindly remember that if you donate through "Just Giving," they take a percentage of your donation!

My Memories of D Day- Maj Alan Graham MiD

Commemorating the 75th Anniversary of Operation Overlord (D-Day landings Normandy)

By Baz Bassett

Good afternoon. Major Alan Graham is honoured to be invited to share memories of his D-Day experience with you on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of Operation Overlord. Alan will be 95 years old next week and offers his apologies for not being able to attend today, but he has asked me to deliver his words to you.

This talk is primarily about my experience of D-Day at the age of 19. However, it may be useful to describe my early training, which took place both in this area of Kent and at The Central Landing Establishment at Manchester Ringway Airfield, where as you will know, Lieutenant-Colonel John Rock was Commanding Officer of the Glider Pilot Regiment from 1941 to 1942.



Having left school when I was 14, I sat the entrance examination in 1939 for the Army Technical School for Royal Engineers and Royal Artillery enlisted boys at Fort Darland - later to be Gordon Barracks and now the site of Gillingham Business Park. An Army apprenticeship was a natural choice for me as my father had also served, primarily in India and Egypt.

Alan as a 14 year old recruit

In 1940 we had to leave the school as it became a transit camp for men returning from the Dunkirk evacuation, and we were all sent on indefinite leave for a year or so. When I was old enough at 17 I went into Man's Service in Clitheroe, Lancashire, where the Royal Engineers were training men for overseas deployment. From there I joined 284 Field Company of the Royal Engineers, stationed in Blandford in Dorset, before volunteering for the Airborne Forces.

This led to a month of gruelling infantry training at Ringway airfield in Manchester. Apart from our six hours of sleep, we moved at the double everywhere. Carrying weapons, boxing in the ring, firing on the ranges - everything was done at the double. About 50 per cent of the men made it through, the rest were sent back to their units. The course included two tethered balloon jumps from 800 feet, followed by seven aircraft jumps, the last two at night.

I was in the 3rd Parachute Squadron, Royal Engineers, under the command of Major Tim Roseveare, part of the 6th Airborne Division, and about a year prior to D-Day we were posted to Bulford, Wiltshire for further training.

In late May 1944 my Unit was taken to Blakehill Farm aerodrome, north of Swindon - an RAF airfield accommodating about 60 Dakota aircraft. We spent the first few days of June in tented camp there being briefed for preparation of Operation Overlord in Normandy.

Our mission, together with the 8th Parachute Battalion, was to demolish one of five bridges on the River Dives, on the eastern front of the invasion zone. We were to cut off passage over the river to prevent the Germans from mounting an attack on the flank of the nearest landing beach.

On the 4th of June we loaded our demolition charges onto the C-47 RAF Dakotas but had to unload the same day due to the bad weather that delayed the D-Day operation. Finally, on the night of the 5th of June we re-loaded our equipment, fitted our parachutes and took off for France.

The drop was chaotic. Our 30-strong troop of Sappers was supposed to have dropped at the landing zone near Toufreville at zero hours and 50 minutes. We should have made our way to the bridge at Troarn, laid a ring main of detonating cord attached to the charges and blown it up.

However, clouds, wind and heavy German flak scattered the drop, and most of the men landed over a wide area. I dropped with my Bren-gunner, Tubby Dixon (with whom I had retained contact with but who sadly passed away recently this year.) near Ranville, on the periphery of woods about six miles to the north of the designated landing zone. We carried the ring mains in our sacks, weighing about forty pounds, but never made it to the bridge.

Meanwhile, with time running out, my Commanding Officer commandeered a Field Ambulance jeep and trailer, loaded it with



explosives and detonators and he, a Lieutenant and seven sappers drove it through Troarn under fire from the 21st Panzer Division which occupied the town. They reached the bridge about a mile away, and fortunately found it undefended. They managed to inflict heavy damage, eventually resulting in a completed mission. Major Roseveare was awarded the DSO for his action.

The various units of our squadron eventually made our way across the marshes and through the woods to the rendezvous point at Le Mesnil, where the squadron HQ was to be established, and dug in there for the next two months under Spartan conditions. There were the usual Sapper tasks of mine laying and clearance, road cratering and patrol work in enemy-held villages. We also provided infantry support to the 8th, 9th and Canadian Parachute Battalions. In mid-August we returned with our CO to the Troarn area to clear and repair the roadways. We re-bridged the streams east of the town, three of which had been destroyed by the Germans, and made temporary repairs to the railway bridge.

In September, when the major Allied breakout through France occurred, my Unit returned to Wiltshire on leave. We returned to action firstly in the Christmas Ardennes counter-offensive, and then the next parachute drop in Germany - the Rhine Crossing, or Operation Varsity in March 1945. In April of that year, as a Corporal, I was leading a small recce party which came under fire from a much larger German infantry unit. We returned fire and the Germans eventually surrendered. For this action I was later Mentioned in Despatches for distinguished services in North-West Europe.

Between those two deployments I found time to marry my fiancée Mary, whom I met in Wiltshire while training for D-Day and to whom I have been happily married for 74 years so far.



After the war I served in Palestine with the 6th Airborne Division, was commissioned at Aldershot in 1953 and posted to Germany with Mary and our two young daughters, where I spent 11 years with the British Army of the Rhine. Subsequent postings were to Naples, at HQ Allied Forces Southern Europe, and Nicosia with the United Nations.

These were followed by a move to the Royal School of Military Engineering in Chatham, where I left the Army after 45 years' service but took up the same staff post as a Retired Officer for a further 15 years.

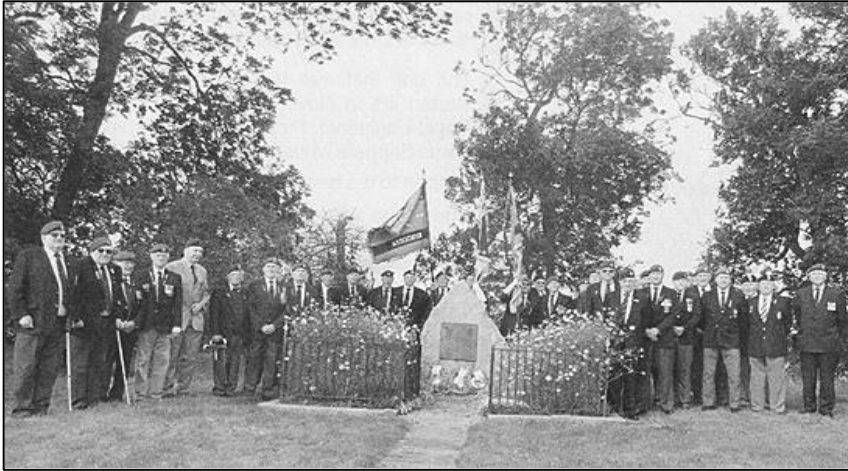
As a D-Day veteran, Alan Graham was awarded the French Legion d'honneur in 2015. His daughter, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are all very proud of him.



Alan with his devoted wife Mary who he lost in October this year after 75 Years of marriage.

Cromwell Lock Service 2019

John Lee – President AEA



The annual Service of Remembrance for the 10 victims from 131 Indep Para Sqn RE (V) who lost their lives during Ex Trent Chase was held on Saturday 28 September.

The weather was similar to that experienced on the same weekend 44 years ago, windy and showery, when an assault boat crewed by members of 300 Tp of 131 Sqn based in Falkirk went over the weir and all but one member of them were drowned.

A good representation from the Birmingham Branch and 299 Association were in attendance, together with our new Chairman, myself and a number of local residents. A reporter from the local Newtk newspaper interviewed some of those present so it was hopefully reported in it.



We met up at 11.00 hrs and a short service was conducted by the local vicar, Canon Paul Adams and wreaths were laid at the memorial by various members. The memorial itself was in good condition having been



tended by members from 299 Association, despite the activities of rabbits who insisted on burrowing there and disturbing the flowers. Our special thanks are owed to Gaz Coe and his team from 299 Association for his efforts in making the memorial smart and tidy.

Chris Shillito of 299 Association cast a wreath in the rather turbulent water at the side of the lock and we held a short silence to reflect and remember the casualties. The river was in full flow, similar to the conditions all those years ago.

It was good to meet up with a number of old acquaintances at the service and memories of yore were later recounted in the Muskham Ferry Inn to which most of us retired after the service.

Next year will be the 45th anniversary of the tragedy and plans are already being prepared to make this a rather special service to remember the victims of Ex Trent Chase.

Memorial Service to the 1st Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers

By Steve Wallis



Sunday 30th September saw the annual memorial service to the 1st Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers at Donington near Spalding in Lincolnshire.

The unit that was to become 1st Para Sqn RE started life in November 1941 as the Air Troop Royal Engineers, they were Britain's very first Airborne Sappers whose role was to provide technical support to the newly formed 1st Parachute Brigade. During the war, members of the Squadron took part in the Bruneval Raid, and saw active service in Tunisia and Sicily - where they took part in the assault on the Primosole Bridge before landing at Taranto for operations in the toe of Italy.

The Squadron was heavily involved in Operation Market Garden with the Sqn HQ, most of B Troop and elements of C Troop defending the Van Limburg Stirum School to the East of the Arnhem Bridge whilst

the remainder of the Squadron took part in the defence of the Sonnenburg in Oosterbeek. During the battle the squadron suffered heavily, when it reformed in England following the evacuation it numbered just 3 Officers and 11 Men.



A Memorial service to the men of the 1st Parachute Squadron is held each year at the church of St Mary and the Holy Rood in Donington Nr Spalding in Lincolnshire. The service is attended by surviving members of the Squadron and their families.

This years' service was attended by members of the Airborne Engineers Association and families of members of the Squadron, unfortunately there were no 1st Para Sqn members in attendance. The congregation was piped into the church by Frank Alexander Menzies-Hearn whilst AEA members lined the entrance.



The RBL Lincolnshire County Standard and the Standard of the Grimsby and Cleethorpes Parachute Regimental Association were also paraded.

During the service Frank Alexander Menzies-Hearn, played a very moving lament to the 1st Para Sqn and Charlie McColgan and Paul Moore laid a wreath at the Squadron memorial.

The service then moved outside into the church grounds and wreaths were laid at the Memorial stone beneath the Arnhem Oak tree. The splendid tree was grown from acorns taken from Oaks in Arnhem and the church provided saplings, grown from the Arnhem Oak, for the congregation to take away with them.

Following the wreath laying at the Arnhem Oak, Tea was provided in the village hall across the road from the Church. The hall contained a fascinating display of 1st Para Sqn memorabilia and provided a splendid opportunity for AEA members to meet with the families including one delightful lady who had joined the Woman's Land Army at the age of 16. This delightful lady kept us entertained with witty stories of her youth. Her conversations with us were full of innuendo and she laughed and joked with us as an equal. A true honour to meet a little old lady with a big heart, a fantastic sense of humour and outstanding stories.



After tea in the village hall, AEA members retired to the local hostelry for food and Liquid refreshment.

For those wishing to read more about the 1st Parachute Squadrons involvement in Operation Market Garden I would highly recommend the book 'Engineers at the Bridge' by John Sliz. This is one of a series of books by the same author covering the involvement of all Airborne Engineer Units which took part in the Battle of Arnhem.

Dutch town grants citizenship to fallen WW2 soldiers

A Dutch town has awarded honorary citizenship to hundreds of soldiers who died there during World War Two. The honour was granted to 328 men buried in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery in Brunssum to mark 75 years since its liberation.

It is the first time the award, the town's highest municipal honour, has been granted posthumously.

More than 100 relatives of the soldiers travelled from the UK, Australia and Canada for the ceremony.

One was Anne-Marie Williams from Wareham in Dorset whose uncle, Bombardier George Sebastian Pitfield, was shot on 13 November 1944, aged 26. She said his wife, Phyllis, lived to be 96 and never remarried.

Mr Pitfield, of the 94th Dorset and Hampshire Yeomanry Field Regiment Royal Artillery, is thought to be the first person buried at the cemetery.

Ms Williams said: "I feel very proud to feel that my uncle sacrificed his life for other people and it is amazing that the people of Brunssum still remember that today."

John Davies, from Perth, was three weeks old when his 23-year-old father, Rifleman Sidney Arthur Davies, was killed on 9 December 1944. He was serving with the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) when he was wounded near Geilenkirchen, Germany, and died at Brunssum. He said: "My mother, when my father was killed, she received a wallet which had been in his possession when he died and in the wallet was a letter from my mother to my father telling him that I had been born."

"I've always strived to do the best I can and I always think of my father when I do these things because I never knew him, but I can try my best to make him proud of me."

More than 1,500 British soldiers were killed during fighting around Arnhem in September 1944.

Nostalgic Prompts from the June 2019 Journal

By Gerry Taggart

Dear Dave, [Rutter]

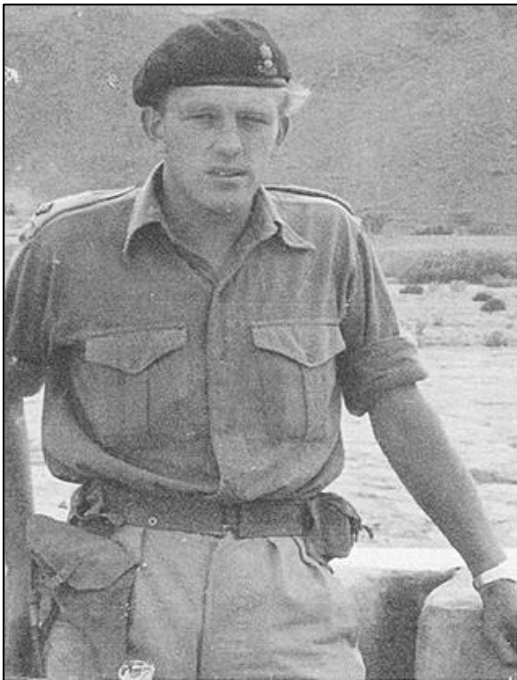
Congratulations on another excellent magazine. As always, there's something of interest for me. Some of it is half a century old of course! I have a few observations to make but, as I'm often told by Chris Davies, they're too long! Anyway, you have editor's blue pencil!

Fred Gray's Nostalgic Return to Scotland.

It was interesting to read Fred's report about his troop task in Scotland. He was my Tp Sgt in 1 Troop and I heard his accounts many times. To hear about Bill Marks and Graham Owens was coincidental too. See my comments about the Commando Brigade below.

Gurney Fisher

I couldn't get to Gurney's Funeral but I had a very nice letter from Wendy in response to mine. She herself told me how much she appreciated the huge support she got from the Airborne Engineer Family. Peter Kershaw's description of Gurney's rugby was very accurate. He always took on the opposition full frontal.



I was Adjutant of 28 Amphibious Regiment when Gurney arrived as a Sergeant in charge of his section of M2 Rigs. He came to my office to complain about many "Mickey Mouse" aspects of life in BAOR. He despaired at the standard of training and motivation. Anyway, he came to my quarter one evening and we hatched a plan for him to win the Section competition. He did of course. He still found time to play rugby (vigorously) for Hameln Rats Rugby Club.

"Park Troop 1967" Picture.

Well this was taken in November 1965; not 1967, just after we were renamed Support Troop (All Park Units were re-titled). Imagine being a young "troopy" with Mogg and Middlemass? Only problem for them was that I knew all the Parky stuff, having been in BAOR in 65 Corps Fd Park Squadron and had done an MTO Course at Army MT School. I'd also been on a year's active service in Radfan and Aden. So I could see the wool before anyone attempted to pull it over my eyes. I wasn't that innocent! However, I listened and learnt much from these two stalwarts.

Al Milah

I enjoyed reading the story of the wonderful Captain Eoghann MacLachlainn, who eventually was awarded his GSM for active service in Aden. That medal saga is ridiculous because the Radfan Medal was awarded after 14 days but the S Arabia one was 28 Days. Al Milah was close enough to the Radfan!

This picture of me was taken on top of the fort at Al Milah by the OC of the RE Well Drilling Team preparing for 300 Para Squadron's camp. I had been in Thumier/Habilayn in Radfan for about six months as a 2 Lt in charge of 1 troop 50 Field Squadron. I was on my way to see 9 Squadron HQ and Park Troop working on the Dhala Road High Speed Resurfacing Unit. My mission was to be briefed by Syd Rooth about joining 9 Squadron to do P Company. That consisted of one sentence, "Go to Redfields House, see Big John Smith and start pre-para."

"Where's Redfields House and who's John Smith?," I asked.

Answer, "Bloody well find out!," I did.

When on the roof of Al Milah Fort, I said I felt like a Figure 11 target. "There's no dissident activity here. Don't be such a wimp." I was informed.

A short time later, the nearby Al Milah camp was attacked by snipers as you reported. Captain MacLachlann was shot through both cheeks (bullet missed bones and teeth) and my colleague, 2 Lt Jeremy Gibb of 50 Squadron, was shot through the neck, missing his spinal cord and blood vessels. I saw them both in hospital looking devil-may-care, a few days after the attack. Lucky pair.

Cloutman Story

There had been a Staff Officer RE and QMSI RE in Commando Brigade for some years. The Royal Marines had no sappers other than their unit Assault Engineers. Bill Marks, who Fred mentions, was one of a long line of ex 9 Sqn "SOREs" in 3 Cdo Bde HQ. Graham Owens (also mentioned by Fred) became OC of 59 Cdo Sqn. 9 Squadron had provided a captain and a QMSI to the Cdo Bde for some time.

People like Jock Wallace, Reg Orton, Mike Addison, Bill Marks and Don Spary GM had all served. When I arrived, the Marines talked about Jock like he could walk on water!

The story in the last journal contains a picture of the Officer Commanding 59 Field Squadron in Singapore. It's not just any OC; it's Major JB (John) Grosvenor, who had served in 9 Para Squadron in the Canal Zone. If the picture had been taken from the right, we could have seen his wings and, if in colour, we could have seen his green beret! John was a great cross-country runner and had no trouble in passing the Commando Course in his late thirties. His second in Command was Captain Geoff Field, whose obituary you published.

Thus It Was

By Lucky Lockhurst

It was descending on a bright and Sunday lunch time
It was welcoming smiles and warm handshakes from the Dutch civilians.
It was marching down leafy lanes and into the quiet, Sunday afternoon streets.
Suddenly it was machine guns - it was stretcher bearers
It was machine guns - it was stretcher bearers.
It was hand grenades and shouts of "Die, you German bastards"
It was leaping from garden to garden - it was dodging from doorway to doorway.
It was smashing out of windows and beating out fires.
It was noise - it was night - it was morning - it was the second lift;
It was more men - more strength - more chances of success;
Days followed night and night followed days;
And it was carrying in the wounded and carrying out the dead;
It was frantically waving yellow silk triangles,
It was watching the slaughter of valiant airmen;
It was choking at the sight of badly needed supplies drifting out of reach,
It was cursing - it was praying,
It was the screeching of panzers and the whirring of the mortar bombs,
It was the mutilated trees and mutilated men,
It was crapping in the corner of a garage or in the corner of a slit trench,
It was the V-sign, stuttered out of a Bren gun,
It was the cries of 'Whao Mahomed' and the groans of the badly wounded;
It was the dirt in the mouth and the ringing in the ears,
It was the rain-soaked clothing and the blood-soaked earth, it was the shortage of food, of ammunition, of sleep, of hope, it was
surrender, but it was not a defeat,
It was Arnhem - 1944.

AEA Website

By Dave Pace

As an Association we've had our own internet presence for quite some time, however the latest evolution of our web site brings a more modern design and features.

We originally launched our site with the domain name **www.airbornesappers.org.uk** but the opportunity to purchase an additional domain name **www.aea.org.uk** was too good to miss so we now own that too, you can use either to access our site content.

One of the major updates to the site is the Members Only content, which is password protected and currently consists of:

- Branch and Executive Committee minutes
- The AEA Constitution
- AEA Journal articles.

We have sent out usernames and passwords to all members where we have their email address in our membership database.

If you have not yet received your username and password please get in touch with me as follows:

David Pace

169 College Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6BX Landline: 01304 373933 Mobile: 07977 282620

Email: contactaeawebmaster@gmail.com

Please feel free to use these contact details for any other web site related matters. For example, if you have a suggestion, have encountered a site problem or if you just need some help using the site.

Double Hills Commemorative Service



Members of the Airborne Engineers Association, Royal Engineers Association Airborne Branch and serving soldiers from 9 Parachute Sqn RE assembled on Sunday 1 September for the Double Hills Memorial service.

On 17th Sept 1944, on route for Arnhem, a glider piloted by two Glider Pilots and carrying 21 Members of 9th Field Company (Airborne) broke up over the village of Paulton Nr Bristol. All aboard were killed and became the first fatalities of Operation Market Garden.

9 Sqn, currently the longest serving 'In Role' Airborne unit of the British Army had the dubious honour of having the highest percentage fatalities of any unit that took part in the operation.

This commemoration was the 40th Memorial service for those killed in the Glider accident, at Double Hills. The Parade was taken by Brigadier John Clarke, former Officer Commanding 9 Para Sqn RE, and now Commander of 16 Air Assault Brigade.



John Askey, Gus Hales & Brig Ian McGill



Presentation by John Lee of an AEA Plaque to Peter Yeates and also a President's Commendation Certificate in recognition for the sterling work carried out by Peter in organising the Commemorative Double Hills Service for the past 40 years.

Op Banner Tales

By Ronnie Hadden



“You Stupid Boy”

Every time I watch the TV programme ‘Dad’s Army’ where Capt Mainwaring (Manning) rebukes Private Pike for being a “stupid boy” following one of Pike’s silly gaffes, I am reminded of an incident involving myself and a house search in Belfast. The incident in question occurred during the Squadron’s 1973 tour of Northern Ireland. This year, 2019, as some will recall occasioned the 50th anniversary of Op Banner - the Northern Ireland military operation to support the then RUC, and implement numerous internal security activities on behalf of the UK government. Operation Banner lasted from August 1969 through to July 2007. Many of us will have been involved in this operation and it would be worthy if others could share suitable tales from their experiences; the more light-hearted the better.

The ‘stupid boy’ incident occurred in 1973 when I was a section commander in 2 Troop, 9 Independent Para Sqn RE. My section at the time formed part of a search operation being carried out on a residential area in the Markets district of Belfast. The Markets area is more or less in central Belfast and, at the time, not unaccustomed to certain adverse republican activity. Several houses were to be searched on this occasion. I can’t remember all the names of the guys then in my section, but a highly dependable firm bunch of lads

nonetheless - all airborne of course. However, I do recall one young lad who had just joined the Squadron, and troop, prior to the tour.

On arrival in the Markets I assembled my team outside the house we were assigned to search and knocked on the door. The door was opened by the woman of the house and I quickly informed her that under the Emergency Powers Act as amended 1972 her home was to be searched. The lads then went straight in, some going immediately to the back of the house while at least two, including the young lad, went upstairs as briefed. The time of the search was approximately 7:30 pm in the evening. I asked the lady of the house to assemble all family members in the living room area. Most members were already seated within the room - around five or six people in total.

Just as I was advising the assembled group on the search procedure about to take place, the young soldier mentioned previously came bouncing down the stairs in a rather excited state. He informed me that there was an elderly gentleman in bed upstairs refusing to get out of bed and join everyone else downstairs. The woman of the house intervened saying, “Oh that will be my father. I’ll go and have a word with him.” I followed her upstairs with our young lad in tow leaving the rest of the team to keep an eye on the remaining occupants. I entered the gentleman’s bedroom and he informed me, somewhat irritably, that he couldn’t get out of bed as he had no legs. He was a gentleman in his seventies. “I’m glad you’re here,” he said, “I tried to tell that young fellow there, but he just ran off before I could explain anything.” With that he rolled back the bed covers revealing the amputation of both legs at thigh level. He offered to get out of bed if we got his artificial limbs from the cupboard in the room. I told the gentleman to stay where he was and that my guys would search around him. “That young fellow there was in too much of a hurry and just wouldn’t listen,” he repeated again. Having sorted that situation out it was time for me to return downstairs. Dad’s Army, of course, was a highly popular programme on the television at that time and, as I left the room I drolly whispered to the young lad in a style akin to Capt ‘Manning,’ “You stupid boy.”

Just like Private Pike he tried to justify his previous action by saying rather defensively, “Well I didn’t know he had no legs.” I replied, “Well you should have found out shouldn’t you? Just make sure you check the bed properly.” It was all like a scene reminiscent of Dad’s Army. On my way back downstairs I thought to myself, great I’m turning into Capt ‘Manning’ and I’m only 27. The lad of course was simply following search practice whereby his immediate job was to get anyone upstairs downstairs as quickly as possible. He was merely following set procedure a little too rigidly, and sought the help of his section commander. In 9 we always liked our lads to react with good sense when confronted with odd situations. I’m pleased to say that like all new lads who came to 9 Independent the soldier in question quickly developed into a solid, self-confident member of the Unit.

“There’s Nothing in Here Mister”

In the Squadron’s 1971 tour of Northern Ireland the search scene was less clear-cut in procedural terms. For example there was no need to quote the Emergency Powers Act and we were more inclined to react directly to developing situations and information received. Nonetheless, the Squadron did plan and execute several searches of the Crumlin Road Jail and Long Kesh Detention Centre (later the Maze prison). The Squadron divers were also awarded the pleasure of searching Belfast’s sewers - some guys just land on their feet every time. I do recollect one particular search operation undertaken on the night of 31st December ’71 - 1st January 72,

(i.e. New Year's Day), in the Short Strand area of Belfast. Apparently a couple of terrorist snipers fired at a sangar within the Short Strand bus station army base just before midnight - a welcome to the New Year gesture no doubt.

The Squadron was based at Antrim and promptly tasked to assist 1 Para in a major search of the Short Strand in a bid to trace the terrorists and weapons used. At the time 1 Para was 39 Brigade's resident battalion on a 20 month tour of duty. The bulk of the Squadron was roused from their beds and quickly transported mainly by Bedford RLs to the Short Strand.

The mission was to search four to five streets of houses and properties around the Short Strand area; basically a lot of occupied houses. All of these homes were terraced properties similar to the old style brick houses seen on Coronation Street, comprising of a front door opening onto the main street and an enclosed backyard at the rear.

At this point I was a section commander with 3 Troop. Pete Williams was the troop commander and Dick Richards our staff sergeant. I lost count of the number of houses my section searched that night but I recall one particular property. This was a house occupied by a woman in her twenties, and seven children. When asked where her husband was the woman informed me that she didn't know, but suspected he was in the Republic and hadn't seen him for over a year. During the search we found no evidence of any male clothing, etc, so make what you wish of that circumstance. The house was immaculate and there was no sign of any alcohol or cigarettes.

We set about searching each room of the house and I eventually came to an upstairs bedroom. The woman informed me it was the children's room and she was loath to disturb them. I informed her it had to be searched. She switched the light on and I and one other team member entered the room. Inside was a large double bed with four little girls in it aged roughly between four and eight, plus a smaller sized bed with two young lads aged I guess five and nine years old. There was also a baby's cot containing a young child. The baby instantly started to cry and the woman removed it from the cot. She soon had that situation under control. All the kids looked clean and in good health as well as nicely dressed. Short Strand is not a well-to-do area of Belfast. At first the girls were shy and hid their faces under the bed covers. The young lads just looked at us bemused. It was after all about 3:30 am in the morning. The two of us set about searching the room cupboards and furniture, and the now empty cot, watched over by the woman.

We left the two beds till last. By this time the little girls had lost their initial shyness and were now quite chatty asking such questions as, "What are you looking for?" To be fair it's not every day you get a couple of fit, lively guys, in red berets, Denison smocks, flak jackets and SLRs rummaging through your bedroom in the early hours of a Saturday morning. For them this was an out of the ordinary event. Finally I decided I needed to search the large double bed while my search partner checked the boy's bed. "There's nothing in here mister," said one of the young ladies rolling back the covers. I replied teasingly, "I just don't believe you. There might be something hidden at the foot of the bed." With that I put my hands under the covers at the bottom of the bed to check all was clear. This caused some giggling and laughing from the girls as well as some playful kicking of my hands with their feet. They were all soon at it. In retaliation I grabbed their feet and little toes which sent them into fits of laughter and high pitched screams that only little girls can achieve. Everyone else in the room was now in laughter.

The screams were heard outside in the street where the OC, Major Awford, and SSM, Dave Edmonds, were located. They had been coordinating the search from the centre of the street ensuring that no house got overlooked. On hearing these screams the OC turned to Dave and said, "Sergeant Major find out what's going on in that house." Dave came into the house through the open door, which we had been instructed to leave open, and asked one of the lads what all the screaming was about? "Oh it's just Ronnie Hadden playing with the kids," was the reply. With that Dave shouted up the stairs, "Corporal Hadden you're here to search not play with the kids." "Right oh Sir," I replied. I did find one article nevertheless at the foot of the bed which was a rather worn out small teddy bear with one ear and an eye missing. This was quickly snatched from me by the youngest of the little girls. At this point I was satisfied the upstairs search was complete and vacated the room to the cheeky pleasantries of, "See you mister." I obviously had established myself as the kid's favourite searcher.

We went on to search more houses and commercial properties finishing at about 2:00 pm in the afternoon. Many residents were in various states of celebration - New Year after all. We had been at it for over 12 hours.

299 Memorial Parade & Service



Fifteen 299 Association members paraded at the Memorial Day for the Yorkshire Air Museum, Elvington near York on the 1st Sept 2019, especially our standard bearer Tony Irwin who never fails to fulfil this role. The rain stayed away on this grey and windy day, thankfully for the larger than normal number of spectators this year, plus many families. Unfortunately the Battle of Britain fly past had to be cancelled for technical reasons.

The photo shows Paul Sims greeting The Archbishop of York, Dr John Tucker Mugabi Sentamu after the service, with Tony Costello looking on. Simbo now thinks his kind words to the Doctor this day will save him from eventual purgatory. There's not a hope in hell!

2019 AGM/Reunion Weekend at Banbury

By Dave Rutter

When it was first disclosed that the Aldershot branch would be responsible for organising the 2019 event, it became very apparent that we would have to find a suitable venue away from Aldershot. Tentative enquires at the only suitable venue proved to be financially unacceptable. With offers of help received from Chris Davies, John Lee and Tony Manley to find an alternative location, the search began.

We decided that the location should accommodate the following criteria:

A hotel that could offer reasonably priced accommodation, with adequate parking facilities, free use of a lecture room for the AGM and a dining room suitable and large enough for the Saturday evening gala dinner.

If possible we should seek out a hotel close to or in the centre of a town that could offer shopping facilities for the ladies and a variety of pubs and restaurants - a Weatherspoons pub would probably be too much to ask.

Enquiries and visits were made to hotels in Reading, Basingstoke, Oxford, Warwick and Stratford upon Avon. The latter was visited in the company of Tony Manley. It was quite an exceptionally fine hotel and could offer most of our requirements. However, looking through the wine and beer prices it became evident that such costs would not be appreciated by our members. Beer was £5.75 a pint, Guinness £6.50 and wine almost £6.50 a glass. They were somewhat taken aback when asked if they could do a reduced bar pricing, retorting with the firm answer, "Definitely not!" It was when they demanded £500 for the use of a lecture hall for our AGM that we made a hasty retreat.

Other suitable hotels were found to be too far out of town and so the search continued.

It was thanks to John & Pat Lee that we were drawn to Banbury. They had trawled through the internet and had found a hotel that appeared to fulfil our requirements. But on visiting this establishment it was quite evident that we should continue looking elsewhere. As we were leaving this hotel the manager suggested that we investigate the Whately Hall hotel in the centre of town. Lisa, the manager of the Whately hotel offered us everything we needed. The one slight draw back was that they could only seat 110 persons for the gala dinner. As it turned out we had 107 seated for the gala dinner. Unfortunately, a couple of individuals had forgotten they had made or cancelled their bookings - so no doubt their credit cards took an unnecessary hit!

In consultation with the manager, it was agreed that our members booked their accommodation directly with the hotel reception. This took a lot of the hassle of sending out booking forms and accounting for member's individual requirements.

In consequence, the committee received many positive comments on both the hotel, hotel staff hosting and in particular the facilities available in the town of Banbury, which offered a great selection of pubs, restaurants and a shopping centre. And of course the mandatory Weatherspoons pub, which was located 300 yards from the hotel.

Sincere thanks are extended to Dave & Lorna Leibrick who not only organised an extremely successful raffle but also, with the help of Sandra Ferry, Mary Ryan, Jeannette Rutter, Ruth Barrie, Melanie Wallis & Edwina Ball, dressed the Gala dining tables.

Regrettably, although several members took along their cameras, few photos have been passed on for publication in this journal edition.



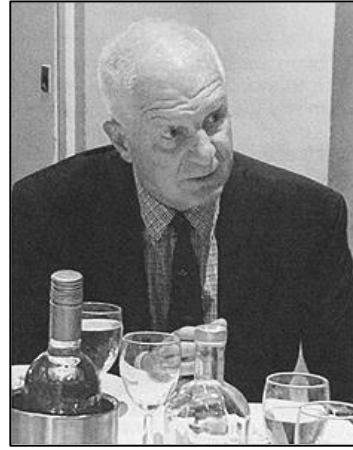
Several members have suggested the AEA return to Banbury in the not too distant future.

But I'm not volunteering to take up the gauntlet.

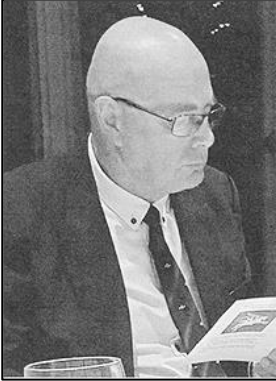
The AEA AGM Committee
Dave Rutter, Steve Wallis, John Lee, Jimmy Hill & Billy Morris



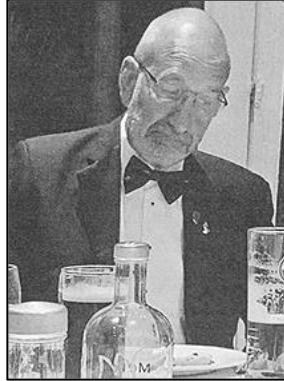
John Ferry hands over the 'Chairman's gavel' to Steve Wallis



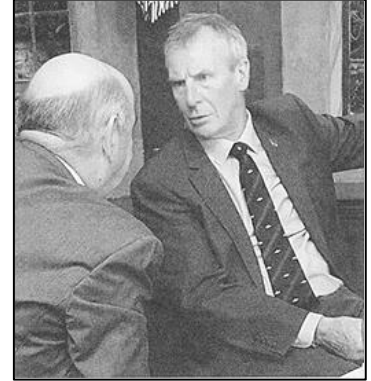
International attendee, Graeme Armstrong from Iowa, USA



Late arrival - Jim Harrower, but



Richard Fleck - what is that on my plate?



Sam Hesketh & Jeff Barlow putting the world to rights!



Mick Leather, Billy Morris, Gerry Bonner, Pat Neal, Graeme Armstrong & Jim Harrower



Ernest conversations on the top table - while Melanie Wallis hides behind the balloons

“Gentlemen, Welcome to the AEA 2019 Fergie Semple Golf Competition”



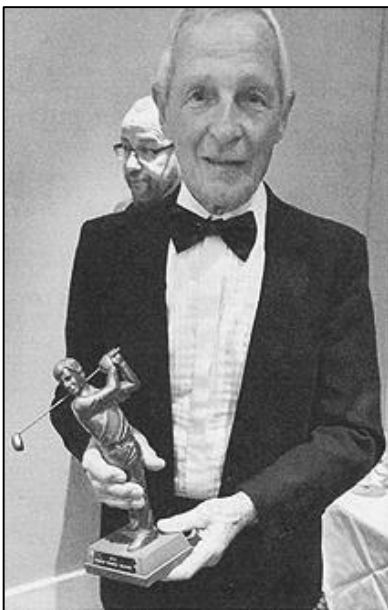
Graeme Armstrong, Dan Sumnail, Martin New, Mick Ridge, Mick Leather, Dave Rutter, Jimmy Hill, Harry Lockwood, Billy Morris & Andy Milsom
(ace photographer: Tony Hogan)

This year's annual golf competition was held at the Rye Hill Golf Club, Milcombe, Banbury, a short drive from the reunion venue. Eleven hardy members of the association took part, it was great to welcome three members from the Regt who are all serving at Woodbridge. This year's field drew members from as far afield as the USA, Graeme Armstrong and from Spain, Mick Ridge to add an international feel. The weather was going to be a major factor in the playing conditions on the Friday morning. But it did not stop Harry Lockwood turning up in shorts!

After a hearty 'fat boys' breakfast in the club house and with Jimmy Hill having organised the day's playing order. Let battle commence!

In my 4 ball was Harry Lockwood, Jimmy Hill, and Martin New from 23 Para Engr Regt. After a nervous start, I started to relax and managed to Par the next 3 holes, as did my good mate and playing rival Jimmy Hill. The weather took a turn for the worse and down came the rain. So waterproofs and umbrellas were the order of the day for the next hour or so, when the sun returned once again.

The course was challenging but open, and the greens, were fast and undulating, adding to the tension, as the match progressed, Jimmy and me were nip and tuck, with only a point between us. The longest drive competition was won by Tony Hogan, with a monster drive down the 9th Fairway. As we approached the 12th Green a par 3 of 161 yards, this was the nearest to the pin competition, there was already a marker on the green some 15 foot from the flag, hit by Martin New of 23 Para Engr Regt. I took my 3 iron and placed the ball within 10 foot of the flag, happy days, I win the nearest the pin, as our 4 ball was the last group.



The competition between Jimmy and myself, all went down to the last hole, we were both on 28 points, but Jimmy got the better of me and putted in for a score of 2 thus beating me on the final putt. What a match, what a great day playing with the other members, and having the banter around the course.

I can only relay what was happening in our group, unbeknown to us, Dave the 'Shark' Rutter was having the best game of us all coming in with a score of 33 Stableford points. So, the final batting order of the day and the bragging rights are as follows:

2019 Fergie Semple Champion: Dave Rutter 33 points

Runner up: Jimmy Hill 30 points

Longest Drive: Tony Hogan

Nearest the pin; Billy Morris

Bandit of the day: Dan Sumnall (23 Para Engr Regt) for a second shot that landed within 2 feet of the flag from a distance of 160 yards.

All budding golfers and existing players, please come along next year, and support this golf competition held during the reunion weekend. Always played on the Friday morning, Tee off around 1000 hrs. Next year's course details to follow.

Presentation of Certificate of Congratulations- to Tom Hicks-100 Years old!

By Capt JC Thompson



There are very few Arnhem Veterans left and certainly Tom Hicks is one of a select band who are 100 years old. I had the honour of presenting him with a Chief Royal Engineer, Lieutenant General Tyrone Urch CBE Certificate of Congratulations for his 100th Birthday and what a character he is.

He was selected to join 1st Parachute Squadron RE in 1942 after completing arduous physical training and his parachute course. It wasn't long before he was flying out to Algiers to undertake parachute jumps in the desert in preparation for airborne operations into Sicily and then Italy.

In late August 1944 he found himself in Bone, France and more training to be ready for Operation MARKET GARDEN and the airborne operation that is enshrined in Parachute history. On the afternoon of the 17th September 1944 Tom landed on the DZ close to Arnhem and he took up position in the School House next to the Bridge.

Tom was wounded 3 times and eventually captured by the German Forces and sent to a camp near Fallingbostal, Germany where he was forced to work in a Lead mine until his liberation in April 1945.

Tom lives in Royston, Barnsley and was completing tandem parachute jumps until quite recently and gets on his exercise bike every day to keep himself fit, but has now decided that at his grand age he will have to give up playing tennis!

Arnhem 75

By Mick Leather

I had the good fortune of being able to get a place on the trip to Arnhem this year organised by the Yorkshire Branch and specifically Dave Grimbley. It was for the 75th Anniversary and I will be forever grateful.



The accommodation was booked in Arnhem, travel arrangements were down to the individual which made sense as members of the group were travelling from all sorts of locations. Issy and I had the pleasure of travelling with Dave Rutter who kindly put us up the night before as we were on an early flight out of Gatwick.

I have been to Schiphol Airport before but you cannot fail to be impressed by its efficiency with the train station right in the airport leaving walking between modes of transport to the minimum, which was just as well because we had a suitcase between us big enough for an illegal immigrant!

The train journey to Arnhem gave you time to take in the countryside and towns we went through and overriding impression I got was how clean and well-kept Holland is, exuding a sense of pride by the Dutch to respect their land and each other. I am sure it has its areas of more dubious notoriety, but it wasn't obvious to us.

We were billeted in the Holiday Inn Express which was perfectly positioned in the Town centre, minutes from the train station and right next to a Bar!! What became very apparent on arrival was how important these celebrations are to the Dutch people to remind themselves and the younger generations of how important this occasion is. The town was adorned with maroon and sky-blue flags and bunting everywhere, every building or street light was festooned with the stuff that left the casual passer-by, (If there were any) that this weekend was about the events of 75 years ago. It did cross my mind that perhaps we should move airborne forces weekend from Aldershot to here, as the town seemed to embrace the airborne soldier with a little more reverence than Aidershot does with its one remaining pub.



Dave Grimbley had some help with the organisation and this came in the very capable hands of Tom and Les, two Dutch airborne enthusiasts that arranged a full itinerary with transport.

The tours started on the Friday when we were bussed to the King Willem III barracks, which was the training depot of the current Dutch police both civil and military for a memorial service to commemorate the time and location of some very brave men who under the command of Col G M Warrack set up a temporary hospital after to Battles to deal with the volume of injured. The Family of Col Warrack were in attendance and the CO of the camp, whilst Dutch, had the very English name of Michael Tattersall. They conducted a service for the soldiers from all the countries and laid wreaths at their memorial. Children also play a big part in the ceremony as the Dutch believe it is important for them to understand how they have their freedom today. What an amazing idea why don't we teach that to our younger generation...!!!?????!!!. Afterwards we were shown around the barracks and particularly to a room that was used by ***** with all the paraphernalia that was used during this period including registers of all the wounded, surgical instruments and other items that the soldiers would have used at the time.

There was also the hiding place of ***** who escaped after the hospital was shut down following the 4 weeks of its existence.



The Bus trundled on and we went onto Oosterbeek where we had time at the Museum which was the old Hartenstein Hotel, there was a glider set up on the town green next to the memorial to the Polish and more re-enactment bodies floating around than the current regiment could muster. It was surreal and fun although, perhaps not fully understanding the situation raised a comment from my wife "Are they entitled to wear those berets or are they just a load of wannabes?" I understand her sentiment but explained the necessity of the theatre. We had time to take light refreshment in the biggest beer tent I have seen, thankfully rather empty which gives respect from the visitors to the significance of the event. Perhaps the most poignant moment was when Les Ramson, a 97 year old veteran was returning to the bus and a woman came running out of an adjacent house, hugged Les and cried "thank you, thank you" to which Les, somewhat bewildered replied "I didn't do it on My Own!!"



We then managed to get to the Church on Oosterbeek and the cafe which looked out on the Rhine, where the Devon and Dorset's got ripped to pieces trying to retake an almost impossible position and were cut down but with stories of grit and determination. Here we were treated to the firing of a light field gun by the re-enactment folk....Deafening... I said "DEAFENING".... I said "DE....Oh sod off!

There was so much to take in and not a lot of time to do it. We were supposed to go on to the cemetery as we knew Sunday would be very busy but this was not possible because of time constraints.

The Friday afternoon we were left to our own devices and I have to say that with a bar directly opposite from the hotel, that was the only move

that was not in the best interests of some individuals. That said, we would not be who we are if we didn't gather around a Hostelry and "pull up a sand bag" to swap stories of people we didn't serve with but who over time seemed to have been there in one great big pot where the different eras blended into one another to make that Airborne stew.

Saturday saw us back on the bus to make our way to Ginkel Heath to take in the Planned Drops, but partly due to a late departure but mostly to a total under estimation of the numbers that would attend, we were delayed in getting there. Arnhem had made provisions for about 60,000 attendees; they got over 100,000. Traffic was grid locked everywhere and the only thing that was moving was the 1000's of bicycles in all shapes and sizes whizzing past us. We missed the 1st drop, so determined not to miss any more, Myself, Phil Taylor and the spritely Dave Rutter decided to speed march the last 7 Kms, which was done at a fine pace; and whilst those amongst you play it down as "a milk Run", I am actually carrying more these days than I ever did with a Bergen.

Needless to say the Drop zone was mobbed with people and beer tents. The highlight was watching the various aircraft coming in a gorging out the Paras, many on clean fatigue. Those that came out on both sides managed to this day to steal air, come down on one chute, pass through each other's rigging lines and on 2 occasions that I saw, pulled their reserves much to the jeering of the crowds and the abuse synonymous with our airborne mentality

On returning to our hotel, we prepared for a more cultured evening by way of a meal in a restaurant which had been pre ordered and booked. It was pleasant and good insight to Officers Mess etiquette as Issy and I sat with 3 ex ranker officers who ordered wine by the bottle, drank the lot and failed to walk in a straight line back to the billet!! Thankfully did pay for it opposed to trying to put it on a chit for a later mess bill.

Sunday came and this for me was the pinnacle of the weekend, attending the service at the Oosterbeek cemetery. Again, it was mobbed and you were lucky to get close. The service was carried out by several religious denominations and in different languages of Dutch, Polish and English, which in today's climate I suppose is only proper. Then 1400 children, each one assigned a grave, come into the cemetery and after reciting the name of the grave they are at, even if it is "Known only to God" then lay their flowers. An ad lib from this is that since our return and at the time of writing this article, Charlie McColgan was so touched by the humility of a young "Flower Girl" when she donned is red beret, that he i has started raising donations in way of cash and berets to be able to issue every child next year with a genuine red beret and badge for the Sunday Service. You can get his details from the Facebook pages of the old and bold or the airborne riders.



There is not much more I can say, and if I have got the order and something's wrong, I do not apologise. The exercise was one of adulation and respect and to say it was humbling is an understatement. I have wondered in the past whether or not we cling to that bit of our past when we were Airborne Engineers but that was put to bed when during this weekend as we were reminded of the sacrifices made by the men of Arnhem all those years ago. The stories of bravery, bravado, inventiveness and sheer audacity were in abundance with behaviour during and after the battles that we are familiar with as in the anecdotes that we regale of our colleges that we served with in our time, and then I knew why I had wanted to be an airborne soldier, and if you want to be respected and treated better, there is no better place than Arnhem.

Presentation by Les to Ed van de Laan on the behalf of 299 Association

Despite dropping 20,000 (numbers Varied) paratroopers and airborne warriors on their town, staying 9 days, wrecking it, bugging out and not returning for another 6 months, the people of Arnhem are grateful. So, if you do decide to make that pilgrimage, enjoy it but remember why you are there. God Bless Les, you're right you didn't do it on your own.... but being airborne, you probably would have tried.

News from the Branches

Aldershot Branch

Dave Rutter – Secretary

Our August Bank Holiday BBQ held in the garden of Fred & Betty Gray, was once again an enjoyable event. Obviously the favourable weather and an excellent selection from the BBQ provided by master chef Tony Manley and a varying range of salad dishes provided by the ladies was most appreciated. For many years our hosts have opened their garden and home to branch members and it is most appreciated by all concerned.

Hosting the October AGM/Reunion in Banbury being some 100 miles from Aldershot produced a few communication problems and more than a few last minute amendments to the accommodation and gala seating plan. However, much of the stress was alleviated by Lisa, the extremely competent hotel manager.

Taking up the gauntlet for the organisation of the grand raffle, Dave Leibrick, ably assisted by wife Lorna and Billy Morris really came up trumps. Dave persuaded several civilian companies to make generous donations, affording us to offer star prizes of a 40" colour TV, 2 children's bicycles, £100 cash prize and a complimentary 4-ball golf round. These were further boosted by a vast collection of prizes donated by association members.

During the AGM it was voted that the raffle proceeds be donated to Combat Stress. The sum raised was further boosted thanks to the 'sales patter' of Mark Desborough and also from the Crazy Golf competition organised by Billy Morris. In total, the sum of £1,915 was donated to the worthy cause of "Combat Stress".

The late cancellation on Saturday afternoon of one couple and the failure to arrive by two other gentlemen, proved most advantageous for Danny McGowan, Fred Preedy and their wives, who arrived on spec hoping to be seated at the gala dinner. With yet a further amendment to the seating plan their hopes were fulfilled. Not to be forgotten for his obvious early memory loss, Jim Harrower was more than surprised to receive a phone call asking if he was on his way to the gala dinner. "When is it?" came the reply. "In approx... one and a half hours' time", was the reply. Jim made it with time to spare, but I'm not sure if the hotel management charged him for the Friday night accommodation that he had also previously booked!

From the general 'thumbs up' comments for the hotel and in particular the town of Banbury gave credit to the efforts of the Aldershot organising committee.



Branch member Bob Sullivan MBE became an 'In Pensioner' at the Royal Hospital Chelsea in May 2019. Our president, John Lee and Col Chris Davies MBE had made previous visits to Bob and to Col John Humphries and so with the weekend visitor of Michael Ellery, we made arrangements with Bob to visit him on Saturday 9th November.

Awaiting our arrival at the hospital guard room, Bob quickly, (he was mounted on a mobility scooter) took us on a guided tour to various interesting places within the vast building.

Our first stop was to the elaborate chapel then on to the 'great hall' that serves as the main dining room for the 300 or so pensioners where he indicated his favoured seating place and the following morning's extensive breakfast menu, which appeared to cater for every conceivable dietary requirement.

Bob & Mike Ellery in the Chapel

In what appeared to be a 'Gentleman's drinking bar, but that was way back, as the hospital now has 10 lady 'Chelsea Pensioners', we paused for a pint. How much? It seemed that the standard price for most ales and wines was a mere £2.30!

Suitably watered, we were then directed to Bob's accommodation. It was amazing how much had changed since my last visit some 12 years ago. Gone had the tiny berths as they were then known, to be replaced with a reasonable sized room with en-suite facilities and other homely comforts. We were allowed to try for size Bob's tricorne dress hat - and Mike and I agreed that it wasn't the most comfortable headdress!





All too soon it was time to bid our farewells with a promise to look out for Bob at the following day's Cenotaph parade.

Bob took great delight in informing us that his wheelchair assistant for the forthcoming parade would be Johnson Beharry VC.

Unfortunately the AEA contingent for the parade was too far back for us to make contact with Bob, but managed to spot him on the BBC recording and he was also featured in the national newspapers on Monday the 11th November.

Following our December meeting, the branch will take a winter break during the dreary months of January and February and will surface again in March 2020.

On the behalf of our President, Sir Donald Spiers, Chairman, Dick Brown and all branch members, we extend seasonal greetings to one and each and a Prosperous New Year to all.

Birmingham Branch

Steve Brown – Secretary

Unfortunately the Birmingham branch missed the deadline for the June issue. For this reason we will endeavour to bring the Journal up to date the on the important items that the branch has been involved with.

At the Branch AGM in April the Chairman at the time John Phillips reported to the meeting that he had not received any nominations from members for the posts of those committee members who were wishing to stand down. This left the branch having to fill the necessary posts of Chairman and Secretary. These posts, at the close of the AGM and OGM had failed to be filled so members went away to consider the future of the Branch.

The remainder of the committee remained in post

Vice Chairman: Neville Collins remains.

- Treasurer: Unchanged, Tom Smith.
- Welfare: Tony Higgins was happy to stay as welfare.
- Membership: Eamon Smyth will continue in membership post.
- PRA Representative: Neville Collins was willing to stay on as PRA Rep.

At the May meeting Neville Collins volunteered to stay on permanently as Chairman and Steve Brown stated that he would volunteer to fill the Secretary post until a replacement could be found with a time limit of April 2020.

At the May OGM it was suggested to organise a visit to RAF Brize Norton and the date of this would be 7th August 2019, this being the best choice for members. This meant that the August meeting needed to be cancelled. The visit went ahead with some 35 attending consisting of branch members and Birmingham PRA members. This was a successful visit and we were very well looked after by the PJI's and station staff. It was an excellent insight into the amount of new equipment that is available to the modern parachutist. Members on return from RAF Brize Norton below.



Bunny Brown: On the 25th May Bunnies wife, Jan with close family and several members from the branch travelled to Netheravon Airfield Camp to witness the scattering of his ashes. The intention was that Mike Coleman ex 131 Sqn would jump with Bunnies ashes and release these while under canopy with the use of a special container.

There were a number of setbacks during the day which delayed timings etc. but around 2000 hrs Mike and his cameraman, Spence, exited the aircraft began freefalling before

deploying their chutes at around 2000ft. Mike released the ashes under canopy and with the weather breaking sufficiently for all present to witness the release in glorious detail. All said it was a special event and would live with them always. Massive thanks to Mike Coleman ex 131 and his cameraman Spence. Chris Chambers and his daughter, Kelly attended and thanked Jan and the Family for the invitation to attend this special occasion. Photos will follow once they have been collated.

JUNE/JULY

Toscaig Bridge Plaque. Eamon Smyth has been tireless in getting this plaque replaced which was originally erected by 299 Troop of 131 Commando Squadron RE in memory of the 10 Scottish Sappers killed on the River Trent in 1975. Donations were received from all branches and the total was sent off to the Royal Navy & Royal Marines Benevolent fund for the work they carried out. The original, weather beaten, plaque was presented to the OC 299 Squadron. A show of thanks went to Eamon for all his hard work with this.

September, Double Hills Memorial was a success and attended by, Eamon Smyth, Pete Owen & K. Lambeth. The Refurbishment of the site is ongoing and it was reported that a regular attendance is made by Jacob Rees-Mogg, MP for North Somerset.

Arnhem 75th Parade. Some lucky members attended the commemorations this year, meeting up with members of 299 Association. Some travelled with the Yorkshire Branch for 75th year anniversary event. An excellent time was had by all.

Cromwell Lock. Several members attended Cromwell Lock on the 28th September (on the actual date of the tragic accident) to remember those whose lives were lost some 44 years ago. Newark PRA branch do a fantastic job each

Welfare. Our welfare officer, Tony Higgins keeps the branch up to date with these matters and the deaths of members or members close family. It was reported that Terry Howard a long standing member had passed. Derek Yeo's son Andrew, 53, died suddenly in the USA, with Derek and Kath flying out immediately on being informed. There were the usual hospital admissions with Tom Dunne being admitted for several months with unknown health problems. The branch President, George Barrett has had few health issues this year but was cheered up by celebrating his 90th Birthday in August.

Other matters, the branch has had a fairly social calendar again with several meetings of the branch Breakfast Club which has been very well attended, although on a standby at present. The branch Dinner Club has also had several evenings out at various restaurants accompanied by wives or partners at the Meal Evenings. These varied from Curries to Fish and Chips to Chinese most have been very well attended and gives the branch a chance for the partners of members involved. These are continuing and are usually well attended.

Chatham Branch

Baz Bassett – Chairman

Hello to all AEA members from the Medway area and I do hope that you have had a fun summer. I must admit that I do feel a bit of a fraud this year, due to commitments over the summer period I have not been around the patch as much as I hoped to be. However, one or two members have made it to the many events that have occurred especially the Arnhem celebrations, well done to all those making the effort. The great power of Social media makes me feel even more guilty and slightly envious when you see individuals getting together and paying their respects at the sacrifice made by our predecessors. The Chatham branch continues to “tab” along, but we, like many other small organisations, are struggling for membership. We have lost a number of members recently to the final DZ in the last few years, reducing our membership considerably. But there is no shortage of enthusiasm or determination from the existing members, nor attendance at events, these are always outstandingly supported by members their families, widows, partners and friends. What the worry for all is where we will be in 10 years’ time. This may well be an issue that the new chairman and president address during their tenure. We as a branch shall continue to provide a DZ for all Airborne Engineers who drift into in this



part of the world and continue to provide events, such as the John Rock dinner etc. for all.

On the subject of John Rock this was again held at the King Charles Hotel in June.

A fine bunch of Airborne Warriors and also the Men!

To celebrate this year’s dinner we were delighted to have in attendance one of our senior member’s, Major (Retd) Allan Graham’s Daughter and Granddaughter. They gave a fantastic presentation, based on Alan’s notes of

his memories of D Day, when he served as a Section Corporal in 3rd Parachute Squadron RE. Very appropriate at this time of the year, unfortunately Alan was not well enough to travel and has recently lost his wife Barbara of 75 years. He lives local and tries to maintain connections with the Branch. Mike Tindle, the branch welfare officer, maintains a good connection with the family. The article is reproduced in the Journal for you all to read.



To stay in the theme Nick Gibson very kindly set up a fantastic display of WW2 Airborne items at the lunch. One or two younger members could not believe that this was the issued kit, no Goretex, no lightweight material and canvas webbing to name a few things!!

The Things you collect over the years. Nick Gibson’s attic collection or some of it.

This year’s Armed Forces Day celebration was hot, extremely hot, which may account for the lack of numbers attending. There was no shortage of veterans at the event on Gillingham Lines, but smaller numbers on parade. It was another good display by the Corps and in particular by I RSME, with their stands and the supporting stands of a variety of volunteer organisations and the Forces charities, which made for a very enjoyable afternoon.



I must admit to a slight error on the parade when marching on, I was clearly briefed to turn immediately left on entering the arena. On marching in it did not make sense but as a good soldier I followed my last order, only to find ourselves marching toward the Regt. Never one to panic and again as good soldiers. We just continued (some may say bluffed) and marched onto our position. To the spectators it looked like a piece of well drilled precision marching but to the organisers there was slight panic in their eyes. I pointed out that in future they should let us lead, instead of bringing up the rear!

The Thin Red Line. Peter Kershaw, Mike Tindle, Tim VdK and Baz Bassett

June also brings the Falklands memorial services across the UK and we have our own small one in Gillingham recognising Cpl Mac McIlvenny. This is organised by Tim VdK along with whoever can make the ceremony on the day.

One for the scrap book, Ray Ogden showing correct exit procedures for leaving a "fire exit" from the top floor.

D Day and visits to France for various celebrations were attended by members of the branch and I must admit another great coverage by the media. It has hopefully raised the profile of our veterans across UK and bring home to the country the sacrifice they and the people of UK at the time were forced to make. The annual Gurkha Curry at 36 Engr Regt was another sell out and outstanding success. Spaces for the event are as rare as a Rocking Horse running at Aintree and Bob Matthews has never had problems filling the spaces. The branch of course thank him and Helen for taking on the organisation of this annual event and liaising with 36 Engr Regt to make it such a huge success.

Arnhem was a big event this year and a lot of it has been made on the Facebook site with some old and bold faces. Many people made the journey to pay their respects and to continue the fantastic relationship we have with the Dutch people and their recognition of the sacrifice made by our predecessors both Airborne, Airland and conventional troopers.

Recently I borrowed a couple of books from Mike Tindle "The Lion on Blue Wings" by Ronald Seath about the formation of the Glider Regt in which there are references to John Rock and the huge input he made to Airborne forces. More importantly mentioned is the huge commitment by the Pilots and Co Pilots of the Glider Regiments and the struggle Chatterton (John Rock's initial 2IC) had with the obstacles he had to overcome to develop and take forward the Glider Regt. I also re-read "Wings of the Wind" by Peter Stainforth. I personally think that both books should be read together as they were written by individuals who were there and play down much of the brave tasks they were required to carry out. These young men faced death daily but deliberately continued to complete their aims, objectives and missions shrugging off criticism, lack of confidence by the powers to be and the political infighting to "get the job done". It covers development, the training of, and the deployment of airborne forces at not just Arnhem, but Italy, Sicily, Africa, D Day and much more. I would like to just give one quote from "Lion with Blue Wings."

"General Browning was, as usual, immaculately dressed in a Barathean battle-dress, complete with a highly-polished Sam Browne belt, knife-edged creases to his trousers, leather revolver holster gleaming like fine glass, a kid glove on one hand with the other glove and a swagger-cane in the other. He might have been on a visit to the Guard's Depot. The gleam, which his eye never lost, was perhaps brighter on this, his Day"

This was on the 17th of September prior to him embarking on Op Market Garden. Not quite how our Officers go into battle circa 2019.

The annual AGM, Dinner and Dance was supported by a number of the Branch members and this is covered in the Journal but as always I am told a good time was had by all and many thanks must go to the organisers for their time and effort in organising another great AGM and Dinner Dance.

Christmas is on the Horizon and planning is well ahead for our Christmas Lunch event with tables filling up fast, as always we can make room for guests so if you are in the area and want to have a great lunch with us give me a ring or email me.

Until the New Year or when we meet again, best wishes to all members



Scotland Branch

Gil Nicol – Secretary

Wednesday the 12th June saw branch members attend a memorial service for Scott Wilson. Scott was a member of 9 Sqn. who, tragically, was killed whilst attacking Mount Longdon during The Falklands Campaign. Some of Scott's ex colleagues and friends, Paul Moore and Charlie McColgan, as well as other friends, were in attendance at The Guards Club after the memorial service as their train was delayed at Newcastle, due to a fatality on the line just outside Newcastle. We managed to raise a glass or two in Scott's memory.

Our Chairman, Gordon McLeod, was invited by the P.R.A. Lothian Branch to attend the unveiling of the new memorial to Airborne Forces. This event took place on Saturday 6th July at Aldershot which was the home of Airborne Forces for 50 years before the move to Colchester. The new memorial is a life sized statue of The Airborne Soldier in jump order and mounted on a stone block from The Falkland Islands. Gordon had a wonderful time and felt privileged to be invited to attend on behalf of A.E.A. Scotland.

We had a "Future Development" meeting on Wednesday 8th August 2019 at The Guards Club, Edinburgh to look at ways that we can keep the branch alive and kicking. This meeting was well attended. We had a very good meeting with some interesting points being raised. The Committee are still looking into some of these matters and will report back to the branch members in due course. Our branch Secretary has been in contact with our colleagues from "South of the Border" and is pleased with the response he has had. Full details will be available to all members.



On Monday 2nd September 2019, members attended a funeral service for Lt. Col (Retd.) Stanley Peake who passed away only last week. He was the OC for 300 Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers (T.A.) He was **not** CO of 131 Parachute Engineer Regiment (T.A.) .He was 92 years of age and had been suffering from Dementia His son and remaining family were pleased to see a representation from Airborne Engineers Association (Scotland).The funeral service was held in The Pentland Chapel of Mortonhall Crematorium, Edinburgh.

The A.E.A. Scotland branch had their annual lunch at The Royal Scots Club, Edinburgh on Saturday 7th September 2019 where a good time was had by all. We had 19 persons in attendance. Jinty Murray, an invited guest and the wife of the late Frank Murray who passed away recently, had a wonderful time meeting up with old friends. Frank had been a past Chairman of our branch and was a very strong supporter of all that we did .The ladies, as usual, were very smartly turned out. Joe Davidson Ex 9 Sqn member, on behalf of he and his mate Dougie, also an Ex 9 Sqn member, presented John Donaldson with a special bottle of "Jura" whisky in recognition of all the good work he has done regarding the awarding of the GSM. Aden Medal for the lads who were wounded or killed in Aden in 1965.



On Sunday 22nd September 2019 we had our annual remembrance service at Zetland Park, Grangemouth in remembrance of the ten sappers killed whilst participating in "Operation Trent Chase" in 1975. This service was very well attended and we also had representatives from P.R.A. Lothian (with Standard), SAS., RBL Grangemouth (with Standards), Ex 9 Sqn. Guys, Ex 131 Commando Engineers, Marine Commando, Royal Engineers, Army Cadets, Air Force Cadets and Sea Cadets. The piper was supplied by R.B.L. Grangemouth .There were a number of independents in attendance.

There was approximately 30 - 40 personnel turned up on a very wet day. After the service we retired to The Royal British Legion (Grangemouth) Hall for refreshments. Some members travelled a fair distance from Kilwinning, Ayrshire and Coldstream for which we thank and commend them.

While we were in the RBL Grangemouth Hall we took the opportunity to present a framed photograph of the plaque that was installed on Toscaig Bridge, in memory of the lads who were killed in 1975, to the son of Terry Smith and another framed photograph to the RBL Grangemouth, as a fitting tribute since the sappers killed were local lads. Terry was only 4¹/₂ months old when his father died and did not get to know him. He thought it was amazing that so many people came out to remember his father and colleagues, especially after such a long period of time. It was explained to him that a similar service was being held at Cromwell Lock, where the unfortunate incident took place. He asked me to pass on his families heartfelt thanks to all involved.

We thank Alan Lochrie (Chairman of RBL Grangemouth) and his staff for the hospitality shown towards everyone on this day.

Before we all broke up to go our separate ways our Secretary (Gil) was pleasantly ambushed and presented, by Joe Davidson , with a wonderfully handcrafted timber container (made by Joe Davidson himself) complete with a bottle of Rum on behalf of all present in appreciation for the effort and work put in over the years. Gil was very surprised and for once, at a loss for words, however once recovered thanked all present for this gift and wonderful show of kindness.

The Garden of Remembrance ceremony took place at Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh on Monday 28th October 2019 at 1100hrs. Some members, along with P.R.A. Lothian Branch members, were in attendance.

Our Annual General Meeting was held on Sunday 17th November 2019 and was well attended. Our Office bearers were selected for the following year. Gil Nicol was surprised when he was presented with The Presidents Commendation as a reward for all the work he has put in over the years. He was very surprised but delighted that his fellow members thought so much of his efforts, he stated that he believes strongly in our motto "Service not self" and that others before him have done sterling work worthy of equal recognition.

Some members and their wives are looking forward to attending the annual P.R.A. Lothian Branch Christmas Dinner Dance, on Friday 6th December 2019 at The Royal British Legion, 33 Rodney Street, Edinburgh.

We have had 2 new members join AEA Scotland branch and they are Bill Pagan (EX 131 Parachute Engineer Regiment/131 Commando Engineer) and Joe Davidson (Ex 9 Sqn.). This is encouraging as we strive to look towards the future of the branch. We have also taken out an advert in The Falkirk Herald to make people aware of our existence. Unfortunately, to date, this has not resulted in any enquiries. We have however an ex 9 Sqn member interested in joining and he will come along to one of our future meetings.

Seasonal Greetings & Best Wishes to our colleagues South of the Border

Wales & the West Branch

Mick Leather – Treasurer

The 1st Meeting of the Welsh contingent of the AEA was organised on Saturday 26th October at the Seven Stars Public House, in Clehonger, just outside Hereford. We had a delay because of severe flooding but it was a credit to all that braved the weather to be there and formalise the future of this new branch. There were 13 attendees in all with John Lee having to make tracks to other commitments and therefore couldn't stay following the delayed start.



This motley crew have basically decided to meet formally 4 times a year to start and expand on that with a view to keep the meetings short and social. The agreed dates will be Jan, April and July 25th which will be Saturdays at 1400hrs. There will be one in September to coincide with Double Hills

The one in January will be at The Welsh Club in Hereford.

So that is the first thing to put in your diaries if you want to get involved and join the branch.

We have nominated Clive Lee as President, Gus Hales as Chairman, Gerry Bonner as Secretary and myself, Mick Leather as Treasurer. These posts will all become available at the July Meeting.

We do intend moving it around the area as we fully understand that geographically, we are spread out to the four corners of the area. We have identified at least 60 in the Herefordshire and South Wales area. The thing is you don't have to attend them all but by becoming a member you will get that contact that the other branches have done so successfully without having to wait every year for the AGM to come around.

We will be writing to all those members that we have knowledge of to formally invite them to join but if you cannot wait please feel free to contact Gus, Gerry or me for details. My contact details are mleather350@gmail.com

Yorkshire Branch

Arnhem 75

From Yorkshire to Arnhem and back, for the 75th Anniversary of Operation Market Garden. After months of preparation and planning it is over in a blink of an eye.

On Thursday 19th of September, by land, sea and air hundreds of Airborne Vets met at Arnhem. We from Yorkshire met up with other Branch members at the Holiday Inn, it was completely full like all the other hotels and B & Bs in the area not a bed space available. We were 50 Strong and our party was looked after by Ed van de Laan our Dutch friend who is an association member of our Branch, along with Tom a serving Major in the Dutch Military Police, they have been our friends for 20 years. They kindly organised a 50 seated luxury coach for the whole weekend, for free, it was so noticeable that the Dutch people around Arnhem cannot do enough for British Veterans.

Thursday night was a meet and greet and drink as much as you could before falling off the stall. Arnhem was buzzing, every square had music and singing, all the pubs were full and no one got to bed before 1 o'clock most of us much later than that.

Friday morning 9 o'clock sharp our luxury coach was waiting for us outside the hotel, with members from the Aldershot, Birmingham and Scotland we joined up on the bus it made a very exciting party, Ed and Tom has arranged a very special morning for us. We had been invited to Koning Willem III barracks in Apeldoorn for a private commemoration service. These Barracks had been used to interrogate prisoners of war and also as a hospital for British and Polish wounded prisoners of war were cared for at this Airborne Hospital approximately 1800 in mates at any one time, once they were well enough they were taken to prisoner of war camps in Germany, but many died of their wounds. The Barracks is now used by the Dutch Army Military police, we were invited to the Officers Mess for tea and coffee and then attended a beautiful private service with the British and Polish Ambassadors laid wreaths school children read the history of a British POW. Others laid wreaths and the Military Police band played throughout the service, the weather was beautiful. We were then invited back to the Officers mess for lunch.

In the afternoon we did a full tour of the Battle Area including the church, Westerbouwing Heights while the re-enactment Artillery fired off 25 lb shells, we all engaged in a perimeter walk with Ed giving us the history of the Battle. Back to the hotel for some more liquid refreshment.

Saturday morning coach outside the door waiting for us, we were off to the Airdrop at Ginkel Heath, thousands of push bikes were passing us on both sides of the road, as we were in a traffic queue miles long, many of the lads got out and walked, but it was 6 Kilo too far for the old and bold. We arrived at Ginkel Heath to find approx. 200,000 people also waiting to see the drop, it was very impressive, we also saw the Dakota fly past, and also the helicopter commando landing, the mass drop included Sappers from 23 Para Engineer Regt. After a bite to eat we drove off to the Dyke near Driel for the commemoration service at the RE and Canadian RE monument. The Canadians had flown over a troop from 23 Field Sqn Canadian Engineers, we had the Engineer bikers led by Major (Retd) Moore and us vets, the wreath on our behalf was laid by Mr Mercer MP. One or two of the lads gave him an ear bending on why we cannot afford to have our serving soldiers represented at these various memorials. Back to the hotel, wash and brush up, and off to dinner at the restaurant de Smidse, we had the whole restaurant to ourselves, it is difficult to find words to describe the beautiful food on the menu, it was quite outstanding, back to the hotel full up and tired.

Sunday coach was waiting to take us to the Airborne cemetery, unfortunately the coach driver got lost and lads from the party had to show him the way, when we arrived the place was packed 53 coaches all trying to get in, hundreds of cars and more bicycles than you can count, we could not get into the cemetery it was full of dignitaries, not a problem we went to the side and got over the fence, the service as usual was very emotional with the children all laying flowers on the graves, the one good thing was the weather was brilliant. Back to the hotel where we decided to go back to the restaurant to have another plateful of the wonderful food

There were only a few veterans able to attend, this could well be the last big event here. We all enjoyed ourselves, thanks once more to our Dutch Friends.

AGM/Reunion 2020 will be hosted by the Yorkshire at the Cedar Court Hotel, Harrogate 16-18 October. Detailed information and booking forms will be contained in the June 2020 journal.

Airborne Sappers at the Cenotaph

By Steve Wallis



The days leading up to this year's remembrance commemorations were very wet. More than a month's worth of rain fell in one day in the East Midlands and there was widespread flooding. Leaving home on the Friday, we had got less than half a mile from home before we met the first road closure caused by the flooding, it wasn't the last as we diverted this way and that heading for the railway station at Newark. London was little different, it rained all day of Friday and most of Saturday, the forecast for Sunday was not looking good. However, the sun shines on the righteous and after a wet night Sunday morning was dry with clear blue skies.

As has become usual Mel and I met up with John and Sandy Ferry at Waterloo. The ladies went their own way to find a suitable vantage point to watch the proceedings while John and I headed for 'Horseguards' and a meeting with the rest of the AEA contingent and the obligatory team photo. This year, thanks to John's efforts the AEA had been given 30 tickets, our largest ever allocation. It was particularly pleasing to see the number of 'Younger' association members who attended.



Horse Guards was as confused as usual with the different contingents milling around wondering if they were in the right place. The gathering is a fantastic event as not only do you meet up with AEA members that you may not have seen for years, but you also meet with old friends from other associations, some of whom you vaguely remember. The RBL marshals did a fantastic job of organising us all and getting us onto Whitehall in the correct order for the march past.

Dick Brown, John Askey, ? & Adam Frame



This year we were near the back of the column, much closer to Trafalgar Square than the Cenotaph, and we watched the dignitaries arrive on the large screen's placed strategically along the route. The gun sounded and the silence was meticulously observed by all the veterans. The short service was completed, and it was time for the march past to begin.

Bob Chatterton, Al Grace, Billy Morris, Adam Frame & Reg Grantham

As each contingent set off, they were greeted with loud applause from the other veterans waiting to go, this is particularly poignant as it reflects the mutual respect the veterans hold for each other. Marching past the Cenotaph is a fantastic experience, as you get closer you grow taller, your bearing is sharper, and you are filled with a sense of immense pride as you remember the reason why you are here and remember those who are not.

It's all over very quickly and after two hours of getting ready and being herded about its over. You continue to march to Westminster green and then back to Horse Guards, passing the Saluting Dias where a member of the Royal Family takes the salute - this year it was Prince Andrew. All the way round you are cheered and applauded by those watching and it's great to hear shouts of 'Airborne Engineers' and 'Go 9 Sqn' as you pass. The parade over, everyone heads to the 'Sherlock' to meet up with others, tell stories, have a drink and a quick debrief about the day's events before dispersing and heading for home.

Will & Sheena MacDonald, Derek Broadbent, Linda Hills and Jon Stubbs



This is always a memorable weekend, meeting old friends and taking part in something that is too humbling to put into words. Arriving home Mel and I watched the whole thing back on the TV waiting for the AEA to pass. It was particularly pleasing to see how smart we looked as we marched past and the way we did the 'Eyes left' this hid the fact that most of the way round, half of us were 'Right Lefting' when they should have been 'Left Righting.' Oh well, we were never known for the standard of our drill.

Airborne Engineers Association Links with the Past

By Eric Blenkinsop

To me the Birmingham Branch have always had strong links with 1st Para Sqn (Bob Jones) and 9 Field Coy Airborne (Tom Carpenter).

The Chatham Branch have always had strong links with 3 Para Sqn when it was formed, due firstly to the 3 Para Sqn founder members Jim Rogers, Alan Graham, and Smokey Gibson and secondly as the following founder members had served with 3rd Airborne Sqn: Mike Farrow, Bill Perry and Eric Blenkinsop, post war. Almost all of the NCO's were ex 3 Para Sqn; Jock Docherty, Wimp Martin, Steve Crane, Billy Fellows, Gordon Ramsey, and Freddy Heads, which had a big influence on the post war recruits.

Also 6 Airborne Div. RE held an annual dinner at the Victory Club in London organised by Major John Shave (3 Para) and Fergie Semple (591 Para) and the Chatham Branch organised a coach to get members to the function. The date happened to coincide with the Darland Boys reunion at the old NAAFI Club and those who were ex Airborne would climb aboard including Bill & Sheenah Dickson, who came over from Australia to attend the Normandy Pilgrimage. So the link has always been strong, with Major Alan Graham now the last man standing at the Chatham Branch.

Do any of the other branches have strong links with a particular war time Sqn?

Blenk

23 Parachute Engineer Regiment Update



It has been a busy year for 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment, with deployments around the world, military training, sport, adventurous training and - of course - plenty of parachuting dominating the calendar! Additionally, there has been change at the top with the Regiment welcoming its new Commanding Officer Lieutenant-Colonel Jez Robinson.

January saw 9 Parachute Squadron deploy to Belize on a construction exercise during which they were tasked with upgrading the British Army's jungle training estates. Whilst there they also took the opportunity to complete a jungle training package, as well as a 175 mile canoe race. Part of the project included work in a local animal sanctuary, where a lucky few were able to get up close and personal with some of the local wildlife! Elsewhere, the Regimental Nordic Skiing team competed in the divisional championships in France, which culminated in a 20 km military patrol race across the snow.



Throughout February and March, 12 Parachute HQ & Support Squadron and 51 Parachute Squadron conducted military training, which included a heavy weapons cadre to familiarise them with Heavy & Grenade Machine Guns, and saw the latter deploy by Chinook from the Regimental parade Square. March also saw Sappers Campbell and Harris excel in the Corps Boxing championships, where they were crowned champions in their respective weights of Light Heavy and Cruiser- weight. Further success was enjoyed by Sgt Bobby Willett of 9 Para Sqn, who won the Chiquibul Challenge Marathon - an annual fundraiser for the Belize Wildlife & Referral Clinic and Friends for Conservation and Development - in an impressive time of 3:05:36.

April saw 12 Squadron deploy on a battlefield study to Arnhem, whilst the Regimental shooting team competed in the 16 Air Assault Brigade competition. In May, new members of Recce Troop were selected on the

Light Role Close Recce Cadre, and the Regiment's Rugby Sevens team were victorious in the Royal Engineers Campbell Cup tournament, beating the home team - 3 RSME – in the final of the competition. Also at 3 RSME in May, two teams from the Regiment took place in the Minley Chase competition, taking home prizes for being first to 50km and 100km along the way. The Regiment showed off its capabilities to members of the public at the Suffolk Show at the end of May, with stands showcasing Plant, Heavy Weapons, Minefield Clearance, Parachuting and even a dive tank!

June saw the Regiment Deploy on Exercise SWIFT RESPONSE in Croatia. This was a multinational NATO exercise, focused on demonstrating the capacity for high readiness elements of the US-led Global Response Force to deploy rapidly, and work together effectively. 12 Para HQ & Sp Sqn and 51 Para Sqn - supported by elements from across the Regiment - made up the bulk of the deployment, where they worked alongside counterparts from 3rd Battalion the Parachute Regiment and 1er Regiment de Chasseurs Parachutistes throughout. Those involved performed admirably throughout, with highlights including a parachute descent onto and seizure of Udbina airfield, and a 2-up Battlegroup assault on a mountain for the final attack.

Also in June, the Regiment sent 3 teams to the Lombardia Italian Commando Rapid competition in the Italian Alps, where they were the top ranked British entry, while several representatives across all ranks took part in a commemorative jump into Normandy to mark the 75th anniversary of the D-Day landings.

The running team were victorious in the Royal Engineers 10km Road Race in July, whilst 9 Squadron travelled to Greece on another battlefield study to learn about the success of German Fallschirmjager (paratroopers) in the Second World War. Meanwhile, the Regiment's Diving Team conducted training in Portsmouth, whilst the Regiment's Junior NCOs enjoyed a leadership development week that included leadership discussions with guest speakers, survival lessons, and a trip to Saracens Rugby Club, where they played a game of touch-rugby on the pitch with club legend Will Fraser.

July also saw the opening of the newly refurbished childcare facility at the Sutton Heath Childcare Centre, which includes a sensory room for children with additional educational needs. Funded by a share of fines levied on the banking industry in the wake of the LIBOR scandal, the Army Benevolent Fund has been upgrading welfare facilities across the UK this year. Elsewhere, representatives from the Regiment took part in the Henley Regatta, the Armed Forces Parachute Championship.



In August, several members of the Regiment joined the Airborne community by completing their Basic Parachute Course (BPC), whilst some more experienced campaigners earned their American wings by jumping into Italy with the US 173rd Airborne Brigade. Throughout the year, there has been a steady drumbeat of success on both the BPC and P-Coy, with the Regiment taking the lead for Brigade beat-up training at Crowborough camp for most of the year.

After some well-earned summer leave throughout late August, the Regiment returned and took part in the Arnhem commemorations in September, with several lucky enough to take part in the multinational jump onto Ginkel Heath. SSgts Cofax and Ferry from 9 Para Sqn took the more scenic route to the DZ, cycling over 200 miles unsupported

from Woodbridge to link up with the commemorations. Further remembrance events included 9 Para Sqn attending the Double Hills Memorial Parade in Somerset, and the annual Arnhem Dinner Night, where the guests of honour were Commander 8 Engineer Brigade - himself an Airborne Sapper - and the Mayor of Woodbridge.

Later in the month, build-up training for Ex CAMBRIAN PATROL got into full swing, during which two of the Regt's patrols hosted the Brazilian team during their acclimatisation package. The Regiment's running team continued their success at the Corps Half Marathon, where they were Major Unit Champions, and were runners up at the Army 10km championships, with all participants finishing inside the top 20. Lt Surmon, Sgt Aschettino and Cpl Stacey displayed endurance of a slightly different nature in the Pegasus Enduro challenge, completing a gruelling 24hr session on an assault bike, rowing machine and ski erg respectively, setting new world records and raising £2750 on behalf of Scotty's Little Soldiers. In a similar (if slightly less intense) vein, the Regiment also took part in the Cha Cha Plank Challenge in support of the Cancer Care Charity as a warmup for Monday morning Green PT at the end of the month.



October saw teams from 9 Para Sqn, 51 Para Sqn and 299 Para Sqn deploy to Sennybridge for Ex CAMBRIAN PATROL 19, with all three putting in an excellent performance to secure a silver medal. Meanwhile, elements of 51 Para Sqn took part in pre-deployment training for Op TORAL in Afghanistan, alongside their counterparts from the Parachute Regiment. This group has since deployed, and are currently providing Force Protection Support and advisors to the Afghan Government and Security Forces. 9 Para Sqn deployed to Thetford Training Area to refine their basic soldiering skills on a series of Squadron and Troop level tasks, and a team from the Regiment also competed in La Desertica 2019. Organised by the Spanish Legion, a team of runners completed a 73km route, whilst concurrently, the mountain biking team tackled a 103km course, displaying true airborne grit and determination throughout. The Regiment's Divers also took to sunnier climes, conducting an expedition in Cyprus.

Thus far, November has seen a number of our Soldiers and Officers jump into Estonia, demonstrating Airborne capability to our NATO allies as part of Op TRACTABLE, whilst the bulk of the Regiment has deployed to Weymouth on Ex EAGLE BUILD, and annual Combat Engineering and trade concentration, which has seen skills refined ahead of redeployment onto Salisbury Plain on Ex EAGLE SAPPER.



As you've seen, it has been a busy, challenging, but rewarding year here at 23 Para Engr Regt, and we look forward to future deployments to Cyprus, Georgia, Kenya, Afghanistan and America in 2020, after a well-earned Christmas break.