



Airborne Engineers Association

Registered Charity No. 1009201

Newsletter

DECEMBER 1998

PRESIDENT

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Brigadier G.A. Hewish, MBE

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From The Chair!

Dear Members,

I would like to thank you all for the support that you gave to the AGM in Great Yarmouth. This was a new venture in our endeavour to find an alternative venue for our AGMs. The hard work of Dave Rutter, Tony Manley, and the venue management staff contributed to this venture being so successful. The location for our 1999 AGM/Reunion will be Birmingham.

If you are wondering why I am still writing this introduction of the Newsletter, it is because my term of office as your Association Chairman has been extended for a further year. So, I am afraid you must put up with my presence for a while longer.

We continue to go from strength to strength as an Association, and I have great pleasure in announcing the inauguration of the Edinburgh branch. This recent addition of a branch to our Association is mainly due to the efforts of Dick Barton and James Donaldson. Unfortunately, there is probably not sufficient time available for the Edinburgh branch to host an AGM before Scottish Independence is declared. When they do, we will no doubt require passports and visas to attend!! On the behalf of the AEA may I wish the Edinburgh Branch every success and the very best of luck for the future.

It has been brought to the committee's attention that no wreath has been laid on the behalf of the Corps of Royal Engineers at the Arnhem commemoration. Our veterans lay wreaths on the behalf of the units that took part in the operation, but it is generally felt that the Corps should be properly represented. It is the committees hope, that in future, one of our veterans, escorted by a young member of 9 Parachute Squadron RE, will lay a wreath on the behalf of the Corps.

Our Association Newsletter is our main source of news and information update, and it is presentation, quality and content improves with each issue. However, it can only survive with your continued support, both as a subscriber and contributor in its content. So please, spread the word, and if you have not already done so, forward your £5 subscription to:

Dave Rutter - [REDACTED]

Cheques made payable to: Airborne Engineers Association

I look forward to seeing more of you in the coming year.

Best Wishes to all!

Tom Ormiston - Chairman

Airborne Engineers Association

Committee Members

Position	Member	Address	Postcode	Telephone
President	Brig GA Hewish MBE			
Vice President	Ian Wilson			
Vice President	Lt Col CM Davies MBE			
Chairman	Tom Ormiston			
Secretary	Ray Coleman			
Membership	Chris Chambers			
Treasurer	Capt Dick Brown			
Historian	Fred Gray			
Entertainment	Dave Rutter			
Editor	Colin Parker			
1 Sqn	Bob Jones			
2 Sqn	Ollie Atkins			
3 Sqn	Bob Sullivan			
4 Sqn	Eric Richards			
9 Sqn	OC, SSM, Cpl			
131 TA	Bunny Brown			
591 Sqn RE	Tony Jackson			
147 AB Pk Sqn	Major Ian Robbie			
9 Fld Coy (Airborne)	Tom Carpenter			
Aldershot	Maurice Metcalfe			
Birmingham	George Barrett			
Chatham	Arthur Cheeseman			
Yorkshire	Bill Rudd			
North West	Alan Marshall			
South West	Tom Brinkman			
Northern Ireland	Phil Chatterley			
Edinburgh	Dick Barton			
Hameln, Germany	WO2 Jim Hillman			
Shop	Jan Chambers			

News from The Squadron and Around the Branches

9 Parachute Squadron

By Captain Dick Brown, RE

During the past few months, the Squadron has survived what could have been the demise of Airborne Forces, commonly known as the Strategic Defence Review. It has now been decreed that the Squadron will move to become part of the new Air Assault Brigade with Parachuting capability, to be renamed 16 Air Assault Brigade. This new Brigade will become operational from September 1999. 9 Parachute Squadron RE will remain Airborne, and will move location to Woodbridge, which is north of Ipswich. It is here that a new Engineer Regiment will be formed. Sadly, this new Regiment will not be Parachute Trained. Time scales for the relocation is yet to be confirmed, but it is expected to take place sometime between the years 2002-2004.

On a lighter note, leading up to SDR, General Delves, Commander to 3 UK Division was quoted while talking to the Commander Royal Engineers 3 Division, I can't imagine an army without 9 Parachute Squadron. It is nice to know that the Squadron is so highly thought of in the higher echelons of the Army!

While 1 Troop remain in the UK for the Para commitment to 5 Airborne Brigade, the rest of the Squadron have deployed for a 6 month operational tour to BOSNIA. Their return is scheduled for February 1999. An update from Bosnia will be published in the next issue of the Newsletter.

I make special mention of a young Sapper, not yet 18, who arrived in the Squadron in September this year. Sapper Walker, on completion of 'P' Company, was awarded top student. Two weeks later he entered the Corps of Royal Engineers cross-country championships. To our amazement, he achieved an incredible 2nd place. An excellent achievement for such a young soldier.

The recruiting figures for the Squadron has reached an all-time high, and we are now 2 above our official strength, with 95% of the Squadron now Parachute trained. The Squadron strength now stands at 187. I would like to express my personal thanks to Dave Lincoln, (PRA), and his band of merry men, for assisting us in our recruiting campaign. On completion of my presentation to new recruits at Bassingbourn, Dave always concludes with a few words about the special bond we have as Airborne soldiers and the Airborne brotherhood. His input, I feel sure has influenced a few volunteers to 'have a go.'

On the behalf on the Squadron, I wish you all A Very Merry Christmas.

Aldershot Branch

By Fred Gray

Chairman: DEREK TAYLOR
Entertainments: DAVE RUTTER & TONY MANLY
Secretary: FRED GRAY • Tel: [REDACTED]

George Fairs MM, one of our most respected and stalwart branch members passed away in early September. George died shortly after returning from his holiday home in Hampshire. He had been a branch member from the day he joined the Association and rarely missed a meeting or function. All members will sadly miss his humour and contribution in branch affairs.

This year we have decided to combine our Christmas Dinner with the Aldershot Branch of the REA. It is to be held during November in the WOs & Sgts Mess Minley. This will be our first social contact with the REA, and we hope that it may lead to other social meetings.

Our Branch Meetings on Sundays continue to be popular. This is reflected in an average attendance of twenty over the past 6 months.

Chris and Jan Chambers, (as members of the committee) and others from the Aldershot Branch, attended the Double Hills Remembrance Service at Poulton. I also attended the annual get together for those men who took part in the TRAGINO AQUEDUCT raid in 1941. John and Glenda Smith, together with Bob and Edna Sullivan, attended the 6th Airborne Annual Dinner and Reunion in London.

During the past few months, the Branch has managed to recruit two new members. Major (retired) Peter Myatt and Bill (Paddy) Hewitt. Peter, formally serving with 9 Airborne Squadron and for the later part of his military service with the Army Air Corps. Bill Hewitt spent quite a number of years serving with 9 Independent Parachute Squadron, and has returned to the fold of the branch after an absence of four years.

Bryan and Betty Andrews have now moved into their bungalow, and the modifications to it will assist Bryan's movement around his new surroundings. Although transport difficulties prevent Bryan from attending our meetings, it is hoped that he and Betty will be able to attend the Christmas Dinner.

The Aldershot Branch would like to take this opportunity to wish all members of the Association and their families a Very Merry Christmas and a Wonderful New Year.

Yorkshire Branch

By Charlie Dunk

Oh no! Is it really that time again? Having just received a prompting letter from Ray Coleman, I had better get my butt into gear and submit the Yorkshire Branch input to the Newsletter. Time seems to fly by - does that mean that I have been busy?

The Branch is in fine fettle, and it's pleasing to note that our membership continues to grow by 2 or 3 each year. Our Branch minutes are distributed out to 65 members and our bi-monthly meetings have a regular core attendance of 15 or so. Added to these numbers are about five ladies who regularly accompany their husbands to the meetings. We offer a sincere vote of thanks to these ladies.

Our meetings continue to be held by courtesy of the 1st Green Howards at Hildebrand Barracks, Pennypot Lane, Harrogate. Hopefully, this arrangement, despite TA cutbacks, will long continue. Our meetings have much to offer. There is the splendid buffet supper prepared by "Yorkie" Davis, late morning closing hours, the issue of sleeping bags for overnight stopovers, and a relaxed atmosphere. The latter is reflected in the fact that Matt Newall attends the meetings in bedroom slippers! So, if you're in the area and would like to join us, please give me a call on 01977-734844 to establish timings and date.

Based on the fact that Branch Meetings are every other month, it was decided to start a Sunday Lunch Club (my suggestion of a club tie based on the Association tie with a crossed knife and fork through the Pegasus will probably not get the approval of the committee!) We schedule these lunches for the first Sunday of the alternate month to our Branch Meeting. The member delegated decides on the location. Bill Rudd was responsible for the first and Gary Copson the second. Both of which were extremely successful. My concern is that I have been 'volunteered' to organise the luncheon in March. Pie, chips, and mushy peas me thinks!

On the behalf of the Branch members who attended the Veterans Weekend at Chatham, I would like to convey our thanks to the Chatham Branch committee members for the hospitality we received. May we make one suggestion, is there any chance of you arranging the brewing of some decent beer in Kent?

To Dave Rutter and members of the Aldershot committee that were responsible for the AGM/Re-union in Great Yarmouth, we congratulate you on the excellent organisation of this event; it was without doubt a huge success. So nice to see some of the former Squadron lads coming out of the woodwork, Pete Burgess, and Pete McCabe, shame Rick Mogg could not make it!

As in previous years, the Annual June Association Meeting will be held in Ripon during the Veterans REA Weekend on Saturday, 19th June 1999. The previous 2 years have been a great success, and it is hoped that 1999 will be even better. The full cost for the weekend is £30.00 per head, and includes all meals and accommodation. If you wish to attend, please complete the proforma enclosed in the Newsletter, and return it to me, with full payment, no later than 1st May 1999.

As an added bonus, 1999 is the 50th anniversary for granting 'Freedom of the City' to the Corps of Royal Engineers. We would, therefore, like to see a record number of red berets on parade as 38 Engineer Regiment exercise their right to march through the City of Ripon with bayonets fixed and band playing. Avoid disappointment - book early.

Some of you computer buffs may be aware that I have set up an Internet site called 'Airborne Engineers Association' (what else!). For those of you interested the address is:

[REDACTED]

Moreover, the e-mail address is:

[REDACTED]

Why not look at the site, and let me know your views? I have already received e-mail from local members (UK) and recently heard from Derek Latham (former 9 Independent Parachute Squadron RE) who lives in Vancouver, Canada. Derek has asked me to say "hello" to George Dunn and Dave Whyllie or Whyilly. Dave and George were

running pre-para during Derek's selection time. Also a big "howdy" to Chris Chambers, and, if anyone bumps into Pat Blake from the PRA, please give her Derek's best wishes. Anyone wishing to contact Derek can send the details to me, and I will forward them.

Now I am on the cadge! Is there anyone out there that has a photograph of me in Para rig? No doubt, there are many of our readers in the same situation, but the truth is I do not have a single photo. I promise the safe return of any photographs sent to me. My address is: [REDACTED]

Dates for the Diary

Christmas Dinner

Our next Branch 'Do' will be the Christmas Dinner on Saturday, 5th December at Hooton Pagnell, which is just outside Doncaster.

Branch AGM will be the 1st Friday in March 1999.

REA Veterans Weekend – Ripon - This will be from Friday, 18th until Sunday, 20th June 1999.

Finally, with the festive season fast approaching, the Yorkshire Branch wishes you all a Very Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.

South West Branch

By Eric Rundle

I joined in with about 20 members of the Weston-Super-Mare Branch of the PRA, on a beautiful sunny afternoon on 20th September. The occasion was their annual pilgrimage to the graves of our fallen comrades who were killed at Poulton on 17th September 1944. These were to be the first of many casualties in 'Operation Market Garden.' The 3 British Legion Standards and one each from the Weston-Super-Mare Branches of the REA and the PRA accompanied us.

The service was conducted with due decorum, with the Airborne Prayer and the laying of floral tributes on each of the 24 graves. On conclusion of the service we retired to the Royal British Legion Club for a cup of tea and sandwiches, where a fair proportion of 'lamp swinging' and singing of the Desert Song ensued.

One week later found me en-route to Weston-Super-Mare again. Typical English summer weather greeted this visit - it was pouring with rain! Our second visit to the cemetery was planned to coincide with the annual commemorative parade at Poulton, which would be held later that same day. Arriving at the cemetery gates, I was greeted by Mr K. Trago (former 249 Squadron), who had 'volunteered' to direct traffic! The turn out exceeded our previous visit, with about 30 members of our Association present. Standards of the Airborne Engineers Association, and the Weston-Super-Mare Branches of the Royal Engineers Association and Parachute Regiment Association graced the ceremony. Extra duties should have been awarded to the padre, who was late on parade! The service was again conducted with due decorum, with the Airborne Prayer and the laying of a wreath by Brig. J.H. Hooper, President of the Southwest Branch. It has given me much pleasure to inaugurate this ceremony, and I sincerely hope that it will become an annual event. On the behalf of the South West Branch, may I thank all of those who attended, and we look forward to an even larger attendance next year.

From us all in the 'West Country' we extend sincere Good Wishes for the coming Festive Season, a Happy, Prosperous New Year, to all Association Members, and their families.

Chatham Branch

By Eric Blenkinsop

Our Branch Meetings continue to be held on a monthly basis in the WOs & Sgts Mess at Brompton Barracks. The unstinting efforts of our chairman and committee are rewarded by the regular attendance of between 14 and 20 members. This figure is usually boosted by the addition of member's wives. Special tribute is offered to our Essex members, Ron Gibson, Ben Taverner, and Bob Woolley, who are congratulated on their exemplary attendance at our Branch meetings (the Dartford river crossing notwithstanding).

Previous Events:

A set back in his health prevented Bert Fordham from hosting the summer BBQ. Unfortunately, Bert's knee was in an advance need of an overhaul. This, I am pleased to say has now been undertaken, and apart from the odd squirt of WD40 on his new knee joints, we expect him to make selection for the first eleven in the very near future.

Our March meeting confirmed the installation of two honorary branch members, Nick Gibson and the Rev Bernard Foulger. Nick gave invaluable support during our preparation for the 1997 AGM, and Bernard is the padre for several of the Servicemen's Associations in the Medway towns and Sittingbourne area.

Gracing our presence at the May meeting held on Bank Holiday Monday, we welcomed our Branch President, Col. John Grosvenor, and his wife Sue. It is pleasing to report to those who served with Col. John, that he has lost none of his humour or exuberance. With a buffet supper organised by our chairman and the evening suitably dedicated to the ladies at the behest of Bob Giles, a thoroughly enjoyable time was had by all.

The Veterans Weekend in September proved again to be an excellent occasion. Amongst the regulars, Bill Rudd and Ken Hart representing Yorkshire Branch, and Chris Chambers (always alert for that next new member), a bonus awaited in the form of George Royall. It was 40 years since we had last met up with George. He confirmed that he was in touch with the 'McCabe's' in Norfolk, and that they would all be at Great Yarmouth in October (and they were!).

The 6th Airborne Division RE Reunion held in September and organised by Maj. John Shave MC, had as guest of honour Brig. James Hill, DSO, MC. The Brigadier spoke at length of the extremely high level of Sapper contribution to the successes of 3 Parachute Brigade and of the support to 6th Airborne Division. His words set the tone for the evening. The Chatham Branch members that attended are unanimous in voting this reunion, the best one to date.

The AGM/Reunion at Great Yarmouth was undoubtedly a tremendous success, and on behalf of the Chatham Branch, congratulate the Aldershot Committee members for organising the event. Being under 'one roof' from Friday through to the Sunday gave many opportunities for members to meet and greet former colleagues and friends.

The price was right, the food hot and plentiful, bars that only closed when the last late night drinker left, and no worries of having to get transport home. This must surely be the way ahead for our future AGM/Reunions! It was a really great weekend.

Finally, a special word for one of our most stalwart members, John Stubbs. A veteran of the Falklands, John served with 9 Parachute Squadron and was with 3 Parachute Bn Gp on Mount Longdon.

In 1993, John suffered severe injuries to his legs in a horrendous traffic accident. Despite being on crutches, he never failed to attend the Branch meetings. Recovery has been a long and painful road. Yet through all this adversity he has displayed an extremely high level of tenacity, and with the support of Michelle has reshaped his life. During the long period of immobility, John has developed unique skills as a model maker, and we congratulate him on his recent award of 'Commended' at the prestigious model-making exhibition in Europe - the Euro Militaire. He is currently attending a Foundation course at the Kent Institute of Art and Design at Fort Pitt, which will hopefully lead onto an HND course. We wish him every success in this challenging enterprise.

Footnote - Fort Pitt, Chatham was the birthplace of the RAMC when the wounded were brought home during the Crimean War.

Future Events

Branch Christmas Lunch - Sunday, 13th December at the Wealden Hall Restaurant, Larkfield.

Branch AGM - April 1999.

1st Parachute Squadron RE Annual Dinner/Reunion

& 54th Arnhem Memorial Church Service

By Stan Pellow

This annual event was held on 26th September at the Comfort Friendly Inn at Bicker - not far from Donington. This Lincolnshire village is where the Squadron was stationed before their deployment to Arnhem in 1944. A total of 63 attended this event, and included former Squadron members, relatives, friends, and guests.

Following an excellent dinner, Len Hook, in his usual professional and inimitable manner as MC, called upon George Cosadinos to propose the "Loyal Toast," for Bob Jones to propose "The Squadron," and 'Absent Friends.' Our principal guests, included Col. Chris Davies MBE, Officer Commanding 9 Parachute Squadron RE during the Falkland Campaign, and Captain Dick Brown, currently serving with 9 Parachute Squadron RE. Also welcomed were the Rev. John and June Moon, plus Fred and Betty Gray.

Correspondence from those unable to attend were read out, including a letter from the Squadron 'Baby,' Brenda Wylie, who was down under in Australia at the time.

Following the cutting of 'the cake,' which incidentally, had been regularly presented by Dorothy and Mary for the past 40 years, Dick Brown gave a resume of 9 Parachute Squadron's recent tasks and of their Sapper support to war torn or devastated areas around the world. During the evening, Arthur Hendry read aloud a poem given to him during his trip to Arnhem last year. Its content confirmed the appreciation that the Dutch people still have for the Airborne Forces. In spite of the late 'Lights Out,' everyone was on parade at the Red Cow, ready for the march to the parish church.

The 54th Arnhem Memorial Service was conducted by the Rev. John Moon, with lessons read by Peter Stainforth and Capt. Dick Brown. Names of the Fallen were read aloud by Tom Hicks, and wreaths laid by Harold Padfield and Norman Swift. The Last Post, a minute silence, Reveille, and Squadron lament played by the piper concluded the service. With the customary photo session under the 'Arnhem Oak' accomplished, we retired to 'Cissie's' for a cup of tea/coffee and a biscuit.

By an amazing coincidence, the people of Spalding have been reminded of a wartime incident. There had been correspondence in a local paper about outside 'privies,' and it was stated in a letter published in an edition on the pervious Thursday. "That the privies at Donington Dial Hall had been blown up by men of the Parachute Regiment in 1944, just before they left for Arnhem."

As some members of the Squadron well know, this is incorrect. The writer of the letter has been informed of the identity of the real culprits, as the Squadron was paying 'Barrack room damages' for some time later. Credit where credit is due, please. A very enjoyable weekend was had by all, and we extend our sincere thanks to Eric and Nina Booth for organising things for us.

Double Hills

By Chris Chambers

Together with Jan, Tom Ormiston and Mick Porter, we joined up with members of the South West Branch at the cemetery in Weston-Super-Mare. The occasion was the commemorative service for those that died when Horsa Glider RJ113 crashed at Poulton while en-route to Arnhem.

Some of those present then moved on to Poulton to join up with Peter Yeates for the Double Hill Commemorative Service. Unfortunately, the so-called 'English summer' prevented the service from being held at the Memorial Cairn. Peter Yeates and his committee were not to be out done and promptly reorganised the programme in the village hall. Despite the elements, over 200 people had travelled to the village to attend the service. Various Associations laid fifteen floral tributes, and Ray Jardine laid a wreath of the behalf of the Airborne Engineers Association. The Rev. Richard Inglesby, who is the vicar of Paulton and Farrington, conducted the church service. A poem read by 10-year-old Sophie Wilson, brought a tear to many an eye. The Midsomer Norton and Radstock silver band provided the music for the service, and were aided by the support of Frank Menzies-Hearn with his bagpipes.

During a break in the weather, the parade, graced with the presence of serving members of 9 Parachute Squadron were inspected by Brig. M.D.K. Dauncey, DCO, DL having been reported as 'Ready for your Inspection' by the parade commander Lt. Chris Warhurst.

Following the afternoon tea, which had been provided by the ladies of the village, a raffle was held and the sum of £100 was raised. The money is used to help finance the event. Peter Yeates wishes to thank all those that attended the Commemorative Service, and sincerely hopes that with improved weather, the attendance next year will be even better.

News Items

Helpline for Veterans

The following article was published in "The Times" on 5th October 1998:

"Veterans and their families are to have their own advice service run by the Ministry of Defence. The Veterans Advice Unit to be started today (5th October) by Doug Henderson, the Armed Forces Minister, honours a pledge by Labour during last year's election campaign to do more for former servicemen and women. The main purpose of the unit was to guide veterans to the many organisations that already exist, such as the War Pensions Agency, the Royal British Legion, and other charitable groups."

All in a Smile

By Ron 'Smoky' Gibson

You cannot write off these "old Sappers," they pop up when least expected. It was on the recent AGM/Reunion at Great Yarmouth, while booking in at reception that a face from the past came into view. With other members of the Association waiting to book in, I joined in with the usual 'long time no see lads!'

One chap smiled, and I immediately recalled seeing that smile many years ago. To be exact it was in 1945 at Bulford Barracks. Stating that I recognised the smile, but unable to put a name to the face, I commented that we probably served together in 2 Troop 3rd Squadron. Quick introductions confirmed that I was addressing Gordon (Smudger) Smith. A hasty 'all of our yesterdays' then ensued, recalling names of troop members past and present.



Gordon had served with 2 troop through Normandy, the Ardennes, Rhine, Java and finally Palestine, where he was eventually demobbed. It was while serving in Palestine that Gordon met up with his younger brother who was serving with the Royal Artillery airborne unit. Ironically, Gordon did not even know his brother was in the Army! Smudger now resides in New Zealand, having emigrated after the war ended. He asked me to say hello to any of our readers that he served with, or shared a pint or two with him. Should any of you be visiting New Zealand please look him up. You will be made most welcome.

SMUDGER - Gordon Smith

Impressions in Captivity

By Sapper Eric Booth

1st PARACHUTE SQUADRON RE: SEPT 1944

Simple observations of everyday things, noted solely for the benefit of me. A safeguard against the time I forgot hardship and want. In conclusion, I dare to prophesy a better world for men if all people were inoculated with captivity instead of Battle and Blood.

To a person who has never anticipated captivity, the reaction spreads over a certain space of time; full realisation comes too late. Prisoners are herded together like cattle, and moved here and there, with a deliberate shortage of food. They are subjected to every kind of inconvenience possible; minds and wits are dulled by this subtle methodical way, or rather procedure. No physical violence is needed and therefore not indicated.

First Thoughts

Having had but one meal in nine days gives one time for thought and reflection, later with the stomach fuller, one's views are not quite so directly distorted. However, an empty stomach speaks first.

When a man is packed with forty-nine others in a closed rail cattle wagon, he is more shocked than hurt. His pride lay in his freedom, and now he has lost that, he next thinks he should not be here, so seeks to fix the blame on someone else. Why should he have to engage an enemy, superior in equipment and numbers is one feint used first, (quoted as such). Trust that old bastard to drop us in the muck. Anyway, he could not command a kindergarten; he is safe enough. To himself, he is the ONLY prisoner, an individual purposely singled out for humiliation. For the first time in his life, he is subjected to self-pity.

Historical Events

Tragino Reunion

By Fred Gray

On Saturday, 3rd October, I was privileged to be invited to the reunion of the survivors of the Tragino Aqueduct Raid, which took place in 1941. Twenty-two attended the dinner, of which only five were involved in the operation, Harry Pexton (Infantry) Jim Maher, David Struthers, and Pop Julian (Royal Engineers) and Fred Sugden of the RAF. Two other Sappers, Lt. Paterson and Spr. Davidson, now live in Canada and New Zealand respectively. I was able to gain details of the operation and learn of the difficulties of their attempted escape to the sea, and their subsequent capture. Little realising that many of the group joined the Partisans after the Italian surrender, and that they fought with them until recaptured by the Germans, and subsequently sent to POW camps in Germany.

On their return to England in 1945 there was no de-briefing and no official record kept of their experiences during the operation, the POW camp, or their time spent with the partisans. A wasted opportunity to record a unique experience and a bold experiment!

I would like to express my thanks to my host Mr Jim Maher, and his fellow former Sapper colleagues for the opportunity of sharing in their experiences.

History of 131 Independent Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers

131 Airborne Engineer Regiment (TA) was formed in 1947 when the Territorial Army was reestablished and provided the Engineer support to 16th Airborne Division (TA). The Regiment HQ was situated with the Divisional HQ at Pont Street, Knightsbridge, and its 4 Squadrons were raised in Hull, Glasgow, Croydon, and Hendon. The Regiment was progressively re-organised over the next few years, for example, when the Glasgow based Squadron opened a new troop in Falkirk, its Liverpool troop became part of the Hull Squadron. By 1954, 299 Squadron had its HQ in Hull, with troops in Doncaster and Liverpool, and 300 Squadron had troops in Edinburgh, Falkirk, and Glasgow, with Squadron HQ. 301 Squadron in Croydon had a troop in Guildford.

The volunteer strength and reputation of the Regiment enabled a successful case for it to be totally retained when 16 Airborne Division was reduced to 44 Regiment Parachute Brigade Troop in 1956.

Regimental HQ remained with the Brigade HQ in Pont Street and later moved with it to the Duke of Yorks HQ in Chelsea. A Birmingham troop of the Croydon Squadron was formed from a Coy of the former 18th Parachute Battalion.

This troop flourished and eventually became the HQ of 301 Parachute Engineer Squadron with troops at Farnham and Hackbridge in Surrey. 301 Park Squadron moved from Hendon to Kingsbury, North London, with a plant troop at Luton.

The Regiment reached a peak in the early '60s with over 1,000 volunteers. The National service obligation no longer existing. It was the largest parachute trained unit in the Brigade and it is believed to have been the unit with the greatest number of men earning annual bounty in the TA. During this period, Squadron-sized detachments served their annual camps in many overseas theatres, carrying out construction engineer tasks as well as parachuting with Canadian, French, German and Italian forces. In 1964, the bulk of the Regiment went to camp in Aden and in 1965, a force based on 299 Squadron went into Little Aden.

Shortly afterwards, in 1967, came the second major reduction and post-war reorganisation of the TA. The Parachute Brigade was reduced in size to 3 Parachute Battalions with a Gunner Bty and a Sapper Squadron. The Squadron in Kingsbury inherited the Regiment number and became 131 Independent Parachute Squadron RE (V) HQ with Support Troop. The Parachute Field Troops were formed in the locations of the former Squadrons in Hull, Grangemouth and Birmingham, and inherited their numbers, 299, 300 and 301 respectively. The reputation and achievements of the Squadron over the next ten years more than upheld the traditions of the Regiment, with camps in Europe, Persian Gulf, Africa and Canada. The 'Ubique' motto of the Corps of the Royal Engineers was manifestly evident. Wherever any unit of the Bde parachuted, there was at least a large section, usually a troop, of the Squadron.

The Transition from Airborne to Commando

In 1977 came drastic reductions in Regular and TA Airborne forces. The volunteer traditions of 131 Regiment and Squadron were such that the only cap badge the volunteers would wear was that of the Royal Engineers, but it had to be on a 'special forces' beret! It was a great honour to the Squadron that the Royal Marine Commando Forces accepted it into the order of battle of 3 Commando Brigade. The Squadron, now in green berets but retaining the parachute capability, did not have to move from its locations and the HQ's remained at Kingsbury with commando field troops (299, 300 and 301) at Hull, Grangemouth and Birmingham. Support troop was raised at Plymouth, inheriting numbers of the former 302 Airborne Support (Park) Squadron.

The transfer from the Red to Green Beret was much more challenging than might be appreciated. Every member of the Squadron, whatever his age, had to attend the tough and demanding Commando course, but this was the kind of challenge with which 131 had traditionally thrived upon.

South Atlantic Medal Association (1982)

Sama82

SAMA82 began its existence at the end April 1997, the fifteenth anniversary of the uninvited arrival of Argentine forces in the Falkland Islands. Soon afterwards, a task force was assembled in Great Britain and dispatched to the South Atlantic in order to restore Her Majesty's Sovereignty. On 14th June 1982, Manor General Jeremy Moore was able to announce to the world that the Falkland Islanders were again living under the Government of their choice. Seventy-four days of occupancy had elapsed.

The main purpose of SAMA82 is simply stated. We intend to maintain and promote a sense of pride and comradeship among all veterans of the South Atlantic campaign, and to keep them in touch with each other in a manner, which respects both individual privacy and personal requirements. We also want to establish and maintain contact with other organisations involved in the welfare of the armed forces and ensure that due consideration is given to the interests of South Atlantic veterans. SAMA82 will also investigate for consideration, by an appropriate organisation, any case of hardship or distress amongst South Atlantic veterans, in which direct financial assistance is sought or recommended.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the majority of SAMA82's members, we desire most strongly to re-establish and strengthen links with the people of the Falkland Islands.

Full Membership will be reserved for those in possession of the South Atlantic Medal (1982). Special Membership will be granted on application (and without payment of fee) to the next of kin of those who died in the South Atlantic Campaign. Honorary Membership may be conferred by SAMA82's executive on any individual who has been of great assistance in the management of SAMA's affairs. Letters of application should be sent to:

South Atlantic Medal Association (1982)

P.O. Box 82

Blackwood, Gwent NP2 OYE

Down Under

By Tom Marshall

During a visit to our family 'Down Under' last April/May, I arranged to meet up with some former members of the British Airborne Forces Association (Victoria Branch). In keeping with the tradition of the country, the Branch laid on a BBQ (chuck another shrimp the on bar-bee clobber). It was at this gathering that I met up with Len Hughes and Mick Welton (former 9 Parachute Squadron). Unfortunately, Wally Gee, Harry Hammond, and Gareth Doyle were unable to attend.

In return for their hospitality, our family invited them back for a 'Sgts Mess Style' Curry and Liquid Lunch. Our eldest son, a former POM in the Corps, prepared the meal. Unfortunately, we had no "compo" available to offer our guests.

Again Wally and Harry were unable to attend, and Gareth had been tasked with driving Mum-in-Law to the airport. Gareth made up for this, by inviting us over to his abode, and I will leave you all to guess what the menu consisted of!

My thanks to all of the Victoria lads that made us so welcome, it was greatly appreciated. I hope the Association tie that I promised Gareth duly arrived.



Pictured at the Bar-Bee

**L to R:
Len Hughes, Mick Welton, John Wilkinson (Branch President),
Yours truly and our good ladies**

It is with regret that I have since heard from the family, that Len Hughes has passed away.

Obituaries

George Fairs, MM



George Fairs MM, a very well respected veteran of the 2nd World war, passed away on 2nd September after a short illness. He was eighty-seven years old.

George entered military life at the age of fourteen when he joined the Royal Engineers in 1925. Serving first in a survey unit and then transferring to the MT section. After completing twelve years as a regular soldier, he was placed on the reserve list. At the outbreak of hostilities in 1939, he was recalled to the colours. Posted to 9 Field Company he went to France with the BEF, eventually being taken off the beaches at Dunkirk and returned to England. He was awarded the Commander-In-Chief's Certificate for Gallantry.

After being reorganised as an airborne unit, 9 Company was sent to North Africa in 1942. George served throughout the whole of the campaign. In 1943, he took part in the invasion of Sicily. Along with many of the gliders carrying the invasion force, the one that George was in ditched into the sea. He survived the crash and managed to scramble onto the wing where he witnessed two comrades fall into the sea and drown. George was rescued four hours later by the RN.

After the Italian campaign, the next great event in George's career was the Battle of Arnhem. It was here that he was awarded the Military Medal for "Saving life in the Field." Later, towards the end of the battle, he was wounded in the thigh but still managed to find an abandoned boat on the riverbank. It had a hole in the bow, but he repaired this with Field Dressings and then crossed the river with three other men from the Border Regiment. He was then flown to England for medical attention to his own wounds. After recovering, he then embarked for Norway with HQRE 1st Airborne Division.

On demobilisation in 1945, he settled in Woking with his wife Mabel and son Peter. He returned to his civilian employment at the Brookwood hospital as an attendant until his retirement in 1976. He enjoyed attending the meetings of the AEA, but most of all he loved his holiday home on the South coast. It was here that he spent many happy days with Mabel. They had been married for fifty-seven years

Our most sincere condolences are offered to Mabel, her son Peter, daughter-in-law Ann and all members of the family.

Len Hughes



We report the unexpected death of Len Hughes in July 1998. Len was born in January 1926 in Chiswick, London.

After leaving school, he enlisted into the York and Lancs Regiment in 1944. In August of the same year he went to France with his Regiment and was then re-posted to the 9th Battalion, Seaforth Highlanders. He fought and was wounded in the Ardennes campaign. When the 9th Battalion disbanded in 1946 Len transferred to the 2nd Battalion in Germany. He was demobbed in 1947 wearing the kilt. In 1949 he re-enlisted into the Royal Engineers and served in 1 Fortress Squadron RE in Gibraltar. So, by this winding trail Len finally arrived at the indestructible 9 Independent Airborne Squadron RE.

He qualified at Abingdon as a parachutist in 1950, and soldiered on with the red beret, serving in Cyprus and Egypt. He saluted for the last time on 4th February 1954, time- served. In civilian life in the UK he worked as a plant operator and fitter and emigrated to Australia in

1960, where he again worked as a maintenance fitter, until retiring in 1987.

Len was very much the quiet Australian. He had been a Brigade welterweight finalist, and only an injured hand stopped him. He never talked about this, nor the years of dedication to competition cycling, in which he had been a Time Trial and Hill Climb champion in 1956 and 57. He had a strong community orientation, in addition to tending his beloved orchids. He was from 1960 to 1975 a Cub Master and Youth Club Leader. The sadness of his funeral ceremony, was for the writer, partially mitigated by his vicar's tribute to Len's work for the Church. He was a staunch Association supporter, and even when no longer able to march the full distance on Anzac Day, he turned up in our "civilian uniform" travelling to the commemoration service in one of the vehicles so thoughtfully provided by the 'Wartime Vehicles Association.'

We express our sincere condolences to Len's wife Joan, and his family. We missed Len on our own Airborne Forces Day - 19th July 1998, the more so, because we know that he would certainly have been on parade. May his soul rest in peace.

Written by Dennis Bateman – Australia

Ken Cowie



The funeral service was held at Buckie Baptist Church recently to mark the passing of a former member of the Squadron, Ken Cowie, who died after short illness on 22nd September 1998.

A Buckie resident all his life, Ken's early days saw him join BRS as a trainee mechanic before joining 9 Parachute Squadron in 1955. During his time with the Squadron he took part in operations against the Greek terrorists and later in November 1956 went to Suez with 1 Troop.

He left the army at the end of a three-year engagement, joined members of his family working in Buckie harbour, and later went to sea with the Merchant Navy. While aboard MV Helena in 1975 he received a testimonial for his attempt to save the life of a fellow crewmate.

In recent years, Ken and his wife Norah took over the running of a Taxi firm, which they ran until last year. He was also actively involved with local charity work organising several fund raising parachute jumps over the past few years. He was a keen bowls player and was a well-known Welfare League football player in his younger days. The attendance at his funeral showed the respect held for him by the community. His wife Norah and their two sons survive Ken.

Major Mick Lobb (Retired)

It is with great regret that we announce the death of Mick Lobb, who died in early October following a short and distressing illness. A full obituary will be published in the next Newsletter.

Major Bill Powell MBE MM



Major Bill Powell passed away after a short illness on 15th May at the Royal Albert and Edward Infirmary, Wigan.

Bill enlisted as an Army Apprentice at Beachley Camp Chepstow in July 1937. He trained as a Carpenter and Joiner and represented the College at football and rugby. On completion of his training, he joined the ranks of the Royal Engineers in July 1940.

During the war, he served with The Combined Operations Piloted Persons Unit. This was a special squadron, transporting men to operational areas by submarine. They then paddled ashore by canoe to carry out reconnaissance of beach landing areas, and other hazardous tasks. He was awarded the Military Medal in 1945 for his conduct in this area of operations.

In 1946, he joined 9 Airborne Squadron in Palestine as SQMS completing a two-year tour before joining 301 Parachute Squadron (TA), as the regular PSI. From 1951 to 1953, he was the SSM of 9 Airborne Squadron in the Canal Zone and Cyprus and during their home tour in Aldershot. In 1954 he returned to the Canal Zone as the RSM of 35 Engineer Regiment and then as RSM of 131 Airborne Engineer Regiment (TA). He held two more RSM appointments, first with 1 RSME Chatham and 2 Division Engineers in BAOR.

He received his commission into the Royal Engineers as a Captain in 1965 and was appointed A/I Bridging Wing RSME Chatham. In 1968 he became Major (QM) of 35 Engineer Regiment stationed in Hameln, West Germany. Major Bill Powell retired from the Army in the late eighties, and took up employment with Maybee and Johnson Bailey Bridge Company, with whom he spent the remainder of his working life. He attended the AEA re-unions each year and in general, spent a quiet retirement in Wigan.

We extend our deepest sympathy to his two sons, John, and Phillip.

William Helsdon

Bill Helsdon passed away on 10th October after a long and distressing illness. He was eighty-three years old. Bill joined the Army at the outbreak of war and soon found his way into the ranks of 9 Field Company. He fought with the 9th in North Africa, Sicily and Italy. During the fighting he suffered severe wounds to his knees and was medically downgraded and declared unfit for airborne duties. Bill left the Army in 1946.

He took up civilian employment in Fleet Street with the Times Newspaper, and later the Observer. An electrician by trade he became heavily involved with the Trades Union organisation, and became Deputy Shop Steward and Chappel Officer. After his retirement, Bill travelled extensively in east and west Europe.

In 1988 he became a widower and became involved with The Local Tenants Association and The British Legion. For the last four years of his life, he became virtually house bound and had to have constant care. He was cremated on Monday, 18th October.

In his will, he bequeathed generous donations to the Airborne Engineers Association, Cancer Research and the RSPCA. Sadly, Bill has no surviving family.

Chris Chambers - Association Membership Secretary

Since the September supplementary Newsletter, a further eight (8) members have joined us, they are as follows:

Maj. Chris Tickell	HQ 5 Airborne Brigade OC 9 Independent Parachute Squadron	1993-Serving
Peter Watt	300 Squadron RE	1959-1966
Michael Hale	9 Independent Parachute Squadron RE	1993-1998
Edmund Ellis	131 Parachute Engineer Regiment RE	1960-1967
Ernest Handling	9 Independent Airborne Squadron RE	1949-1954
Albert Price	9 Field Coy RE (Airborne)	1942-1946
David Raes	3rd Battalion Parachute Regiment 9 Independent Parachute Squadron RE	1978-1986
Paul Burlace	2rd Battalion Parachute Regiment 9 Independent Parachute Squadron RE	1967-1979

To all new members - "Welcome to the Association"

With the end of the year fast approaching, we now have the opportunity to look back at the highs and lows of the past 12 months. We are all saddened by the loss of loved ones, whether a family member, good friend or colleague.

Memberships

The membership continues to grow at a steady pace. During the month of October, I have had a good response from the Service Pals, teletext page 682 on Channel 4. Keep spreading the word and thanks for names of potential members that you have sent me. In the meantime, I will continue to beg, badger, and gently persuade the ones unfortunate enough to meet me in person.

Sincere thanks are extended to Tom Purves for his continued generosity to the Association.

The AGM (Hi-di-Hi) Seacroft, Great Yarmouth

The AGM broke new ground in the choice of location by going "civvy" for the first time. A few fingers were crossed that all would be well. It turned out to be an excellent 'Airborne Operation.' A good simple plan and sound preparation after the recce, meant the surprise and objectives were all achieved. Congratulations to everyone concerned for making it such a great weekend.

Remembrance Day

Memorial services will have taken place by the time you read this Newsletter. We will all have had our personal memories of fellow Sapper's that were killed in action from WW2 right up to present times. Sadly, the ultimate sacrifice is still the price to be paid to ensure that others may continue to live in peace and freedom.

We honour and remember our fallen comrades with sadness and pride, but we must not forget those that have survived, having suffered loss of limbs or have lasting mental scars to bear.

Since the founding of our Association, many of you have made contact with friends that you have not seen or heard from in years, and for most of us, that in itself means the Association is a success.

On a personal level, it never ceases to amaze me that there appears to be no obvious prejudices due to age, time served or rank, as can be found within other Associations - long may this continue.

Correspondence


Frank & Helen Brady, Mal & Joan Scott, Don Newman and the Airborne Sappers Association (Australia) send "Seasons Greetings" to all members and their families.

I would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and Happy Prosperous New Year.

"Happy Landings"

CHRIS CHAMBERS

Membership Secretary



Association Shop

Items available

Description	Price	Postage &, Packing
Association Ties (Pegasus logo)	£12.50	75p - UK
Association Directories (Updated October 1998)	£5.00	£1.25-UK
Association Blazer Badges	£12.00	60p - UK
Association Jumpers Maroon or blue with Pegasus logo and embroidered "Airborne Engineers" (Sizes: 38-48")	£19.00	£2.60 - UK*
Association Sweatshirts Maroon or blue with Pegasus logo Embroidered "Airborne Engineers" (Sizes: M/UXL)	£15.00	£2.60 - UK*
Association Polo Shirts Fred Perry style • Maroon or blue with Pegasus Logo Embroidered "Airborne Engineers" (Sizes: M/L/XL)	£14.50	£2.50 - UK*
Association T-Shirts Maroon only with Pegasus Logo Embroidered "Airborne Engineers" (Sizes: L/XL)	£8.50	£1.00- UK
Association Shields	£16.00	£2.60 - UK*
Book 'The 9th' by Tom Purves, Ex-9 Indep Para Sqn RE	£14.00	£3.50 - UK*
A Memoir of 9 Parachute Squadron RE in the Falklands Campaign 1982 by Major C.M. Davies, MBE RE	£12.00	£1.00- UK
Stick Pins (Parachute Wings)	£2.60	60p - UK
Anniversary Silk Ties Double logo of Pegasus and Wings	£15.00	75p - UK
Christmas Cards (6's) AEA badge on cover	£3.25	60p - UK
Pair of Association Cuff Links /As Blazer Badge but slightly smaller	£8.50	£1.50-UK

Cheques should be made payable to:
Airborne Engineers Association

'Recorded Delivery

Would overseas members please send cheques in £ Pounds Sterling from your local Bank or International Money Order from your Post Office (please include a little extra for postage).

"My thanks for your continued support, and a Very Happy Christmas.

Yours aye!"

Jan

Association Shop Order Form

Description	QTY	Price	P8LP per item	Total - £
Association Ties		£12.50	75p - UK	
Association Directories		£5.00	£1.25-UK	
Association Blazer Badges		£12.00	60p - UK	
Association Jumpers Colour: Maroon or Blue Size: (38-48")		£19.00	£2.60 - UK*	
Association Sweatshirts Colour: Maroon or Blue Size: (M/L/XL)		£15.00	£2.60 - UK*	
Association Polo Shirts Colour: Maroon or Blue Size: (M/L/XL)		£14.50	£2.50 - UK*	
Association T-Shirts Size: (M/L/XL)		£8.50	£1.00- UK	
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TOTAL £				

Cheques should be made payable to: Airborne Engineers Association

Name:.....

Delivery Address:.....

.....

.....Postcode:.....

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Would overseas members please send cheques in £ Pounds Sterling from your local Bank or International Money Order from your Post Office (please include a little extra for postage.)
