



Airborne Engineers Association

Registered Charity No. 1009201

Newsletter

APRIL 1999

PRESIDENT

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Brigadier G.A. Hewish, MBE

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From the Chair!

Dear Members,

At the recent Ordinary General Meeting held in the John Rock Room on Sunday, 14th February, it was brought to the Committee's attention, that 91 members had failed to renew their Newsletter Subscription. Having printed a surplus of the December issue, a copy, with yet another reminder for the payment of their subscription, was forwarded to the members concerned. Regrettably, only a few of these members have responded to this final reminder. It is the Committee's decision to cease any further distribution of Newsletters - hence, if you don't pay you don't get!

Following the memorial service at Arnhem last year, the Committee learned that there has not been a wreath laid on the behalf of the Corps of Royal Engineers at the main ceremony. This has now been resolved, and the Airborne Engineers Association will take on this duty for all future ceremonies.

Airborne Forces weekend has once again been resurrected! It will take place during 3/4 July this year. With the publication in the local Aldershot press confirming the imminent move of the Parachute Brigade to Colchester, this will definitely be the 'Final Airborne Forces Weekend' ever to be held in Aldershot.

There will not be the traditional parade; however, there will be a parade to commemorate the disbandment of the 5 Airborne Brigade Logistics Battalion. Units within the Brigade will be doing their "own thing." 9 Para Sqn will be organising a Saturday evening function. The Sqn bar together with the 'John Rock' Room will of course be open for a sufficient period in which to quench the thirst of the many expected visitors. At the time of going to press, there is no official program of events. However, I doubt that this will deter those of you intent on attending the "Last 'Aldershot' Airborne Forces Weekend."

If any further news or a programme of events is forthcoming, it will be conveyed to the representatives at the OGM due to be held in Ripon on Saturday, 19th June, 1999.

The one bright note is that 9 Parachute Squadron RE, will remain in Aldershot until the year 2003.

If the millennium bug is going to be as bad as they say, "Dig in, stock up with compo, and remember to keep your heads down."

Best Wishes to all!

Tom Ormiston - Chairman
Airborne Engineers Association

Committee Members

Position	Member	Address	Postcode	Telephone
President	Brig GA Hewish MBE			
Vice President	Bill Rudd			
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			
131 TA	Bunny Brown			
591 Sqn	Tony Jackson			
147 AB Pk Sqn RE	Major Ian Robbie			
9 Fld Coy (Airborne) RE	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

The Squadron arrived for its first tour of the Former Republic of Yugoslavia over a period of 3 weeks in September 1998. The overall strength in theatre peaked at a total of 118 and consisted of Squadron Headquarter, two field troops, a plant troop and the support elements. Meanwhile, our commitment to the Lead Parachute Battlegroup was maintained by a reinforced 1 Troop remaining in the United Kingdom. As the Field Squadron within 36 Engineer Regiment Group we were to provide, in basic terms, both construction support to the Stabilisation Force (SFOR) bases across our sector, and combat engineer support to the Southern Armoured Infantry Battlegroup.

The week spent on pre-deployment training, had perhaps, sown more uncertainty about the impending tour than it had given true insight, into what we could expect to encounter. However, it would not prove long before everyone was in no doubt of our construction role in Bosnia-Herzegovina. As reconnaissance and preparation proceeded for the construction tasks, the crucial job of attending to our own house before those of other units took place. Although already an adequate bar by normal standards, the inherited log cabin required a touch of maroon. This it quickly received along with some talented paintings from the "Hindley" stable. Decoration of the bland Co-Ri-Mec accommodation was left up to the occupants. Those 7 feet by 20 feet rooms housed a maximum of three, came with a necessary heater that only lost its power supply occasionally!

2 Troop's first job was to provide concrete turning pads for tracked vehicles and a washdown point at Sipovo SFOR base. For the duration of the task they were content to be accommodated at the location of this field ambulance hospital, returning to Gornji Vakuf on only the occasional weekend. Whereas for the most part, 2 Troop remained as a single entity, the sizes of its allotted tasks dictated that 3 Troop be split up for most of them. It too had its share of concrete pads at both Glamoc, where some correction of the previous squadron's work was also required and at Sanski Most in the North of the divisional area.

An aspect of the tour that will not be forgotten quickly was the time spent travelling to and from task sites. This was frustrating for the drivers, coupled with the speed limits imposed because of the poor driving of the locals. The highest profile tasks that the Squadron undertook were at Banja Luka. Support Troop plant completed the ground works for a new re-broadcast station, which 3 Troop then built with Hesco Bastion forming the perimeter and prefabricated accommodation units within. Local contractors were used only to supply building materials such as ready mix concrete, timber and aggregate.



Many of the Bosnian's delivering the aggregate to this site had an uncanny resemblance to those featured on a poster of wanted war criminals! 2 Troop's frustration at the inability of the contractors to meet their times for pouring concrete experienced at Sipovo, continued at Banja Luka Metal Factory, where they had a number of tasks to upgrade the camp. Even greater frustration resulted for the time it took for construction materials to arrive for a task.

Cpl Heley supervising the Sanger construction at the hill top site near Banja Luka

Each construction task received some plant support, but there was not a substantial job that the Support Troop could really get their teeth into. A huge amount of time was however; spent maintaining the vehicle fleet and the REME workshop was always busy. Our snow and ice clearance capability was not really tested by the weather, except when a search was mounted for a Royal Military Police vehicle that had become lost! Other assistance given included the recovery following the crash of an Army Air Corps Lynx and the demolition of an unstable bomb-damaged private house. The only other task to directly benefit the local community was where a field section spent one worthwhile week carrying out repairs at a kindergarten in Gornji Vakuf.

Despite being extremely busy on overseas tour in terms of construction, there was the opportunity to carry out essential training. The difficulty of changing magazines in conditions where gun oil freezes was experienced during a live firing package. Attempts were made to parachute; however the windows of opportunity to do so with the Americans in Italy, unfortunately, did not go ahead due to poor weather. However, we will always have the opportunity to "tab," and aside from the normal fitness training, this came in the form of a 100-Km march for charity. Additionally, many were able to benefit from a week's adventure training on the island of Brae, and some memorable nights were had in Trogir in Croatia.

As a result of the restructuring of the Engineer Regiment in theatre, the field squadron is no longer required, and the Quartermaster's department has the most unenviable task of closing all the accounts, this whilst simultaneously completing the paperwork for bedsheets lost at a Roman Night in the Squadron bar! The SQMS hopes to return before the turn of the millennium, as do the members of 2 Troop Group who remain in Split, Croatia.

Their task until mid-March is construction of the first phase of a sizeable program to relocate the current logistic depot.

9 Squadron's Operation PALATINE tour has surprised many outsiders, who probably believed that we are only suited to our primary role of supporting 5 Airborne Brigade. To operate within the constraints that seem peculiar to the Former Republic of Yugoslavia has been demanding, with it never clear whether the situation is operational and the increasing move towards 'garrisonisation.' A huge amount has been learned across the board and much trade experience gained; however we now direct our efforts towards support within our current, and thereafter-new brigade.

9 Parachute Squadron RE -100 Km Charity "Tab"



During the period of 16/17th January, 30 men from the Squadron tabbed 100 km across central Bosnia in aid of charity. With a few short breaks the tab was completed in 19 hours 59 minutes - a truly awesome feat considering the lads had not done any training!

To those of you that have already sponsored the team, we extend our sincere thanks. However, if there is anyone that would like to offer any amount, however large or small, donations should be sent to WO11 (SSM) Nick Blair. All of the money raised will go to the Army Benevolent and the Squadron Charitable Fund. The latter is used to support

Squadron personnel who find themselves in particular need immediately after injury, and before other financial support becomes available.

Cheques should be made payable to: Central Bank 9 Para Sqn RE.

Aldershot Branch

By Fred Gray

We held our Branch Christmas Dinner early last year to enable us to combine with the Aldershot Branch of the REA. It was held during November in the WO's & Sgt's Mess Minley. It turned out to be a little more formal than we expected, but it was of a general consensus amongst those attending, that it was a very pleasant evening and well worth combining with the REA. It gave us the opportunity to meet them on their home ground, and also team up with a few Sappers from our service days, other than those spent in 9 Squadron. We shall be inviting some of their members to attend our summer BBQ, which is normally held in June or July.



During the month of November we had the pleasure of a visit by Roy Jackson from Australia. Roy joined the Squadron from the Parachute Regiment and served most of his time in Plant Troop. He was able to meet up with a few of his former colleagues from his Squadron days, and in particular with Rick Mogg who was the Plant Troop S/Sgt at that time.

Roy with the Aldershot Branch Members on his recent visit

After an excellent curry lunch, the inevitable group photograph was taken, and a copy sent to Roy at his home in Clayton Australia as a memento of his visit to our branch.

Disenchanted with the poor service at Potters International Hotel, we have changed our Sunday lunch venue to the much more people friendly Princess Royal pub and restaurant. Following the January branch meeting, thirty-five branch members and families attended the Sunday lunch, and all agreed that it was well worth the inconvenience of having to drive a few extra miles.

Since the last newsletter two new members have joined our branch, Ted Ellis, formally with 131 Para Engr Regt TA, and Don Docherty, who served in the Squadron in the late fifties and early sixties. We extend a warm welcome to them both and look forward to seeing them at our meetings.

There are many former members of the Squadron living in our area and we would very much like to see them become members of the branch. Meetings are normally held on Sundays, which enables people to travel in daylight and also, to join us for Sunday lunch. Anyone who would like to become a member of the Aldershot Branch should ring Fred Gray [REDACTED] for details of meetings and location. You will be made most welcome. PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF PHONE NUMBER ,

Chatham Branch

By Eric Blenkinsop

Meetings back at Branch level were always going to be low key, following the tremendous spirit of comradeship & "bonhomie" at the AGM in Seacroft. However, we were able to enjoy some of the fruits of the AGM at our two remaining meetings before year-end.

At the October meeting, we were again privileged to enjoy the company of Gordon Smith. This was by courtesy of his brother, who had driven him by car from Ramsgate. The link with Gordon has been maintained since his return to New Zealand. Our Chairman (Arthur) sent him a Christmas card, and received a nice letter in response. Jim Rogers is communicating with Gordon in the search for Airborne friends of long ago. Many of whom have since gone to ground in New Zealand and simply disappeared!

We were delighted to welcome Bill Perry and his wife Freda to our November meeting. Bill a former 3 Airborne Squadron member was based in Neumunster and Hameln in 1948. Bill met up with several friends from the past at the AGM, and decided to join the branch. We now look forward to their company on future occasions.

Our Branch Christmas lunch gave our members the opportunity to bring along their family and friends for a festive get-together. The event was well attended with a total of 36 members, friends, and family gathered together in relative comfort and a friendly atmosphere. It was also an opportunity to meet up once again with Mick and Pamela Fisher, we trust that we shall be seeing more of them this year. On a slightly down beat note, several members were disappointed with the standard of catering and service - Point to note when booking for next Christmas!

It was nice to get together again for our January meeting. This was quite well attended, and we received a pleasant surprise with the attendance of Sgt Jim McCarthy. Jim had been a regular attendee before his posting away, and we were delighted to learn that he has been posted back to Brompton as an instructor.

A membership subscription has been received from Bert Haffenden, who had served with 3 Para Sqn with Ron (Smokey) Gibson and Jim Rogers. Bert regularly attends the 6th AB Div re-unions, and we now look forward to seeing him at our Branch meetings, when time permits.

On the behalf of the Branch, we offer our sincere condolences to Dot Parks and her family (Birmingham Branch) on the loss of her husband Dennis. Our condolences are also conveyed to John Waite and his family (Yorkshire Branch) at the loss of his lovely wife Marie. Our very best wishes for a full and speedy recovery are extended to Col. Chris and Jenny Davies in their efforts to restore Chris to full health again.

Looking ahead, we hope to see Bert Fordham in the not too distant future. Bert is making slow but sure progress in his recovery from his knee replacement. We understand that he is now able to drive short distances in his car.

Dates for the Diary

26 th April	Branch AGM;
13 th June	Branch Sunday lunch and quiz afternoon;
11 th September	6th AB Div re-union - Victory Club, London (A coach will be organised from Chatham - more details later);
10 th - 12 th September	Chatham REA Veterans Weekend.

North West Branch

By Brian Jones

It is with regret that this brief report from our Branch commences with the news of the passing away of Norman Towler in December 1998.

Our last meeting generated an attendance of 10 members, and at this point, we would like to extend a warm welcome to our two new members, Ian Strettle, and Geoff Marsden.

Due to an oversight in the passage of information, I must offer my apologies for not attending the funeral of Mol Molyneaux. Unfortunately, the news of his death and subsequent funeral was not conveyed to me until a week after the event. It was some-what embarrassing to hear the news from the RSM 75 Engr Regt (V) instead of through the Association, and would strongly request that Branches pass on information as and when it occurs.

We are looking forward to the Yorkshire Branch dinner in March, which of course will have taken place by the time this item is published. If, and when we are able to organise our own function we will put up the flag and let you all know.

Our next Branch meeting will be held at the White Barn pub in Cuddington, Cheshire on Saturday 10th April. If you are in the area, you will be made most welcome.

Yorkshire Branch

By Charlie Dunk

Greetings everyone from the depths of glorious Yorkshire. Due to the winter months, there has been very little activity in this "neck of the woods." The Branch held their Christmas dinner at the Hooton Pagnell back in December - it was another 3am finish, (and Lorraine and I left early!).

The main news from this quarter at the moment is that we have lost the use of the drill hall in Harrogate. Fortunately, the RSM of 38 Engineer Regiment has allowed us the use of the Corporals Club in Claro Barracks. Our first meeting at this new venue will be our AGM and this will be held on Friday, 19th April 1930 for 2000 hours. If by chance you are in the area, please drop in and join us.

Our annual dinner scheduled for Saturday; 20th March will have been held just before you receive this newsletter. However, just to let you know what you will have missed, I will enlighten you. The dinner will be held in the WO's & Sgt's Mess at Claro Barracks. Our guests of honour will include Maj. Gen. Sir Michael Gray, Brig. Garth Hewish and our Association Chairman Tom Ormiston. Numerous members from other branches have also booked in, and we look forward to a thoroughly enjoyable evening. I will give you an update in the next publication of the newsletter.

The Ripon Branch of the REA has again kindly allowed us to host the AEA OGM during the Ripon REA Veterans weekend. The event will be held during the weekend of 18-20th June 1999. Accommodation is becoming scarce, so please, if you want to join us, contact Bill Rudd soonest [REDACTED]. The complete weekend, including meals and accommodation, the cost is approx. £42.00 per head. This price does not include the coach trip to Masham brewery.

The outline itinerary for the weekend is as follows:

Friday, 18th June	Reception open in Deverell barracks from 1200 hours Light tea available between 1630 - 1730 hrs Social and supper commencing 1930 hours until??
Saturday, 19th June	Reception opens from 0900 hours Corps Silver Display in Ripon City Hall 1000 - 1200 hrs Corps Band concert in Ripon Market Place 1100 hrs
TBC	BBQ in Deverell Barracks 1230 - 1300 hours AEA OGM in Deverell Barracks commencing 1400 hrs Beating Retreat on Deverell Square at 1915 hours Dance & Cabaret with hot & cold buffet at 2000 hours
Sunday, 20th June	Freedom of the City March past Buffet lunch in Claro Barracks commencing 1300 hours

Birmingham Branch

Visit to Hameln - April 1998

By Kevin Lambeth

Firstly, we offer a sincere vote of thanks to Lt Col Mullin Commanding Officer 28 Amphibious Engineer Regiment, for sanctioning our visit. To WO11 Jim Hillman and his team, we extend a huge vote of thanks for the close liaison and organisation that made our trip such a resounding success.

(With the thanks out of the way let me continue before I get too carried away enthusing about our hosts). We set off from Birmingham at the God forsaken hour of 5am on a Thursday morning, arriving at Binden Barracks at 11pm that evening. We were delighted to be met by WO11 Jim Hillman and his wife Mandy. Trays of sandwiches and a bottomless teapot welcomed us, and in addition, a bar still open! (How did he know?) With stomachs full and our thirsts well quenched, we hit the sack!

Our Friday morning breakfast was provided in the Sergeants Mess (quite superb!). Watered and fed, we moved off to witness a demonstration of some of the new kit that our lads play with these days. They even allowed us to play with the new M3 Bridging rig! Located near the M3s was an MGB bridging set. Dave, the Sergeant, who was our host, stated that the MGB was no longer in use. Our offer to demonstrate how to erect it was politely declined. Our bridging and equipment demonstration completed, we then headed down town to visit old haunts and re-acquaint ourselves with German hospitality.

Friday evening our hosts did us proud with an invitation to a Seventies Night and BBQ in the Sgt's Mess. Again, the food was superb, and we extend our compliments to the Chef and his team. The evening will be a talking point for some time to come as we drank the bar dry. A great night was had by all.

Saturday Morning started on a sad note. Bob Jones, one of our Arnhem Veterans was taken ill. The Regiment in their usual efficient mode swung into action and shipped Bob off to the local hospital. (Bob, that's the second time the Germans have had you. Do you think they are trying to tell you something?) Fortunately, Bob made a sufficient recovery to make the return journey. I feel sure that Bob, and his wife Violet, would like to express their most sincere thanks to everyone who responded to his need.

Those still able had Brunch in the Mess, then set off with the Ratenfanger, on a guided tour of Hameln. On the conclusion of the guided tour, members dispersed to do their own thing (or find their favourite bar!).

On the Saturday evening, we were invited into the Corporals Mess. Again we had a few beers, built a few bridges, did a few parachute jumps, and generally swung the lamp! It was yet another late night! Sunday was a rather sober day with a run into Hannover (it was shut!) To console us we had a few beers and then returned to Hameln. Monday, the day of departure, and once again a superb breakfast. With tearful goodbyes to our new friends, we boarded our transport for the journey home.

En-route to the Hook of Holland we called in at Arnhem. Nostalgia for some, a privilege to others, I can only say, that I for one, was awe struck.

On leaving Arnhem, we went on to the Oosterbeek cemetery to pay our respects to the fallen. I still get a lump in the throat thinking about it. Following a wreath laying tribute, we left Oosterbeek with a silenced coach party. Most were reflecting on the tranquillity and history of what we had seen.

We arrived at the Hook of Holland just in time to see our ferry pulling out! We stood on the quayside waving the ferry goodbye. It was at this point that the Airborne initiative took over. We made a slight detour to Calais and arrived home two hours later than expected. Everyone who went on the trip expressed a wish to go again next year.

In June, WO11 Jim Hillman and his wife Mandy came to Birmingham on personal business and stayed at Mike Holdsworth's guest house. On the Friday evening, Mike arranged a BBQ for Jim and Mandy, and several of the Branch members popped in to say hello to them. As usual, a great night was had by all.

Because of the thoroughly enjoyable time that we experienced as guests of 28 Amphibious Engineer Regiment, we would like to visit you again? God willing, the approval of Lt. Col. Mulling, and the blessing of the new RSM, we will be back next year. So, watch this space!

“A Plea from the Heart”

After 20 years+ of hiding my past in Northern Ireland, and as a former member of 9 Indep Para Sqn RE (the thinking man’s SAS). I have decided to come out of the closet!

I do not know what prompted this, nostalgia, a sense of pride, peace in the community, de-commissioning, who knows? Anyway, I made my first contact with Dick Brown asking him if he could send me some memorabilia from my Squadron days (71-77). He did just that, enclosing an application form to join the AEA.

After mulling over the implications, I made contact with Chris Chambers (Association Membership Secretary). He gave me information to follow up, to enable me to make contact with fellow Airborne Sappers. However, to no avail! He advised me that Northern Ireland was an anomaly, and if a branch did exist at that time, was made up of members that were just ‘passing through,’ and existing only in name. Not to be deterred, I offered to act as a contact in Northern Ireland, and, with the assistance of existing members to try to establish a thriving branch of the Association. So, I pestered a couple of the committee members, one being Chris Chambers and the other being Dave Rutter. I even wrote to Ray Coleman the Association Secretary for his support.

To cut a long story short and not to waste valuable editorial space, they called my bluff. I was proposed and passed at the last AGM in Great Yarmouth. To my surprise, it seems that I have been elected onto the committee! If anyone knows of any ‘Airborne Sapper’ past or present that now resides in or is ‘passing through’ Northern Ireland, would you ask them to contact me - I promise not to blow their cover. For my next move in my recruiting campaign, I intend to make contact with, and infiltrate the N.I. branch of the PRA, by attending their next branch meeting in March/April. If any of you out there, read this, please make yourself known to me, I will be the only one wearing an AEA lapel badge.

Phil Chatterley

[REDACTED]

Tel: [REDACTED]

Phil Chatterley - N.I. Branch (membership of 1 and counting!)

Annual General Meeting

16-18th October, 1999

The Annual General Meeting and Reunion for 1999 will be held in Birmingham during the weekend 16-18th October 1999.

The Birmingham Branch committee have worked extremely hard, and have secured an excellent deal with the Birmingham City Forte Posthouse Hotel. Bed and breakfast in this 4 star hotel will cost £25.00 per head per night. The cost for the Saturday evening reunion dinner, which will be 4 course (silver service), will be £18.00 per head. Car parking is at the rear of the hotel, in a secure, subsidised, N.C.P. car park.

The AGM is to be held in the Birmingham United Services Club, which is located in Gough Street, approx. 200 yards from the hotel. A light lunch will be provided at the United Services club for a small fee. There will also be the normal bar facilities and tea/coffee for those that require it. For those not so sprightly, transport can be provided if requested.

Timings for the AGM will be 1400 hours prompt. This is to enable the staff sufficient time to rearrange the room for an evening function.

It is essential that members intent on attending the AGM/Reunion submit their request for accommodation/dinner together with their full payment at the earliest opportunity. Bookings will be allotted on a first come, first served basis!

Accommodation in the Posthouse Hotel, offers single, twin or double bedded rooms, all of which have the usual 4 star accoutrements and en-suite facilities.

The complete hotel accommodation (180 beds) has been booked for the AEA, which should ensure a Unique Association Event.

We'll do the hard work - all you have to do is send us your booking form and cheque. Please, make our job that much easier by sending in your reservations early!

Booking forms are enclosed (loose) within this Newsletter.

DON'T DELAY - SEND IT OFF TODAY!

The AGM/Reunion 1998 - Great Yarmouth

By Charlie Dunk

In spite of serious foreboding about the decision to hold our AGM at a holiday camp, (and many more doubts when on arrival we were greeted with a Christmas theme!) I would like to thank the planners and the executor for a memorable weekend.

The Chatham event was always going to be a hard act to follow, an occasion, which it may never be possible to repeat. However, I now believe that the holiday camp concept is probably the very best available alternative. It is a venue, which offers the opportunity to share several meals and two nights in the bar, with old friends. It also makes the long journeys, which so many of our members have to make year after year, so much more worthwhile.

My general comments concerning Seacroft Holiday Centre:

The accommodation was adequate (warm room, clean sheets and plenty of hot water). The food and service was reasonable and the entertainment good.

It was great to meet Ian Muirhead and Gordon Royal again after 41 years. I missed seeing Charlie Edwards and Ian Thomson this year. I regret that I didn't spend any time with our wartime veterans. My apologies to them, I will do better next year.

Conclusion:

Excellent value for money and I cannot imagine that there were any complaints - but if there were, they wouldn't have come from the 'soldiers!'

“The Para’s Leaving Aldershot”

The following extracts are taken from the Aldershot News published on the week ending 5th March 1999. The Military reporter Larry Signy wrote the article.

Quote:

It’s official! The Parachute Regiment is leaving Aldershot for Colchester to be replaced by a mechanized infantry brigade bringing more than 800 additional troops to the town. The Armed Forces Minister Doug Henderson confirmed the move on Tuesday.

Some HQ elements of Aldershot’s Airborne Brigade are expected to move in September, although the main transfer will not take place until next year after consultations with the local authorities in both towns.

The minister told Aldershot’s MP Gerald Howarth: “The moves would when fully implemented bring about a net increase in the strength of the Aldershot Garrison of over 850 service personnel and some 200 vehicles.”

Mr Howarth stated: “This is a bitter blow for Aldershot and it just not make sense. It destroys the town’s 50 year link with Airborne Forces for no apparent military gain.”

The idea behind the move is for the Para’s to train closely as an Air Assault Brigade alongside new Apache attack helicopters, due to come into service in 3 years’ time.

The Airborne Brigade will move to Colchester, to be re-named 16 Air Assault Brigade and will work within 24 Airmobile Brigade.

In Colchester the Para’s will become 2 of the 3 infantry battalions, light artillery, Engineer Regiments and support units working alongside 3 aviation Regiments equipped with the new Apache or existing Lynx helicopters.

Taking the place of the Parachute Brigade will be part of a 3rd UK mechanized brigade - 12 Mechanized Brigade. They will be equipped with Saxon wheeled infantry combat vehicles. The mechanized brigade will also have Challenger 2 main battle tanks and Warrior tracked infantry combat vehicles.

A sad day for Aldershot (unquote)

It must be true it’s in the Aldershot News!

Chris Chambers - Association Membership Secretary

Since the December Newsletter, a further (16) members have joined our ranks and file, they are as follows:

John O'Rourke	300 AB Sqn RE	1951-1955
Ian Adams	9 Para Sqn RE	1998-Serving
John Farr	9 Indep Para Sqn RE/21/22 SAS	1963-1998
Arthur Stones	299 Para Fd Sqn RE	1957-1965
Emrys Fowler	131 Para Engr Regt 23 SAS	1954-1967 1967-1968
Paul Nicholson	9 Para Sqn RE	1989-Serving
Tim Barnard	9 Para Sqn RE	1993-Serving
Frank Grogan	131 Para Fd Sqn RE	TBC
Syd Dane	131 Para Engr Regt/59 Indep Cdo Sqn RE	1956-1976
Ian Strettle	9 Para Sqn RE	1976-1983
Anthony Gilbert	302 Para Fd Pk Sqn RE	1961-1967
Douglas Archibald	131 Para Engr Regt	1960-1970
Ian McCleery	9 Indep Para Sqn RE	1967-1974
Bob Runacres	9 Indep Para Sqn RE	1958-1964 1970-1973
James Lowder	282 AB Sigs/131 Para Engr Regt	1957-1965
James Dunn	300 Sqn RE 1 Bn Para Regt	1961-1964 1964-1971

To All New Members

"Welcome to the Association"

Amendments

In the last issue of the Newsletter, there were a few incorrect entries. I would like to correct these errors and offer apologies to those concerned. See following table for corrections.

Chris Tickell	HQ 5 AB Bde 9 Para Sqn RE (OC)	1993-1995 1998-Serving
Peter Watt	300 Squadron RE	1959-1966
Michael Hale	9 Para Sqn RE	1993-1998
Edmund Ellis	131 Para Engr Reg	1960-1967
Ernest Handley	9 Indep AB Sqn RE	1949-1954
Albert Price	9 Fd Coy RE (Airborne)	1942-1946
David Raes	3rd Bn Para Regt 9 Para Sqn RE	1978-1982 1982-1986
Paul Burlace	2rd Bn Para Regt 9 Para Sqn RE	1967-1974 1978-1979

Aea Membership Eligibility

There still seems to be some confusion regarding qualification for membership of the Association. I hope the following assists in clarifying the situation.

Membership is open to all Sapper personnel who are serving or who have served on the strength of any Airborne Engineer unit, Regular, or TAVR since the formation of UK Airborne Forces. This also includes Royal Engineers who are serving or who have served with Airborne units, Regular/TAVR during WW2 to the present day, i.e. Commando, Parachute Regiment, Special Air Service, etc. The latter mentioned units have all had their fair share of Sappers who served with distinction in their ranks, having passed tough selection courses before being presented with their 'Wings' by the RAF.

The only members of the Association who are not parachute qualified are the personnel who served in the Airborne Forces and went into battle in gliders - but let us not forget the very first Royal Engineer Airborne unit started as glider borne. These very brave Sappers are no less of an Airborne soldier than their comrades who went to war by parachute. The Sappers who served in the Glider Pilot Regiment (many earning their wings as pilots) are also welcome.

Airborne Soldier - Royal Engineers

An Airborne soldier is completely different from any soldier, who is a trained parachutist, be it with a civilian or military qualification. Skydiving, freefall parachuting - call it what you may, cannot by any stretch of the imagination be compared with the experience of standing in the line of a 'stick', sweating, swaying and weighted down by a very heavy equipment container whilst waiting for the "Green" light.

Final comment on this matter:

"Sapper" passes selection ('P' Company), completes 8 jumps is on the bottom rung of the Airborne Engineers ladder - how high he goes is his to choose.

"Sapper" qualifies as parachutist military or civvy. It matters not, how many jumps he completes or from how high - he is NOT and will never be an "Airborne Engineer."

. . . END OF STORY . . .

Honorary Membership - Association

Honorary Membership of the Association is open to any person - male or female, which, in the opinion of the Executive Committee has rendered special services to the Airborne Engineers. There are at present three (3) persons who have been given honorary status of the Association. They are: Mr Peter Yates, Mrs Janet Chambers and Mrs Betty Gray.

Honorary Members Branches

Honorary membership of an AEA Branch is open to any person, male or female, who has rendered special services to the Branch, can be nominated by a Branch member for consideration and voted upon by full Branch members at any meeting. The said Honorary member can then be invited along to accept the Honour at the following Branch meeting.

It is the duty of all Branch Secretaries, to inform the Membership Secretary of all Honorary members' names and addresses plus the reason for honorary membership being granted. By complying, we can ensure that our Association records are accurately maintained.

Branch Minutes

Many thanks to the Branch Secretaries who already comply by sending me a copy of their Branch meeting minutes. These are both informative and helpful, and, are in some cases assisting in the recruitment of new members. Knowing the time and location of the next Branch meeting can also be of great value.

Association Branches

There are now nine (9) thriving branches within the Association. The latest addition being North of the border in Edinburgh. We are actively seeking to start a branch in Wales - land of the Red Dragon and fine tenor voices. As I pen this article on St. David's day, it seems fitting to enquire if there is an individual amongst our 70 plus Welshmen, who would be interested in forming a Welsh Branch? If you're prepared to take up the gauntlet in forming a Branch, please drop me a line for further details.

My sincere thanks to you all for keeping me informed of any changes of address and most important, telephone numbers. This information is vital in maintaining an accurate Membership directory. Please continue to send all changes to:

CHRIS CHAMBERS
Membership Secretary



Recent correspondence from Australia and New Zealand, extend best regards to all Association members. Several from "Down Under" are hoping to make the journey back to "Blighty" during 1999/2000 to say hello in person. We, in turn, offer them our Very Best Wishes.

Until next time "Happy Landings"
CHRIS



News Items

Head of State Commendation

In May 1996, the ferry Bukora sank in Lake Victoria with massive loss of life. The Tanzanian Government declared a national emergency and they called in the services of a company called Divecon, who had, as one of their leading Dive Project Managers, a former Airborne Sapper diver named, Dave Ruddock.

Dave had spent many years with 9 Indep Para Sqn before being posted to 28 Amphibious Engineer Regiment in Hameln. On completion of his tour in Hameln Dave was posted to the Royal Engineers Diving Establishment at Marchwood. During his time at the Diving School, Dave assisted in the training of hundreds of Corp divers, and in particular '9 Squadron' divers.

Once tasked, Divecon flew Dave from his home in Leeds to the disaster site. On arrival, he discovered that he was the only qualified diver on location. In typical Airborne fashion, (when thrown in at the deep end), Dave took command of the situation, and with the help of the Tanzanian government, enlisted the assistance of the South African and Kenyan Navy.

Over the next two weeks, using all the resources now at his disposal, Dave supervised the operation of recovering more than 450 bodies from the wreck.

At this point Dave decided that there was little benefit in putting other lives at risk and recommended that the ship was sealed, and the site classed as a grave and marked accordingly. This was accepted by both the Tanzanian and Kenyan Governments.

The Government, in recognition of his efforts and service to the community, presented Dave with a Head of State Commendation.

On the behalf of the Association, we offer belated congratulates to Dave on his fine example of leadership and Airborne initiative.

Congratulations Dave

Arnhem Visit, 1999

The Cambridge Branch of the PRA is organising a 5-day tour to Arnhem in September to commemorate the 55th Anniversary of the Battle of Arnhem. The cost is expected to be £225.00. Anyone interested in obtaining further information should contact Dave Lincoln (Chairman) or Brian Day (Secretary) on 01223-351899.

A Walk on the Wild Side

by Den Healey (Formerly of 1 Troop & Plant Troop 1956-1961)

After losing contact with the Squadron for about twenty-five years, a chance meeting with Mick Turner, my section corporal at Suez, led to my joining the Association.

The Double Hills memorial service in September 94 offered an opportunity to approach the small contingent representing the Squadron. At that time the main part of the Squadron were serving in Rwanda. I spoke at length with one member of the party, Cpl Mike West, about a walk in the hills.

A Walk on the Wild Side continued ...

There has been a tradition among walkers and climbers since just after the 1st World War, to meet at the top of Great Gable, one of the highest and most impressive mountains in the Lake District, on Remembrance Sunday. Mike, an accomplished mountaineer, agreed to join me and a small party of pupils from the school where I work. We were to make the pilgrimage a couple of months later.

Mike arrived at the school near High Wycombe on a damp Friday afternoon. Clambering aboard the minibus, we headed north. Four of our fifteen-year-old lads complete with their Emotional and behavioural difficulties, a phrase that strikes terror to the hearts of teachers in comprehensive schools, and incomprehension to the minds of grammar school teachers, were the mainstay of our party. A few male staff and our social-work student, Helen, completed the team.

We camped in Great Langdale Valley and took the lads on a local walk in the rain on the Saturday. While showing them some basic map-reading skills, Mike persuaded them, that if they looked carefully, they would probably find some of the contour lines. As we went higher up the hill, they did in fact find lines - lines of slate across the path every few hundred yards.

Remembrance Sunday began with a gloomy pre-dawn breakfast, and we had to strike camp in heavy rain. The lads were very impressed with the compo breakfast, but not with the idea of eating it in the dark. We were all rather damp before commencing the long drive to the start point of the climb. A couple of the lads were becoming less enthusiastic about the walk.

When we reached the starting point it was blowing a gusty gale force 8, with frequent blasts of force 10. Three of the boys stayed in the bus with a couple of staff, and one lad, Robin, came with us to the top of Great Gable in quite ferocious conditions. Helen was blown off her feet several times, Mike and Robin had to hold hands with her, for safety! When her college supervisor came to see her at school several weeks later, I told her that Helen had come with us to the hills in her own time at the week end, but, had spent most of the time holding hands with a soldier.

The rain was horizontal, and visibility was a couple of hundred meters at the best of times. Mike and our Deputy Head, Steve, did the navigating, I gave up even looking at the map because I could hardly keep my reading specs on my face, or see through the rain on them. Robin and Helen, carrying no packs, kept up with Mike, but he had to keep stopping for me and another old timer to catch up; "ee lad," senile decay is bad news up hill in the rain. We made it, and as we sat there, on top of a mountain on a thoroughly miserable November day, thinking the ever familiar thought "What the hell am I doing here?"

The Ministry of Defence Veterans Advice Unit

The Ministry of Defence Veterans Advice Unit is there to assist all former members of the Armed Forces, such as veterans of the World Wars, Korea, National Service, the Falklands or Gulf Campaigns, peacetime regulars or volunteer reservists, and their dependants.

The Advice Unit is a telephone help line, which will advise individuals on where and how to obtain expert help.

It is staffed by fully trained, friendly, Warrant Officers aware of the needs of Veterans - no matter when they served or in which Service.

It is open Monday - Friday (9 a.m. - 5 p.m.) and has an answerphone service when closed.

The Veterans Advice Unit can assist in some ways:

I have a disability as a result of my Service in the Forces. Can I claim any compensation?

Depending on the degree of disability, you might be able to claim a war pension.

How do I claim?

An initial claim is made on form WPA1, which is available from the War Pensions Agency, Norcross, Blackpool, FY5 3WP. Contact them on 01253 858858.

Can anybody help me with my claim for a war pension?

If you wish, a War Pensioners Welfare Manager can visit you in your own home and they will provide free and confidential advice. You can do this by getting in touch with your nearest War Pensioners Welfare Office. We can tell you how to do this.

My husband is suffering from nightmares about an incident that occurred during his military service. He doesn't seem to be able to cope any more. Can you help? The charity Combat Stress has specialists who can provide the sort of help your husband might need. Contact them on 0181-543 6333.

I miss the Services. Is there a comrade's organisation I can join?

The Royal British Legion is an ex-comrades association with branches all over the country. Contact them on Legion line 0345-725725.

My ex-Service relative is elderly and needs assistance. Who can help? SSAFA-Forces Help will be able to visit, assess your relative's need, and organise help. With your permission, we will pass their details to the local branch.

No matter what your problem, the "Veterans Advice Unit" is there to provide advice. Give them a call at local call rates 0845-602 0302

Lost Touch with Pals?

A free service is offered by Channel 4 teletext page 676 in placing adverts; to enable tracing of service pals you may have lost touch with over the years! Next time you have a spare minute, tune in and see what you can offer, remember it's FREE!

Once More Into The Bag

By Fred Gray

John Humphrey is one of the very few men to have been captured, first by the Italians, and then the Germans, and still manage to escape from both. His first escape took place during 1942 whilst being held prisoner in Lucca, near Pisa and the second occasion whilst being transported to Germany after the battle of Arnhem.

My Second Escape

By John E. Humphrey's

I arrived back from Italy at the back end of December '43 and after a period of leave was posted to 1 Trg Bn RE which was then stationed at Clitheroe in Lancashire. Having reported in I was told that I had been selected as a potential officer and that I was to report to the WOSB in nearby Whalley the next week. The five-day tests completed, it was back to the TBRE to discover that it would be two months before the start of the next OCTU and that in the interim period I would be employed escorting the ration trucks to and from Preston. To hell with that I thought, and now it was 17 September and I was sitting in a Dakota with others from 'B' troop 1 Para Sqn, on my way to Arnhem.

The role of 'B' Troop was to provide the Engineer support to the 2nd Bn in the assault on the northern end of the Road Bridge. Our route from the DZ at Wolfhezen to the bridge would be along the road, which ran parallel to the river.

Until we got over the Scheldt all was peaceful, apart from those prone to air sickness who were occupied filling the brown paper bags. It was here that we met the first of the anti-aircraft fire. This was soon disposed of by the accompanying Typhoons. Shortly after we were on our feet and hooking up: The aircraft was now approaching the DZ and through the window, I could see the flaming red balls creeping up only to flash past the aircraft. Then it was 'Green on, Go' and out we went lead by Lt. (Stiffy) Simpson with me doing "tail end Charlie." After collecting the equipment from the containers we moved off the DZ and made for the yellow smoke where the 2nd Bn was forming up. We waited for what seemed to be a long time before starting the march to the bridge. The landing had been unopposed, we had caught "Jerry" having his Sunday lunch, but now he was wide-awake and starting to show it. I thought that we would do a "walk - run" to the bridge, but it was all "hurry up and stop." Four hours after dropping, we arrived at the bridge to a noisy reception.

There was a pill box at the end of the bridge, and until this was eliminated, there was no possibility of capturing the bridge. This was achieved with the aid of a portable flamethrower. The north end of the bridge was now in our hands, but capture of the south end was not possible. From there, we went into a school, which overlooked the approach to the bridge and prepared it for defence. It was intended to house the Bde HQ, but they never made it to us. Having removed all the glass from the windows, we filled every available container with water, and were then assigned to our defensive positions. Mine was at a circular window looking north over a park, and as it was high up I pushed one of the school desks against the wall and knelt on that, with Sid Guerran doing the same alongside me. He was the No2 on the gun. I rested the Bren gun on the windowsill and prepared for whatever was going to happen. All my previous operational experience had been in the desert, so my knowledge of street fighting was negligible.

In the early hours of the morning there was a lot of noise, rifle fire, automatic weapons, bursting grenades, then a loud explosion from the house next to us. It had been occupied by 'A' Troop, and the survivors lead by Capt. Mace came into our building. Our Troop Commander had been wounded early in the battle, so, 'Stiffy' Simpson, my stick officer, had taken command, but Mace now took over. The school was situated against the ramp, which lead up to the bridge. The ramp was actually level with the second floor, so we had a good view, and could cover the approach to the bridge from the top floor where most of us were. The north side of the building covered the park. The rear looked onto a grass play area dotted with trees, and the south view was similar.

It was not long before the "Jerries" started attacking in earnest, and they came across the park in armoured half-tracks heading for us. The sheer volume of fire directed at them stopped them. This firefight went on for what seemed a long time, but eventually the halftracks pulled back out of sight and there was time to reload the magazines and get ready for the next assault. I turned to ask Syd for his assistance loading the magazines, and

saw that he was still kneeling on the desk with his head down, as though asleep. It had certainly been a long night, but when I shook him his head turned towards me and blood poured from his mouth on to my para smock. He had been shot in the head and chest and had died instantly. Monday was another long day, as were all the others that we spent there.

The second attack came from the south as the Jerries tried to rush the north end of the bridge in half-tracks. These vehicles, although armoured, had no head cover so we were able to shoot down into the occupants. The driver of the first half-track was hit and "slued" his vehicle across the road, effectively blocking it. The rest of the half-tracks were easily destroyed and most of the occupants killed. The rest of that day was spent beating off attacks by small enemy forces. Tuesday the attacks became stronger, we now knew, we were up against two SS Panzer Divisions that had been refitting and regrouping in the woods north of Arnhem. Most of the attacks were of platoon strength, but they had to cover the open grass area to get to us. We just let them get about twenty yards away, then shot them at point blank range.

During the afternoon they brought up a Tiger tank and positioned it opposite us. We scrambled down to the second floor and waited for it to open fire, knowing that it could not depress its gun any lower. As the shell went through the top floor and the ceiling of the second it was like standing on the platform of an underground railway station when the train went through - plus a lot of dust and flying brickwork. After he had fired half dozen shells at us he packed up and trundled off, leaving us to trudge back up to what was left of the top floor. Of the forty or so that we had started with, seven had been killed and many more wounded, and although we had taken their ammunition, another hard day of fighting would use what was left.

Wednesday dawned wet with drizzling rain, but that was the least of our worries. The town was still burning. One of our re-supply Dakotas had been shot down and had struck the steeple of the church opposite, and there was still no sign of the promised relief. The "Jerries" were still very active. They had wiped out most of the resistance around the north end of the bridge, and it looked as though only a few others and us were left. They were now tackling one problem area at a time, and only moving on when they had eliminated that position. It was difficult for them to get close to us, so they were now targeting the school with a mixture of high explosives and incendiary mortar bombs. Early that afternoon we could see the enemy forming up, and it was obvious whom their target was to be.

Mackay got us all together then said: "We will let them get very close before opening fire, then, if they succeed in breaking in, we will go to the first floor where we will fight to the last man and the last round." The thought came to my mind that he too must have read "Beau Geste." Their infantry then started moving towards us. We waited until they were about 15 metres away before opening up with everything that we had. This put an end to that attack. Later, a rifle grenade came through one of the windows killing Jock Gray and mortally wounding "Twiggy" Hazelwood and Joe Simpson. The numbers left fit to fight were decreasing, but worse was the ammunition situation, one more severe attack would see it all expended. Nevertheless, it looked as though they had had enough, and were going to bomb or burn us out with their mortars.

The mortar bombs began dropping on and around the school almost non-stop. The first fire broke out in the afternoon, but was extinguished quickly with what was left of the water. By late afternoon, the roof was well and truly alight, and it was obvious that we would have to leave the building. Those of us who had automatic weapons and a few rounds left, went out first keeping the "Jerries" at bay, whilst the wounded were brought out and laid amidst the ruins of the house next door. By now, we were all filthy having not washed for four days. We were covered in dust from the tank attack, plus the effect of soot, and in my case, a blood stained smock. No wonder the "Jerries" were reluctant to get close to us! I lay amidst the rubble of the house with a Sten, one almost empty magazine, and knew we would be damn lucky to get out of it. But I wasn't ready to give up yet, the memories of prisoner of war life in Italy was still fresh in my mind, and I did not want to go in to the "bag" again. In a short while everybody was out, the school was collapsing as the fire raged through it cremating the dead. We lay there waiting for the next event. It was not long coming, the mortar bombs began dropping around us, and Mackay said we would have to surrender.

It seemed such an anti-climax to that long desperate fight, and I had no wish to just pack it in, if there was still a faint chance of making it across the Rhine. I told the four that were left of my stick that I was going to make a break for it, and that they were welcome to follow me.

Waiting until the machine gun that was firing across our front finished a long burst, I raced across the road to the shelter of the houses opposite followed by the others. As with most continental houses, these had cellars, and the gutted windows were level with the pavements allowing me to dive through one and land amongst the still hot bricks of what had been a row of houses. The houses ran down towards the river and the walls that we would have to climb over separated the gardens. There were now four of us, one having been hit crossing the road. We were now scrambling madly over the garden wall accompanied by odd bursts of fire that cracked as they flew over our heads. All was going well and I thought that we might well make the river when I heard Joe Malley shout "Help, I'm stuck" I looked back to see him caught up in barbed wire on the top of the last wall that I had crossed. Racing back to him I reached up, grasped his shoulder straps, and started to pull him down. There was the noise of a MG 42 firing, and a rash of bright pink holes in the brickwork about an inch from my left eye. I thrust Joe back over and dived to my right into a flower bed, I had a quick frightened piss, without standing up, then flew over the remaining walls. I caught up with the other two at the edge of the tram depot. The depot was large, but so was the number of Germans assembled there. I came around the corner of a building moving fast and ran into a group of them who ran even faster, away from me. Before any shooting started, we had crawled under a tram, taking shelter behind the wheels and hoping we could hold the "Jerries" off until nightfall.

My hopes were rising as the minutes ticked away, and then again, I heard the sound of enemy tank tracks. It was a self-propelled gun, and it stopped about forty yards away, the barrel was depressed until it was pointing at us and a voice with Oxford accented English called, "If you don't come out, I will blow you out." Well, there didn't seem to be any point in arguing with that bloody great gun, so I said that we were coming out. Before moving outside, I pulled the jack-knife, which was on a lanyard around my waist, to the front of my trousers and dropped it inside. A button compass was already in the lining of my smock. The one thought in my mind was how long would it be before I got the chance to escape.

I walked towards the SP Gun with my hands up with the other two behind me. Two SS soldiers came from behind the gun carrying Luger pistols, one pushed his into my naval, and the other into my back. My anus popped like flute players lips, and I thought that this was it. We had, after all, killed rather a lot of their friends and comrades. The one facing me took my AB64 from my pocket, and told me to take off my equipment. He then reached out to take my beret, and I knocked his hand away telling him to leave it alone. It was then that I realised that he was more afraid of me, than I was of him. We were then marched to their HQ where an officer tried to interrogate me, but I kept replying, "1877368, Cpl J.E. Humphreys", to all his questions. He then told me the names of my OC; my Troop Commander and many things that Cpls never bother themselves with. After that, we were sent into a courtyard, given a tin of meat and a packet of biscuits for which we were very grateful.

Sitting in the courtyard watching the antics of the opposition it was obvious that we had given them a hard fight. Whilst there I heard a burst of Sten gun fire, but the SS were taking no chances. They sent a Platoon accompanied by a half-track and one poor fellow who was carrying a flame-thrower, and did not look at all happy about it. Night fell, and we were told to climb into the back of a lorry guarded by two soldiers armed with Schmeisser machine pistols. There was no chance of escaping yet. In the early hours of the morning we stopped and were herded into a disused roadside cafe where we slept for a few hours. Then back onto the truck until we reached a transit POW cage at Emmerich.

The cage was the usual design, a few buildings surrounded by a double wire fence with sentry boxes on stilts. All the POWs went looking for friends who had been captured earlier into one large building. At right angles to this were a number of smaller buildings and these were what I was interested in. I wanted to find a way of escaping before we were moved deeper into Germany. Having been captured in Africa, my morale had not suffered the trauma that one feels when first taken prisoner. The door of one of the smaller buildings was not locked, and I looked in to see that it was a cookhouse with two Sawyer stoves, Best of all, there were two windows, which had metal bars set into them. I immediately made myself the cook and wedged the door shut, then looked to see how the bars had been set into the windowsills. Using the marlin spike on the knife hidden in my trousers, I started to pick at the cement around the base of one of the bars. There seemed to be more sand than cement in the mix. Working with haste, I picked the cement completely away from the bottom of one of the bars, and knew that if I could do that to all three it was possible to bend the bars and get out through the window. One long dose of prisoner of war life had been enough for me. In two hours I had cleared the cement from the other two bars, then made a mix of ash and cement chippings, which I used to camouflage my actions. Whilst freeing the bars I noticed that the building backed onto a grassy bank which sloped down to a country lane bordered by hedges. So, providing we were not moved before dusk, it would be possible to effect an escape.

All I had to do was bend the bars upwards; climb out and slide down the bank. Then leg it to the Rhine, and hopefully steal a boat. Failing that, I would have to swim for it. First, I wanted to let Joe Malley know, thinking that he would like to come with me.

The difficult part was to leave the kitchen where I had a definite means of escape not knowing what would happen in my absence. I slipped out and made my way to the main building. Finding Joe, I explained my plan of escape and asked if he like to join me. To my surprise, he refused. I then saw Chick Weir, who was a Cpl in 'A' Troop. He was keen to come, so I lead him to the kitchen and showed him what I had done. I also let him know that the reasons for not letting everybody know was that there was always the chance of a 'stooge' or informer amongst us.

Sometime in the late afternoon a German NCO pushed his way in, looked at me, said 'Kommen Sie.' With great reluctance, I followed him wondering what it was about, but he took me to their kitchen, pointed at a sack of potatoes, and told me to take them and cook them. Back I went to the cookhouse as fast as I could, and Weir let me in. I poured the potatoes into the Sawyer stove, added water and lit the fire. It must have been late evening by this time, as before the water had started to boil there was a great hullabaloo outside as another batch of prisoners arrived. They were making their way to the main building looking for their friends. Now was the time to go. The "Jerries" were more interested in what was happening, than looking at the kitchen. I asked Weir if he would let Lt. Simpson know what we were doing so that he could come with us. He came back with Simpson and Mackay, who was his Troop Commander. As soon as they were inside, I grasped one of the bars with both hands: put my feet against the wall and with the strength born of desperation, I pulled. It was surprisingly easy and in no time, the other two were bent up. So out I went, dropped onto the bank, and slid down into the lee of the hedge. Simpson and Mackay followed me, but to my horror, Weir was stuck in the bars just as a German soldier came down the lane with a girl on his arm. Thankfully, he was more interested in her than what was going on around him. Weir had the sense to keep still until I ran back up the bank and freed him. There was just enough light to see by, as the officers lead us towards the Rhine. Making our way across fields where we could to avoid the roads and tracks where possible. The only incidents that come to mind are crossing a field with a bull in it and us breaking the 100 metres sprint record. The other was coming out of a wood only to see the dim shape of a soldier trying to persuade a girl to surrender her virginity. I don't know what the others were thinking, but I was wishing she would give in and quickly. It seemed ages before it was safe to cross the road and carry on. Dawn broke to find us on very flat and open ground with the river Rhine in front and nowhere to lie up. We followed the river until we saw a small wooden hut on the riverbank and quickly got inside knowing it was not the best of places, as we would be trapped if surprised.

It was a long day. About 0800hrs a van delivering bread stopped on the track that ran parallel to the river and was just below us, the smell of the newly baked bread was so appetising to us. We had eaten so little in the past few days that I was almost tempted to run out and steal a loaf. The day wore on with the odd alarm, a policeman cycled by, children played on the river bank, and the occasional pedestrian strolled past. Eventually night fell, and with the dusk came a Rhine barge that moored up almost opposite us. The crew scrambled ashore and no sooner were they out of sight than we were on board.

In the cabin were the remains of their supper, a stew, which we quickly scoffed, together with the loaf. The best of all was the rowboat that was tied up alongside. Taking the few blankets that were there, we all got in the boat. Whilst the others made themselves comfortable I took the oars and we cast off. Mackay told me to keep to the far bank and make sure that I took the left fork when the river split. The current was running fast so all I had to do was to keep the bow pointing in the right direction and at a safe distance from the far bank. The journey was uneventful apart from the odd burst of machine gun fire that went over the top of us.

Then, as the false dawn was breaking I saw a bridge, which looked the same as the one at Arnhem. I woke the others up, and when they saw the bridge started to accuse me of not keeping to the left fork of the river. At that moment, we heard a voice calling "Halt, who goes there?" and it was obviously a British sentry on the bridge. We did not know the bridge at Nijmegen was identical to the one at Arnhem.

The sentry had not actually seen us, and was challenging someone else so we drifted into the bank. We moored up the boat, climbed out to find that we had landed in the middle of a Gunner defensive position. All the slit trenches were facing away from the river. When I tapped one of the gunners on the shoulder, he turned, looked at me, and I though he was going to faint. I didn't realise what I looked like covered in dried blood and grime,

and to see an apparition like that at 0500hrs was enough to frighten anybody. Mackay contacted the Battery Officer so that we could move out of their perimeter and make our way to 1st BR AB Div HQ. Weir and I were ordered to wait outside whilst they went in to make their report (Officers make reports not Cpls), which is why there are different accounts of the escape! Sometime later, we were told to find the seaborne element, get cleaned up and into a change of clothing. We were later interviewed and photographed by the press. Weir and I were ordered not to say anything about the escape.

I think that it was the next day that the survivors of the battle made their way across the river, and were accommodated in Nijmegen. Most of this period is a bit vague. I do remember the remains of the 15th Airborne Division standing on a cross roads with the 1st Brigade on one corner, the 4th Brigade on another, the Airlanding Brigade on the third and the remains of the Polish Brigade on the fourth. It did not seem possible that this was all that was left of the Division. There were only ten left out of the 153 of my Sqdn that had dropped. Not long after we were ferried down to Louvain to spend the night in a school before moving to Brussels airport and the flight back to the UK.

Obituaries

Maj. (Retd) Mick Lobb



Mick Lobb, who can best be described as one of the truly real characters to have served in the Corps of Royal Engineers in recent years, passed away in October 1998. Mick had fought an extremely brave fight against cancer, yet remained his cheerful character to the very end.

He enlisted into the Corps of Royal Engineers on 26th April 1960. His chosen trade, which surprised many that knew him, was to be within the clerical roster. He served with the clerical staff on the strength of 9 Indep Para Sqn RE from 1963 until July 1965. During that time, he served with HQ & Plant Troop on their tour in Aden in 1965. He returned to complete a further tour with 9 Para Sqn in 1979, in the appointment of Chief Clerk.

Following his initial tour with the Sqn, Mick moved on to complete tours with 21 Engr Regt, 35 Engr Regt, 38 Engr Regt, 3 tours in Northern Ireland, a tour in Muscat & Oman and Belize (To name but a few). On completion of his posting as Staff Asst (WO1) in 35 Engr Regt, Mick was selected for a commission in 1985. His first appointment was as the Admin Offr in 10 Fd Sqn.

Further tours of engagement continued with 48 Fd Sqn (Construction) as QM, 28 Amph Engr Regt as the TQM and finally 77 Engr Regt as the QM. It was during December 1990 and March 1991 that Mick was attached to 32 Armd Engr Regt, and as Regt QM deployed on Operation Desert Storm.

A keen boxer in his earlier days, Mick contributed back into the sport that he loved, by becoming a boxing official. To those that served with him, he was a man's man - full of humour, mischief, and fun - was never known to refuse a pint and never known to leave the bar early.

Quite possibly, the proudest moment for Mick was the Commissioning of his son Michael, into the Corps of Royal Engineers. We offer our most sincere condolences to his wife Maureen (Mo) daughter Kelly, son Michael and daughter in-law Kirsty.

Mick Leigh

Submitted by Steve Stephenson

Mick Leigh, better known to his service friends as "Scouse," died on the 3 June 1998, after a very brave battle against cancer. "Scouse" began his army career in September 1947 as an army apprentice at AAS Arborfield. After "passing out" in the summer of 1950, he went directly to 1 TRRE (when located at Merebrook camp, Malvern) where he completed his "basic Sapper training" with other "ex - boys" of Group 47B from Harrogate and Chepstow. Later (circa 1951/52), whilst serving in the Canal Zone, he decided that he wanted to join 9 Airborne Squadron RE, which, as part of 16 Indep Para Bde Gp, was also based in Egypt.

Having successfully completed his Para training at the RAF Middle East Parachute School, Ferry Point, "Scouse" joined 9 Squadron in Moascar (or was it Fayid?).

There he was reunited with some of his old friends from Group 47B, who were already serving with the Squadron. From memory, these would have included "Yakker" Nurse, Harvey Williamson, and "Taffy" Owen.

It was with 1 Troop that "Scouse's" long association with 9 Sqn began. By the time that I joined them in Moascar, in March 1954, he was already a highly respected member of the troop. Being a first class Sapper, a totally committed team man, and possessing a wonderfully dry sense of humour, it was inevitable that he would be one of those who contributed significantly to the pleasure of soldiering with the troop at that time.

There was never any doubt that he was a man of courage, but it was during his long and often painful illness that this quality shone out like a beacon for his family. His "scouse" sense of humour never left him and it was mostly that, which helped them through their last difficult months together.

Sincere thanks are extended to Eric Matthews, Ken Tealey, and Brian Jones who did what they could to be supportive of his family at the end. They also represented our Association at his funeral. Belated condolences are extended to his wife Marguerite, and her daughter, Rosalie.

Maj. (Retd) C.J. Gilbert



Charles Gilbert, known to his friends and family as Gil, passed away on 23rd December 1998 at Trowbridge Hospital aged 85 years following a series of strokes.

Gil joined the Territorial Army in 1931 as a Sapper in a Royal Engineers Searchlight Battery in North West London. When the WW2 commenced, he was Company Sergeant Major and immediately sent to the 21st Training Centre R.E. in Scarborough Yorks. Gil was married to Anne in June 1940. Anne's father who was also in the Territorial Army had introduced them. A daughter was born in May 1941 and a son in February 1943.

Unhappy at being in Scarborough, he joined 272 Field Company RE, and on Christmas Day 1942, sailed to North Africa. He spoke little of his war time exploits, however, following the Salerno landings he was "Mentioned in Despatches" and given a commission. After the war, he again joined the Territorial Army, initially with the Royal Artillery; he transferred to 302 Parachute Field Squadron at Hendon. His parachute course was completed in 1949, and on his retirement in 1957 he was the Commanding Officer, and had completed 99 parachute descents.

Much of the photographs and memorabilia collected (including a photograph of his Coles Crane lent to Ian Wilson aboard Ark Royal en route to Suez) he donated to the Royal Engineers Museum in Chatham and the University Museum in Leeds.

His working life was spent with the Nestle company, and having taken early retirement in 1968, he drove to Greece every year until 1996, when aged 83, he decided it was too far! Gil loved the Greek people, which were no doubt caused by the fact that when the Germans evacuated Greece he was one of the first British soldiers to enter the Peloponnese.

Up until 1998, he was still attending annual reunion meetings in Kalamata. During his retirement he took a great interest in the First World War and spent a considerable time visiting France, Belgium, and especially Ypres, where for many years he laid a wreath on behalf of the Royal Engineers at the Menen Gate on the 11th November.

He leaves his wife Anne, daughter Valerie, son Tony (also a Sapper in the Airborne Engineers) and 11 great grandchildren.

WO1 K.E. Molyneaux

Keith Molyneaux served for many years in 9 Para Sqn. He gained his first step on the promotion ladder before postings in various Regts within the Corps. He returned to 9 Para Sqn as a SSgt and completed a full tour as the SQMS in Sqn HQ. Keith was promoted to WO11 and posted to 25 Engr Regt in the appointment of SSM. He gained further promotion to WO1 remaining in 25 Engr Regt and was appointed Engineer Resources Officer (Northern Ireland).

An extremely keen and competent hockey player he competed at Regimental level. Keith had almost completed his 22-year engagement, and was nearing completion of his resettlement course. Tragically, Keith died as a result of a motor cycle traffic accident in December 1998. We extend to his wife Sandra, her children, Keith's family, and friends, our most sincere condolences.

Jim Wood

After a short illness, Jim passed away in Harefields Hospital in November 1998. Jim joined the Corps as a boy soldier in 1943 and on completion of boy service volunteered for parachute training. He gained his wings on his 19th birthday in December 1947 and was then posted to 3rd Airborne Squadron in Neumunster, North Germany. Jim was in at the formation of the 9th Independent Airborne Squadron in 1948. On leaving the Squadron in 1950, he served in Japan and with the United Nations in South Korea. His wife, family, and his Squadron friends will sadly miss Jim.

We will remember them!

Forecast Of Events

Airborne Forces Weekend	Aldershot	3/4 July
5 AB Bde Log Bn Disbandment Parade	Aldershot	3 July
Southsea Airborne Spectacular	Sunday	11 July
Laying Up 10 Para (V) Colours	Oosterbeek	18/19 September
Double Hills Commemorative Service	Paulton	26 September

Application for tickets to attend the disbandment parade for the 5 AB Bde Log Bn should be sent to:



Association Shop

Items available & applicable pricing!

Description	Price	Postage &, Packing
Association Ties (Pegasus logo)	£12.50	75p - UK
Association Directories (Updated October 1998)	£5.00	£1.25-UK
Association Bow Ties (Pegasus logo)	£7.50	60p - 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/L/XL)	£15.00	£2.60 - UK*
Association Polo Shirts Fred Perry style • Maroon or blue with Pegasus Logo Embroidered "Airborne Engineers" (Sizes: M/UXL)	£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 PE	£14.00	£3.50 - UK*
A Memoir of 9 Parachute Squadron RE in the Falklands Campaign 1982 by Major C.M. Davies, MBE PE	£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).

REPLACEMENT LAPEL BADGES - Full members of the Association can purchase lapel badges from the Association shop. They are limited to one per member, on production of your membership number, at a cost of £3.60 (inc. p&p).

STOP PRESS!! - Maroon 9 Para Sqn RE Jumpers Special Offer of £12.00 - While Stocks Last, plus £2.60 p&p. Send chest size together with your cheque (£14.60 inc. p&p).

"My thanks to you all for your continued support" Until the next time,
yours aye! – JAN
