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# The Airborne Engineer

August 2000, Issue Number 1

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**DEADLINES FOR PUBLICATION**

**Material for publication in the December 2000 issue of the "Journal" must be received by the editor no later than 3rd November. Items forwarded for publication should be typed if possible, and sent to the Editor by post or E-mail together with photographs - please don't forget to add an appropriate caption, and if possible identify the individuals in the photograph.**

**The "Journal" is published in April, August and December**



**Moving? Don't forget to inform us of your change of address.**

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## From the Chair

Bob Prosser – Association Chairman

The move ahead promised in the April Newsletter, has started. You will notice the revised Newsletter now our "Journal" - I'm sure you will agree it is an "Up Market Step", and hopefully will help swell our ranks with new members. May I suggest that once you've read this publication, if you are not going to keep it, drop it into your local doctor or dentist waiting room, local hairdressers, British Legion, local club, etc. It will certainly make more interesting reading than the usual 'women' magazines that one is faced with, and you never know who might pick it up and subsequently get in touch with us.

Full credit must go to our editor Dave Rutter for the work he has done in setting up the new software and for producing an excellent piece of work.

The promise of providing an alternative for the John Rock room and putting Airborne Engineers memorabilia in a place of safe keeping for the future, and providing access to our history for generations to come, we have moved very positively along a new road. The Royal Engineers Museum have agreed to provide a space for an Airborne Engineer display and our friends at the Chatham Branch are negotiating with the museum as to what form the display will take. But, since Airborne Forces started 60 years ago I'm sure enough history has been made to provide a lasting tribute to all those who reached upon a few threads of rigging lines.

The Yorkshire Air Museum and allied Forces Memorial opened the new Airborne Forces display on the 25th June; which we are now a major part of in conjunction with the Glider Pilots Association, the Parachute Regiment Association, the Special Air Service and the Airborne Assault Normandy Trust. Due to the major part Lt Col John Frank Rock RE took in being responsible as the Senior Army Officer for the forming of a Parachute Force and that of the Glider Force, the Airborne Engineers Association will be honoured and represented in a very impressive display. At the same location there is a beautiful church and Rose Garden which when visiting you are able to quietly reminisce.

I have written to all past OCs of 9 Sqn asking for some of their memories. For those who have already replied — thank you, to those still to come — thank you in anticipation. In addition, I have contacted many other personnel and asked for their memories. Much of these writings will be published in the Journal, and all of them will eventually be handed to our archivist member (Fred Gray) who works tirelessly in his effort to obtain the 'Full Story of Airborne Engineers', and both museums, North and South, will be eternally grateful for his efforts.

On the subject of the annual Journal subscription, the fee is to remain at £5, and can now be paid by standing order. Full details are contained within this publication. Those wishing to continue forwarding payment by cheque or postal order may do so. My plea is that whatever option you decide, full payment is made by 1<sup>st</sup> November 2000. Much time and effort is spent chasing up defaulters on this subject — so please, assist the treasurer and editor in this matter, by being prompt with your payment! Cheque/postal order payments should be sent direct to the Editor. Don't delay, do it today

You will note from the content of this journal that we are now receiving items of interest from a much wider and varied field. I feel sure that many more of you have experiences and tales to relate that would make interesting reading by our members. Why not jot them down and forward them to our editor — and please, include a photograph if possible with the names of the characters. Do not write on the back of the photographs; write the caption and names on a separate piece of paper. All photographs will be returned to their owners.

May I, on the behalf of all members of the Association, bid a fond farewell to Major Chris Tickell, who is leaving the Squadron to take command of a Coy at the RMA Sandhurst. Thank you very much for all the help that you have given to the Association - please keep in touch.

Welcome Major Rob Rider, we sincerely hope that you have a rewarding tour of duty as OC 9 Para Sqn and we look forward to meeting you at some of our functions.

October will soon be upon us, and I look forward to seeing many of you at the AGM/Reunion in Blackpool - it has all the makings of a wonderful weekend — I can't wait!

**Now don't forget!**

Your Journal subscription (£5) should reach the Editor no later than 1st November 2000. This fee will cover the next 3 issues of our publication (December 2000, March & August 2001). Cheques should be made, in sterling, to 'Airborne Engineers Association.' Members wishing to pay direct from their bank account should contact the Editor ('phone or E-mail) and request a Standing Order mandate. Numerous members are to be congratulated for paying several years subscription in advance. A note of credit will be enclosed in this Journal to those members. If no note of credit is enclosed in your copy, then I'm afraid your subscription of £5 is now due!

**Comments**

If you have any constructive comments or suggestions concerning the new format of our "Journal," please forward these to our editor.

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## Officer Commanding 1945 – 1947, Maj Gen FWJ Cowtan

In May 1945 I was 2IC of 1st Para Sqn RE stationed in Stavanger, Norway where we were ensuring that the Germans picked their own mines up properly; when we were ordered by the clever dicks to stop doing this, as it was against the Geneva Convention. Can you believe it! The job was of course done with typical German thoroughness and efficiency, well supervised by 1 Para Sqn Corporals, and there were no casualties!

Around 20th May I was ordered to go to Nordstraud Camp Oslo to take over command of 9 Field Company (Airborne) subsequently to be renamed 9 Para Sqn. There was no proper land transport, the weather was appalling, the RAF couldn't or wouldn't fly me from Sola airfield, nor could the 9th USAF Troop Carrier Command. I was in a hurry, so Sapper 'Geordie' Harper and I proceeded with our kit to the Luftwaffe part of Sola, found The CO and I ordered him to fly us both to Oslo. With many a "Jawohl" and "zum Befell Herr Hauptman, he trundled out a complete Junkers 52, 3 engine troop carrier - the sort used by the German Paras. Having checked everything he and the co-pilot got in the sharp end, I sat in me middle and Geordie sat in the back guarding our kit! We did an extremely hairy landing between the extended runways of Oslo's smaller airfield, and I said I required transport downtown. A 30 seat, steam driven bus (fired by timber) appeared, driven by a German soldier and guarded by a splendid Norwegian. They sat in the front, me in the middle and Geordie in the back guarding the kit.

I said, "Take me to my leader", in this case Lt Col Eddie Myers DSO, CRE 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, who had an office in downtown Oslo. Duly arrived I was welcomed, almost told that I had taken my time getting there, and directed in Airborne Sapper Transport this time to Nordstrand Camp! Geordie and I had arrived!

After Norway we returned to England to become a unit of 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division, as 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division was disbanded. We started training and equipping to be useful airborne sappers in the final stages of the war in the Pacific, - but this was not to be after the atom bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the subsequent Japanese surrender. Instead it was decided to send the Division to Palestine to help with the problems of the Mandate with thousands of Jews attempting to emigrate from Europe after the Holocaust.

9 Sqn became part of 3 Para Bde consisting of 3<sup>rd</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> Para Bns and the Field Ambulance. We sent advance parties to Palestine to prepare camps for our arrival in the hills near Gaza. Our party was commanded by Lt Patrick Terence McCarthy (later to become the father of John McCarthy, the Lebanon hostage). He drew some 15 EPIP tents and some smaller ones and had them erected in time for the arrival of the main party. His work was obviously observed with great interest by the local Arabs, because one or two mornings after he had completed the task he looked out of his own small tent to find that all the big ones had gone! There were camel tracks leading into the desert to the Southeast, but there were no other clues. As with all military disasters a Court of Enquiry was set up and found Lt P.T. McCarthy RE "particularly to blame" for the losses, and the Brigade Commander, Brig G.W. Lathbury, DSO, MBE, "invited" him to pay £10 (ten pounds) towards the losses.

Patrick McCarthy asked if the Officers Mess headed note paper had arrived, and being a well brought up fellow, schooled in the social graces replied to this as follows:

"Lieutenant P.T. McCarthy, Royal Engineers, thanks Brigadier G.W. Lathbury DSO, MBE, for his kind invitation to subscribe £10 (ten pounds) towards the loss of tentage from Nusceiat Ridge during the first week in September 1945, but very much regrets that he is unable to accept"

Nothing more was heard of it. The Brigadier had a sense of humour after all!

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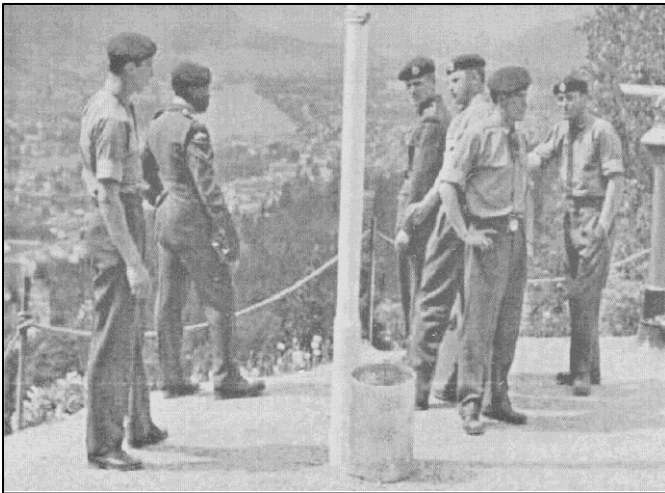
## Caution

A person who addresses himself as Colonel AJ Hines MC\* TD, has been attending, in the past few years, Airborne Engineer Association commemorative events and functions. Although an AJ Hines served in the Royal Engineers at the end of the Second World War, there is no record of him having been promoted beyond the rank of captain, nor that he was awarded the MC and Bar. There is also no evidence that he was awarded the TD. Should anyone in future be approached by Hines, please refer the matter to Regimental Headquarters Royal Engineers.

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## Keep your eyes open lads!

Fred Gray is looking for an extra Sapper for guard duty!



**L to R:  
Colin Fielder, Atu, Alfie Fisher, Pete Plowman, Tom  
Rhodes &  
Bruce Bissett  
Drammen, Norway 1966**

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## Close Support to a Light Battle Group

9 Parachute Squadron and 1 Para on Operation Agricola

Major CL Tickell MA



Major Chris Tickell was commissioned into the Corps in 1983. His first three tours were with 30 Field Squadron, the Junior Leaders Regiment and Independent Field Troop Allied Command Europe Mobile Force (Land). He led a canoeing expedition in the Okavango Delta, Botswana, prior to taking up an appointment as Adjutant 39 Engineer Regiment. 1993 saw him move to 5 Airborne Brigade as a Staff Officer before being selected for Staff College. Two and a half years in Whitehall was followed, in August 1998, by command of 9 Parachute Squadron. Ten days later he took them to Bosnia for a six-month tour. Within two months of returning to the UK the squadron was deployed at short notice to Kosovo as part of 5 Airborne Brigade. By the time he completed his tour the squadron, or significant elements of it, have spent 18 out of 24 months on operations.

Having read with fascination the various articles on Kosovo in December's Journal, it seemed appropriate to craft my own thoughts on the operation. 9 Para Sqn's experiences on Operation Agricola were, inevitably, very different from those of the majority of Sapper units deployed at the time and subsequently. Happily we managed to deploy for only six to seven weeks and were undoubtedly involved in the most challenging times of the operation. Many of the lessons learned related more to soldiering and leadership than true "sappery" but as we all know; Sappers are soldiers first....

### Introduction

Saturday 5 June 1999 started like any normal weekend in the UK. The squadron was stood down. I was about to go to Winchester with Mrs T but was suddenly asked to be in my office for a brief by the CO at 0830 hours. Delighted with this excuse to avoid some shopping I darted into work. "You're going to Kosovo as a light squadron to support the remainder of the brigade," said Lt Col Mike Carter as he arrived, "Not only that but you will be going within the next 48 hours."

So began an incredibly frenetic period for the squadron. Everyone was recalled from leave and I woke up the 2IC, Capt Frazer Ross, and told him he needed to start some fast planning. By 1030 I was able to give my first squadron O group and by midday we had finalised the ORBAT. All the G1098 was squeezed onto vehicles during the afternoon and I was summoned to a brigade O group. I then discovered that I would be leaving Aldershot at 2300 hours that night; my recce group would be leaving the next day and the bulk of the squadron on Monday, 7 June. Another set of orders from CO 1 PARA was followed by another quick set of orders to the squadron before I managed to get home to pack my kit and explain to Mrs T that shopping in Winchester would have to be delayed.

### Deployment

I flew out with the brigade recce group and as part of CO 1 Para's Tactical HQ (1) The brigade's potential mission was to seize the Kacanik Defile in order to allow the forward passage of lines of 4 Armd Bde. We knew that time would be short and therefore detailed planning started in the back of the RAF VC10. Indeed by the time we landed in Skopje, Macedonia, the "estimate" had been completed and the initial plan thrashed out; 1 Royal Gurkha Rifles (RGR) with 69 Gurkha Fd Sqn would clear the southern half of the defile and 1 PARA with my squadron would clear the northern half. Subsequently we were to be prepared either to continue to hold the defile or fly north to Pristina.

On arrival in Skopje we found ourselves with very little in the way of transport and reliant on the kindness of 4 Armd Bde and 21 Engr Regt. OC 1 Fd Sqn lent me a Landrover which I shared with the Bty Comd from 7 Para Royal Horse Artillery, who was also part of CO 1 Para's tactical party. This allowed us to network and try and discover when our relevant sub-units were going to arrive in theatre. Mobile phones became critical assets and were the only method of talking to the UK. Meanwhile the planning frenzy started in earnest and the next 36 hours was a blur, much of it spent in either CO 1 Para's basha or the Brigade HQs' 12x12 tent. The comparison

between ourselves and 4 Armd Bde could not have been more apparent and we were certainly on light scales. My recce group had been delayed in the UK and the squadron main body arrived at 2300 on Monday 7 June ahead of them! However the good news was that our vehicles and equipment flew in with them on board an assortment of Antonovs, Galaxies and C130s. Early Tuesday morning saw the squadron fully established within 1 Para's harbour area; a sparse wood in the centre of the Petrovee Training Area.

## Training

Due to the short notice deployment, no specific training had been done in the UK. It was therefore a question of relying on residual experience to ensure we were ready to go when required. The political situation was changing hourly and we were told to be prepared to move from Wednesday morning. I continued to be in a series of never-ending planning meetings at brigade or battalion level, which left me little time to be with the squadron. The standard one third and two-thirds rule did not apply in even the remotest sense and there was some question as to whether real value was being added by the huge raft of briefings and updates that began at 0600 and ended often in the small hours. In view of the ever changing plan I decided to adopt a set of standard procedures that could be adapted at short notice. We knew that we would be flying in, the approximate length of road that we would need to clear and that time would be key. The squadron was therefore split into three troop groups of two sections each. The third troop was to be commanded by the QM, Capt Chris Gosling, a veteran of the squadron. Procedures were worked up for clearing the roads, tunnels and bridges that we would face in the defile. At the same time we had to acclimatise to the heat; it was in the high 80s and very different from the UK! Living conditions were austere and washing limited to mess tins. The Brigade Commander had declined the offer of more pleasant surroundings in order to prepare and acclimatise us that much quicker; a wise decision in the event. Light G1098s were packed in troop Landrovers and trailers and rigging trials with the support helicopters were conducted. The press descended on the 1 PARA battle group like a plague and a complete day was devoted to entertaining them. They were very much on side but this was indication of the interest generated by the "Paras."

The need for detailed intelligence on the defile was, at this stage, becoming critical. Although some excellent material was available it was still not clear which obstacles the Serb Army had prepared for demolition. On Wednesday night we were warned that we were to move up to the border to Camp Piper, run by 65 Fd Sp Sqn, for final preparations before crossing the border on Friday morning.

## Camp Piper and the Russians

We flew to Camp Piper on Thursday and settled into an even more austere area; a cornfield awaiting cutting, without the benefit of shade. By this stage the squadron was fully "bombed up (less explosives)" and the weight of our bergens and the heat was certainly focusing the mind. We ran through the plan for the final time only to be told that we were to be delayed by 24 hours. In retrospect it gave us a welcome breather and allowed the first rest since deployment. Final orders on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> June were interrupted at 1300 by CO 1 Para informing us that we had been ordered to seize Pristina, by helicopter assault, ahead of the Russians that afternoon. We were to be ready to move at 1345! An even faster set of orders then followed and our explosives arrived simultaneously; PE4 was thrown at every man in the squadron and bergens became even heavier.

We were not clear as to the situation we were about to face other than from the CO's statement "Gentlemen the threat is ramping up." As a consequence we tabbed to the landing sites with a degree of unease but then watched the afternoon unfold and the tension lessen. Eventually at about 1700 we were stood down and moved back to our harbour area. Recent exposure in the press has revealed a degree of disconnect between senior NATO commanders during this particular afternoon. It was without doubt a difficult few hours and the decision to keep us in Macedonia was, in retrospect, welcomed. The worm's eye view, rightly or wrongly, was that once committed we should be prepared to fight for the airfield; not a particularly happy thought and one that most did not relish. Happily I was too busy to give it much consideration!

## Crossing the Border

The events of Friday afternoon left the whole brigade remarkably tired but we received another set of orders for the crossing of the border the next morning. A final set of checks followed and we were able to rest from soon after midnight before moving to the landing sites at 0330 hours. The support helicopters arrived shortly afterwards, flanked by American attack helicopters as escorts. The squadron was split into the three troop groups and would be the leading elements of the 1 Para Battle group. We had chosen two landing sites (LS) on the

Kacanic Defile and 1 Tp would work south to link up with the Gurkhas who were moving north up the road from the border. 3 Troop would land on the same LS and move north to the next LS where the newly formed 4 Troop would already be moving north towards Pristina. After about an hour waiting in the aircraft both on the ground and circling in the air we crossed the border, overlying the huge traffic jam of 4 Armd Bde and the army of press who were all jostling to move first. The RAF produced some outstanding flying to put us down on very difficult landing sites; indeed one Chinook had to hover over a cliff face with its back ramp on the road as troops disembarked. With 1 PARA providing close protection, the troops started to clear the road. The atmosphere was particularly tense and eerie. All the villages were empty and cars lay abandoned on the road. The only traffic was a Serb Army staff car travelling south, which soon turned around when it met us! Communications were, not surprisingly, very difficult in such a deep defile and our dispatch riders provided the only reliable method to pass critical information on the routes back to Bde HQ. Within 5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> hours the route was open; we had found and dealt with two improvised explosive devices and one antitank mine. It is worth noting that the engineer plan had lead and dictated the brigade and BG plans in their entirety.

1 Para was ordered to go firm in the town of Kacanic, which was completely empty. It had been badly looted and dead animals littered the streets. Some members of the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) appeared from the hills and were delighted to see us but there were very few members of the community about. We started to establish ourselves in the town but were then informed that we had 15 minutes to be at a LS 2 km up the road in order to fly up to Pristina; we ran up the road and met, with 1 Para, the support helicopters that landed in amongst the armour of 4 Armd Bde. We sat in the aircraft for an hour, paralysing the move north of 4 Bde, before we were told to debus and move back to Kacanic; the armour rumbled on! 24 hours later we were flown north but to the south of Pristina to a town called Lipljan. 5 Airborne Brigade (5 AB) established itself in the town although at this point 1 PARA was switched to 4 Armd Bde. The first night in the town was disturbed by celebratory gunfire on behalf of the Albanians and a distinct feeling of unease by the Serbs. The next day the squadron was ordered to re-role into an infantry company and take control of Lipljan and its surrounding villages.

## Policing Lipljan

The town of Lipljan had been predominantly Albanian until the early 1990s when many of them fled the Serb repression leaving the Serbs with an 80 to 90 per cent advantage in 1999. Serbs had occupied Albanian homes and many of their businesses looted and burnt. However the Serbs were very fearful for their welfare when we arrived and our key task was reassurance of the Serb community to avoid ethnic cleansing by the Albanians. This was best achieved by a heavy patrol programme, mostly on foot but at times utilising the few vehicles we had in theatre. Rural patrols sapped our manpower but often these communities were the most vulnerable to Albanian intimidation.

We were billeted in an ex-Serb police station; the outgoing inhabitants had left us a full array of weapons and torture instruments and copious quantities of blood on the stairs. Although collocated with The Royal Irish Regiment and Royal Military Police, the majority of the clean-up fell to the squadron. This was done in between patrols and was a further drain on our resources. Included in this was the clean-up of the kitchen, which allowed us to move onto fresh rations (2); a major boost to morale and the envy of HQ 5 AB.

I spent much of my time with Serb leaders, discussing their fears and concerns and trying to ensure that we assuaged them; this included a number of addresses to the people, which were somewhat fraught. At the same time the KLA was giving us valuable intelligence on war criminals and weapons caches, which we often acted upon. As a result, the Squadron arrested a key war criminal, and hundreds of weapons confiscated. Needless to say this ran contrary to the policy of reassuring the Serbs and we were very much caught in the middle of two differing objectives. Impartiality remained vital and we arrested leaders on both sides; however the Serbs became even more frightened and this led to some of them fleeing to Serbia.

The Albanians became more overtly aggressive and on one Monday market day after a morning's drinking they started to wantonly loot the town. We flooded the area with the whole squadron and arrested more people than our cells could deal with before we restored a measure of calm to the situation at the end of the day. Some days later, a squadron multiple patrol was caught in crossfire between gunmen from both sides; one Serb turned to open fire on the patrol and was shot dead by them. Follow up operations over the next 12 hours netted a large variety of ordnance and weapons(3). Life continued in this vein for the four weeks that we were responsible for law and order in Lipljan.

Throughout the period we also continued to provide engineer support to the brigade: setting up and running a brigade water point for the four weeks; completing a series of plant tasks; providing detailed engineer recce data on local materiel; and supporting both the pathfinder platoon and BGs on patrol tasks. Physically and mentally it was highly demanding for all of us; in addition to regular foot patrols we mounted several covert OPs on likely targets and were able to furnish Bde HQ with high quality intelligence.

We were warned that we would recover to the UK in early July and amazingly were duly relieved by a company from 1 Royal Irish at midnight 4 July 1999. We spent two days cleaning equipment before flying home on 7/8 July.

## Lessons Learnt

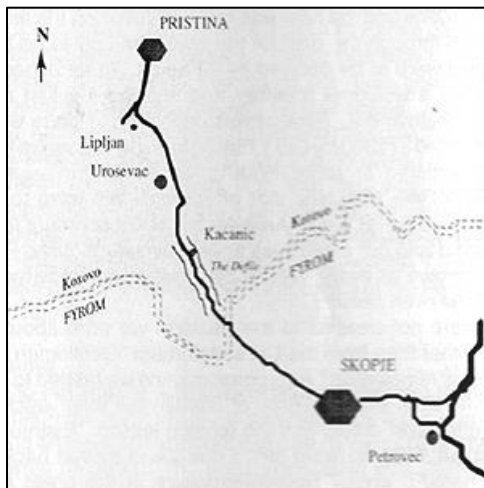
The weeks we spent in Kosovo were demanding but highly rewarding. Across the rank structure we learnt much about the squadron, others and ourselves! It is dangerous to draw too many lessons from such a short, albeit intense, deployment but I would emphasise the following four points:

Close support is not just an armoured occupation. The squadron was in close support to 1 Para and 69 Sqn to 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Regiment. The planning processes are identical and although equipped differently, the demands are similar if not more intense; we were expected to be as professional in our infantry skills as we are as combat engineers, not necessarily the case when the BG is equipped with Warrior and Challenger.

The speed of deployment both to and from the theatre demonstrated the strategic and tactical utility of light forces. Combining the strengths of 5 AB and 4 Armd Bde made the UK contribution to Opera: or Agricola flexible and potent.

The insertion using support helicopters and US attack helicopters worked extremely well and was a look ahead to the future of 16 Air Assault Brigade. It is a concept that worked for the US in the Gulf and the UK in Kosovo; 16 Brigade must be properly funded and resourced if UK plc is to reap the full benefits of such a capability.

The squadron was asked to perform several different tasks at no notice, with little, if any suitable training. The need for commanders at all levels to be able to operate in an uncertain environment proved to be critical and training for such difficulties must be included at an individual and collective level.



- (1) CO 1 Para's tactical party consisted of himself, his Operations Officer, OC 9 Para Sqn and the Bty Comd of G Bty 7 RHA.

We were also supported by a number of signallers.

- (2) SSgt Tim Barnard was awarded a Mention in Despatches for this work.
- (3) For instance, Cpl Balloch & LCpl Winter spent 48 hours with "eyes on" a KLA stronghold. They were no more than 300mtrs from the house which was situated in open country; they extracted without incident. For this and other work Cpl Balloch was awarded a Joint Commanders Commendation.

**This article is published by kind permission of the Royal Engineers Journal**

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## Extracts from a letter to No1 Parachute Training School

Letter from Sir Martin Lindsay Bart CBE, DSO to CO No1 Parachute Training School

You asked me to send you notes about the early days at Ringway, which I joined in July 1940, as a second army officer. It was then a parachute school. The CO was Wg Cdr Strange and his No 2 was Sqn Ldr Jack Benham. The senior army officer was Maj J.F. Rock. He was a psc officer who had been a brigade major during the 1940 campaign in France. When Rock got back through Dunkirk, he was sent for by the War Office and told, "to start Parachute troops." He was given no directions. But a German parachutist boots and smock suit from Holland. A commando was sent to Knutsford to be trained as paratroops. The CO was a very stupid officer.

At the beginning of the war I had submitted a War Office memorandum suggesting that a small parachute cadre should be started, to study the problems in case we would need paratroops later on. It went all the way up to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and came back minuted in his own handwriting, "I am not going to ask Englishmen to do that!"

Morale in the Commando was not good with distrust of the parachutes, and Rock always jumped first after a fatality to show confidence. Nevertheless we were all shaken when two promising young Captains from RM and RA, asked to be RTU not being able to take it. A demonstration was laid on for a few sticks of the Commando to jump on Ringway for Winston Churchill in the spring of 1941. Half the men at the last moment refused to jump and the CO took no disciplinary action. This enabled Rock to get the War Office to remove him.

Early in 1941 there was expansion at Ringway. It became the Central Landing Establishment. Rock went up to Lt Col, and I to Maj. The expansion was due to the decision to start gliders for operational purposes. We also had a central European officer trying to develop a kind of rotor arm, the idea being that individual soldiers would be able to glide their way down under the circulating rotor arm - but nothing ever came of this.

Rock having been our first parachute soldier thus became our first glider soldier, only to be killed when the towrope of his glider broke and he hit a telegraph pole. It is disgraceful that he was still allowed to be doing experimental work nearly two and a half years after starting parachuting. He should have been given command of one of the three infantry battalions converted or formed for parachuting at that time, in which case he would have commanded a parachute brigade in due course, and been the obvious choice for command of 6th Airborne when Gen Gale was promoted. He would have seemed certain to reach general's rank had he lived. The official History of Airborne Forces (chapter 111 page 29) says: "The greater part of the credit, on the Army side, for the success of the initial experiments and trials must go to Major Rock, whose unfailing courage and determination in the face of all difficulties, was an inspiration to others."

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## Summary of Service Lieutenant Colonel John F. Rock RE

by Major J.R. Cross of Museum of Army Flying Corp

- Born: 25 Jul 1905 Son of Dr Frank Ernest Rock MD Educated: Imperial Service College
  - 1924-25: RMA Woolwich
  - 3 Sep: 2Lt RE
  - 30 Sep 25-25 Jun 27: 13 Junior Offrs course SME Chatham
  - 23 Jul-3Sep 27: Mounted duty course, Aldershot
  - 3 Sep: Lt
  - 12 Sep 24 Sep 27: YOs' AA course, School of AA Defence
  - 25 Sep 27: Eastern Command (AE Colchester)
  - 10Jun 29: 49 Fd Coy, North Queensferry
  - 10 Mar-21 Mar 30: 52 course, School Air Photography
  - Oct 31: T Bn RE, Chatham
  - 9 Jan -10 Feb 33: Small Arms course, Hythe
  - 6 Mar -1 Jun 33: German language course, Germany
  - 16 Dec 34-16 Mar 35: ADC to CinC International Force Saar Territory, Saarbrucken (Maj-Gen JES Brind CBCMG DSO)
  - 16 Mar 35: T Bn RE, Chatham
  - 27 Apr 35: Embark for Ceylon
  - 24 May 35: OC 31 Fd Coy
  - 3 Sep 36: Capt
  - 3 Mar 38: SME, Chatham
  - 18 Aug 38 - 21 Jan 39: AI (construction) SME
  - 21 Jan - Oct 39: Staff College
  - 26 Oct 39: GSO 3 No2 Military Mission BEF. Also reported in orbat as Bde Maj 11 Inf Bde
  - 24 Jun 40: Reported as selected to take control of the organisation of Airborne Forces. (No indication of when promoted Maj. Though referred to as such by this date).
  - 27 Jun 40: GSO 2 (NT Centre), RAF station, Cheshire
  - 25 Aug 40: GSO 1 Central Landing Establishment, Ringway
  - 30 Oct 40: P/A/Lt Col. GSO 1 Airborne
  - 9 Feb 41: WS/Maj and T/Lt Col
  - 21 Dec 41: CO 1st Glider Battalion - T/Maj
  - 22 Dec 41: Air Schools Ltd ERFTS (Derby) (basic course)
  - 2 Feb - 2 Apr 42: 16 EFTS for Magister course
  - 10 Apr - 7 May 42: 1 GTS (Croughton) for Hotspur course
  - 9 May - 21 Jun 42: No 4 course at 102 Glider OUT
  - 8 Jul - 9 Sep 42: no 4 course at 1 Heavy Glider Conv unit, Brize Norton (Horsa)
  - 3 Sep 42: Maj. (Relinquished T/Lt Col from 21 Dec 41. Obviously in error and probably published as he was on courses and same date of sub promotion to major. On 12 Nov 42 T/Lt Col reissued backdated to 21 Dec 41 again, presumably when the error was discovered)
  - 24 Sep 42: Injured in crash of Hotspur at Shrewton
  - 8 Oct 42: Died at Tidworth hospital - aged 37
  - Awarded 1939 - 45 Star and Medal 8 April 1949
-

## The Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces Service of Dedication

To Celebrate the Millennium at Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire – Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> May 2000

On a beautiful day of blazing sunshine, in the grounds of Hardwick Hall, a Parade was held consisting of 32 Standards, a contingent of Regular Soldiers of all Arms who were just about to start the Para course and a fine body of veterans, again from all Arms.

I must mention that St Johns Ambulance were very busy looking after a few spectators and the Regular Soldiers who had not had breakfast! But you will be pleased to know that the Veterans held fast (no doubt due to the couple of pints the night before!) The Parade marched on and stood fast in the presence of:

Vice-Lord Lieutenant of Derbyshire Lieutenant Commander Martin Boissier

High Sheriff of Derbyshire Mrs Margaret Boissier

Lieutenant General Sir Michael Gray KCB. OBE. DL.

Mayor and Mayoress of Chesterfield Councillor Michael and Mrs Loretta Leverton

Councillor Ray Brooks and Mrs Lorna Brooks

The Airborne Millennium Prayer was said by all, and was followed by the wreath laying ceremony at the Memorial Plaque and the Last Post with two minutes silence. The Reveille was next and then the hymn 'Now Thank We All Our God' was sung by all. The Rev Rodney Warden, the Chesterfield Branch Padre gave the Readings, Prayers and The Blessing. We all sung Jerusalem and The National Anthem.

All this was followed by a terrific flypast and display by the Dakota C47. I'm sure many of you will remember her.

The following Sappers gave a fine display - you can be proud of them: Gerry Hammond, Don Stevenson, Jack Toseland, Dave Mellor, Ken Cole, Bob Prosser, Tom Thornton, Harry Anderson and Brian Jones. The others disappeared into the crowds - please give your names to the roving reporter next year lads!

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## On the Wings of Pegasus

The emblem of the British Airborne Forces is Bellerophon mounted on the winged horse Pegasus. The first recorded instance of an airborne warrior, his exploits are recounted in Greek mythology, where he is chiefly famous for slaying the fire-breathing monster Chimaera. Mounted on Pegasus, with spear in hand, Bellerophon rode into the air, swooped down upon the monster and destroyed it.

The emblem was chosen for British Airborne Forces by Lieutenant General Sir Frederick ("Boy") Browning, when he was appointed to lead the Airborne Forces in 1941. The sign, to be worn by all airborne soldiers, was designed in May 1942 by Major Edward Seago, the chosen colours of the Pegasus design (Maroon and Pale Blue) have become the trademark of airborne forces and are said to have been based on the horse racing colours of Lieutenant Sir Frederick ("Boy") Browning and his wife, authoress Daphne Du-Maurier.

### Red Berets

In 1942 Major General Browning decided that airborne troops should have some form of distinctive headwear. The beret was selected as a suitable and practical item of headwear and several colours; including pale blue and white were considered. Legend has it that Daphne du Maurier, the well-known novelist and wife of Major General Browning, was responsible for selecting the adopted colour of maroon, but she denied this. In fact, the choice of colours was pieced before the Chief of Imperial General Staff, General Sir Alan Brooke, who was apparently unable to make up his mind and asked the opinion of a soldier on whose head the berets of different hues were being displaced. The man expressed his preference for maroon, and thus the choice was made.

### Red Devils

It was the German forces that complimented the British airborne troops with the title '**Die Rote Touflen' (The Red Devils)**. The unofficial name was given to the airborne troops following the bitter and fierce fighting in the Tomera Valley, North Africa. The soil in this region to a ruddy red colour and following heavy rainfalls turned to a sticky red mud. The airborne men had dug in to defend the area and had become covered in the dirt, taking on a red colour which must have made them a frightening sight as they pressed home many counter attacks on the attacking German forces.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> January 1943 Major General Browning sent a signal to 'All Para Units'. It read: '**General Alexander directs that 1 Para Brigade be informed that (they) have been given the name by the Germans of "Red Devils" General Alexander congratulates the Brigade on achieving this high distinction...**'

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## Association Secretary

Ray Coleman

Activity in the Association has increased dramatically during the past three months. The Yorkshire Branch has been extremely active in planning and organising the Annual General Meeting and Dinner at Blackpool.

Work has also been going ahead at quite a pace preparing the room and display on behalf of this Association for the opening of the Yorkshire Air Museum, Elvington. We understand that the lowest tender was received from the Prosser Construction Company," however, I do feel slightly sceptical when checking company records and find the main workforce consist of three ex Clerk of Works RE. Still, Bill Rudd assures us they come highly recommended.

Recently our 'Standard' was on parade at Wembley Stadium for the London International Tattoo 2000. As it was the only Airborne/Para standard parading it was extremely conspicuous in the main parade proudly carried by Chris Chambers who was commended by so many.

The European Cup Draw has gone well. Eve and I wish to thank all of you that made the effort to take part and for the 80 plus kind letters of appreciation. You have raised just about enough to finance the projects proposed, which is wonderful. The sum raised is just over £3,000. One of the most pleasing acts of support happened when I attended the annual Royal Engineer's Association Football Club dinner for ex 'Corps' players at Chatham on Cup Final day. I was permitted to mention our draw in my short oration and everyone present came to me, bought tickets and wished us well in our undertaking. This, I think you will agree, was a truly magnificent gesture, which raised a considerable amount, and we thank them most sincerely. - Maybe food for thought for some members of this Association. Unfortunately, quite a number of members failed to return their tickets, however, if those members wish to contribute to the fund, all monies received will be gratefully accepted.

Prior to the Annual General Meeting there are various functions to attend throughout the country. However, if I miss you at these, I look forward to meeting many of you at Blackpool 2000.

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## European Football Cup Draw

The under mentioned personnel drew participating teams in the Airborne Engineers Associations Football Draw.

England	Anthony Harrap, Chiltern Avenue, Castleford.
Germany	G H Page, Hamlet Road, Birmingham.
Portugal	James Webster, Corner Crescent, Wick.
Romania	Tony Manley, Coleville Road, Farnborough.
Belgium	Stephen McArdle, Livingston Road, Blackburn.
Turkey	Mrs M J Mackay, Forest Avenue, Aberdeen.
Sweden	Karen Trayhurn, Sea Mills, Bristol.
Italy	Martin Corby, 9 Parachute Squadron, N Ireland.
Spain	Horace Stokes, Bentham Road, Chesterfield.
Yugoslavia	Danny Exton, Parish Road, Minster-on-Sea.
Norway	J Herbert, Waverley Road, Reading.
Slovenia	R Myers, Glanyrafon, Ystalyfera, Swansea.
France	Norman Penny, Old Park Close, Farnham.
Holland	Ken Teeley, Lomond Avenue Billingham.
Czech Rep	Neil Partner, Queens Drive, Leicester.
Denmark	Mrs V A Hicks, Wilford Grove, Sutton Coldfield.

LCpl Simon Barlow and LCpl Rob Gunson of 9 Parachute Squadron RE drew the tickets and teams at Rhine Barracks, Aldershot on Sunday 11 June 2000.

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## News from around the Branches

### Aldershot Branch

Fred Gray

The Aldershot Branch has had a relatively quiet period, with only the Annual General Meeting being held since the April publication of the newsletter. Due to difficulties in setting the date for the AGM, the numbers attending was not up to previous years, with many of our members away on holiday, business, reunions or other activities. However, we still managed eighteen members in attendance. We had the pleasure of seeing Jim Crozier who is on a working holiday in the UK from his adopted Australia. He was pleased to meet up with a few friends from his days serving with the squadron during the early 60s.

The only change to our committee is that Mrs Betty Gray (01252 668339) is to take over the post as Branch Secretary. All other members volunteered to carry on in post for a further year.

Following the AGM, Tony Manley provided an excellent BBQ lunch. As always, it was of the highest standard, and we greatly appreciate Tony's service to the Branch. Our annual BBQ is programmed for the end of July. Hopefully, weather permitting; we will have a group photograph of the event in the December issue of the "Journal."

We would welcome any members of the AEA living in our catchment area of London, Hampshire, Wiltshire and Surrey to join our Branch, you will be made most welcome, and we look forward to seeing you.

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## Chatham Branch

Ron "Smokey" Gibson

Hello mates (gawd help yer's)

As I am now the Chatham Branch rep this will be my first attempt at the "Journal." Eric Blenkinsop has been our rep (I put rep cause I can't spell representative) for many years but has decided to stand down (these old uns can't keep up nowadays), but seriously, Eric has done a marvellous job right from the early days of the Association formation. I believe he has done sterling work for the Association and for the Chatham Branch in particular. Many thanks Eric from all at Chatham and have a rest for a while, but don't go far away, we might need you as our rep again.

On the good side, Branch members who in the past had severe setbacks in health are in most cases back in fighting fit condition. We're happy that our colleagues John Elliot, Frank Shepherd and Mike Farrow are once more full of get up and go (I don't know where to, but still?) Bob and Pam Seaman have shaken off the bronchitis and 'flu they had - times are good!

### **Branch Meetings**

We are keeping our average of 16 - 18 members at meetings. Some new members have joined; we now have about 44 members spread over Kent, Essex and Sussex. We enjoyed a Sunday lunch that was arranged by John Elliott at a country pub, The Harrow, in Kent. It had many wartime connections with RAF Biggin Hill aircrews. The landlord and staff gave us a warm welcome and good food. Our next outing is programmed for 10th July at the King Charles hotel - Chatham. In the near future we have a venue in East Sussex, this will be for a pub Sunday lunch, and will be followed by a visit to Bert and Dee Fordham at their country cottage.

### **Other News**

The Airborne may have lost the "Pegasus" sign but not at Chatham as we will soon have a bar in the King Charles hotel (formerly the NAAFI Club). Now, hopefully the "Pegasus" bar, which a team of our members will decorate with pictures, badges (RE) Airborne for the walls, so that ex-servicemen and visitors alike: will not forget the Airborne or the "Sapper" role.

In a letter from Gordon "Smudger" Smith ex 2 Tp - 3 Sqn, who now lives in New Zealand, he enclosed a letter sent to him by Reg Arnold of 3 Sqn who joined us after the Normandy drop, but was with the Sqn in the Ardennes, Rhine and Far East. I don't recall the name so if anyone can fill in with details, I would be pleased to know in order to pass it on the Smudger. Reg Arnold also lives in New Zealand now!

A team of female Sapper Officers won the women's team event in the Sahara Desert Race over some three days. That's some tough going - a big Well Done is in order.

Should any reader wish to join us at any of our events, you can contact me on 01708 559326

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## Yorkshire Branch

Charlie Dunk

The news of the Yorkshire Branch must be spreading, and we say welcome to four new members since the last newsletter. **Henry Anderson, Vince Cairns, Gerry Hammond and Mick O'Leary** - Welcome Gentlemen, we know some of you live a fair distance away from our meeting place in Pontefract, but **should you be** able to attend, you will be made most welcome.

Several of our members have been very busy assisting the Yorkshire Air Museum prepare for the Airborne Forces Day at Elvington near York. This will include the opening of the new Airborne Display. The event took place on 25th June, so if you weren't there, you've missed it!

Work continues on the Blackpool 2000 reunion. I am reliably informed that the hotel rooms are going fast, so you had better get your applications in pretty quick, or there will be no room left at the inn.

Which leads me nicely into this story I heard from Derek Latham in Canada ... by the time the Paratrooper pulled into Blackpool, every hotel room was taken. "You've got to have a room somewhere," he pleaded to the hotel manager, "Or just a bed, I don't care where I sleep - I'm really tired." "Well, I do have a double room with only one occupant," admitted the manager. He's a Marine and he might be glad to split the cost. But to tell you the truth, he snores so loudly that people in adjoining rooms have complained in the past few days - I'm not so sure it'd be worth it to you" "No problem," the tired Para assured him, "I'll take it!"

The next morning the Para came down to breakfast bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. "How'd you sleep?" asked the manager, "Never better" smiled the Para. The manager was really impressed now. "No problem at all with that Marine guy snoring, then?" "Nope, I shut him up real fast," stated the Para. "How'd you manage that then?" asked the manager. "Well, he was already in bed snoring away when I went into the room," explained the Para. "So I went over, gave him a kiss on the cheek and said, "Goodnight beautiful - and from then on he was just sat up there in bed watching me."

Lorraine, my wife, and I have just spent a great weekend in Wales climbing one or two "hills" with several other like-minded fools. It was a great weekend and I am sure that Chris O'Donovan or Phil Chatterley will give a full sit-rep on the weekend somewhere else in this edition of the "Journal." The weather did us no favours, and we got so wet outside, that we decided that we might as well get as wet on the inside! Thanks to Chris and Phil for getting underway what I hope turns out to be an annual event.

Unfortunately, due to other commitments, I regret that I will not be at Blackpool this year. I am sure you will all have a great time. I would also like on behalf of our Branch to congratulate Christine and Dave Grimley on their marriage that same weekend. Lorraine and I will drink a toast to the BRIDE and GROOM in one of the many hostelrys that we hope to visit in Dublin at that time.

Mark Holbrook (ex-Para Regt, now with the TA in Leeds) is trying to get in touch with any ex-members of 131. He would like any information or stories on 131 to help him compile a history of TA ABF. If anyone can help, please let me know and I will pass on the information.

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## Northern Ireland Branch

Phil Chatterley

The Branch, following our success in the organisation of the Snowdonia Adventure, will be closing down during July and August, but have no fear, we will be back with a vengeance in September.

I have touched base with the Squadron, who are currently located in Antrim, and will hope to foster close relations with them during their stay in the province. Geordie Lightowler and me were hoping that some of the lads would be in attendance at a recent presentation given by the GOC, Lt Gen Sir Hugh Pike KCB, DSO, who was in command of 3 Para during the Falklands campaign. Alas, despite an invitation, I fear that they were otherwise engaged!

October will soon be upon us, and by all accounts the AGM/Reunion in Blackpool will be quite an event. We sincerely hope to be in attendance, and look forward to seeing many of you there.

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## Northwest Branch

Brian Jones

Following our AGM, held on Saturday 20th May, I have to report, that despite offering up the appointments within the Branch; there were no takers (typical!) Therefore the committee members remain as follows:

Chairman - Brian Jones, Secretary - Ian Strettle and Treasurer - Ken Cole.

It is with sorrow that we report the passing of two members, Ray Walden and Tom Purves. Unfortunately we only learned about Ray several weeks after the event. Fortunately, we able to make amends at Tom's funeral, which was attended by six Association members, and the service was conducted in true Scottish style complete with a "Piper." A guard of honour, consisting of Bob Posser, Chris Chambers, Ken Cole, Eric Matthews, Jim Percey and myself, attired with "red berets," stood braced to attention as the hearse drove slowly away.

We extend our most sincere condolences to the family members of Ray and Tom.

On a lighter note, we have now recruited two new members, Lawrence Long from Blackpool and Capt Dave Sheridan (PSAO 75 Engr Regt V). A warm welcome is extended to them both.

We are currently planning a social activity, probably for Saturday 30th September. If any Association member and their guests would like to join us, please give either Ian Strettle or myself a ring for more details. We shall also include the relevant details in the next copy of our minutes, which will be forwarded to all Branch Secretaries.

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## South-West Branch

Tom Brinkman

Our most recent social event was a Sunday lunch at a local hotel. Several of our members, together with their good ladies travelled quite a distance to be with us. Bert Gregory and his wife came up from Cornwall, Terry Maxwell and his wife travelled up from Plymouth, Charlie Hoskins and his wife came over from Newport (S Wales), and finally, Brig. Hooper MBE, travelled up from Monmouth. Making up the remainder of the party were Mike and Elaine Newton, Ray and Maureen Richards, Gilly Potter and his wife, and myself and wife Yvone.

One of the stalwarts of our group, Mervyn (Gilly) Potter, served as a Sgt in 261 Sqn and was attached to 9 Fd Coy at the time of Arnhem.

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## Birmingham Branch

Mike Holdsworth & Bunny Brown

The following is an update of the developments for the Memorial Service to be held on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> October as part of the Commemorative service for the 10 Sappers of 300 troop 131 Indep Pare Sqn RE (V) who died in the Cromwell Lock tragedy on 28th September 1975.

On Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> June, three of us visited Cromwell lock and weir, Cromwell Village, Near Newark, Notts, to obtain the landowners permission for the coaches/cars etc. The Weir and The River Trent itself, looked so tranquil in the bright sunlight with the fishermen in abundance along its banks. The "Haywain" painting by Constable springs to mind. While we were there we watched the futile attempts of a salmon trying in vain to jump up the weir. It hardly seemed possible at that precise time, to appreciate, that this was the very spot, that was the cause of so much pain and suffering. Most of the tasks for the success of the memorial have been allocated to individuals. Lots of enthusiasm, which is good.

### **The Memorial Service**

The religious side of the service is being formulated by our AEA representatives Maj. Bunny Hooper and Alan Brough together with The Rev. Tucker from Cromwell Village. We have the services of a Piper and a Bugler from the R.E. Band which will be part of the religious service under the control of Maj. Hooper and Alan Brough.

### **The Buffet and Reunion**

We have decided not to use the original meeting place "Memory Lane pub" (I believe the accommodation is good) as we felt it would not be big enough. We have, however found a larger and more suitable place for the Buffet (£3.50 per head please give me numbers when you can)

"Ye Old Market" is in Newark itself. (Accommodation Single £29.50, Doubles £39.50)

### **The New Memorial Fence**

The engineers have measured up the memorial site, near to the lock, in readiness to erect the ornamental steel fence. The fence is at present under construction.

### **Site Maintenance**

I am able to confirm that British Waterways have received the remaining outstanding memorial funds to be used for the upkeep of the garden for the next three years.

### **Military Service**

Serving members of 131 INDEP CDO SQN. RE (V) will be the formal Guard of Honour. The Guard Commander will be Chris Shillito (I believe Chris was on the tragic weekend) The PARA contingents voted to wear smart dress i.e. Regimental tie and Beret (No jeans) Summary timings for the service are 1300 hours brew 'o' tea 1330 hours the program starts. Actual numbers attending are yet to be confirmed - but estimate 150.

We are trying to locate two of the QMSIs who were serving with 131 at the time of the tragedy, and would appreciate the help of anyone knowing the whereabouts of Taff Lougher and J.G. (Jock) Grey. Our intention is to invite them to the ceremony.

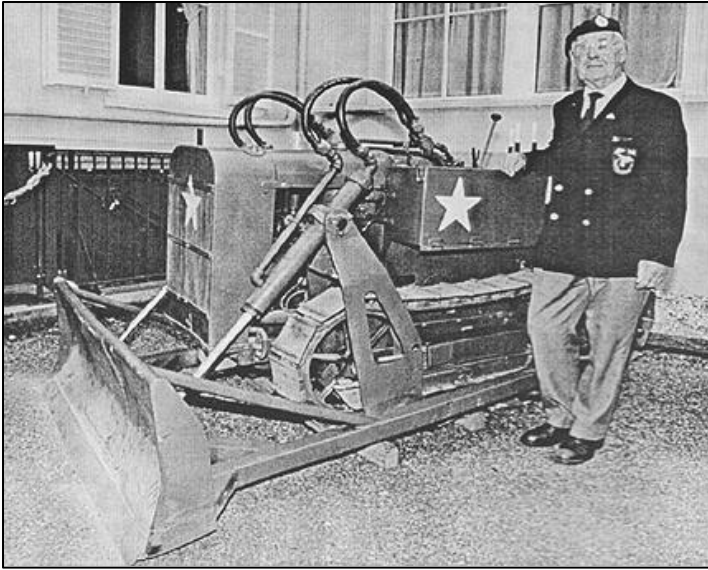
Association members wishing to attend are requested to contact Mike Holdsworth on 01 21 744 2846 or on his mobile 09564 29154.

We are now in our summer mode and will have held, (weather permitting) our 5th annual Clay Pigeon Shoot and family BBQ that is scheduled on 1<sup>st</sup> July. We'll give you update of how things went in the December issue of the Journal.

We look forward to meeting friends old and new at the AGM in Blackpool.

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## Gilly's Airborne Clarkair Crawler



The photo shows Gilly with his renowned Airborne Clarkair Crawler. This is now on display at the Arnhem Museum. Gilly was accompanied at Arnhem by LCpl Underwood, Sprs Diamond, Belcher, Greenwood, Cheetham, Boden, McFarlane, Page and Dvr Clarke.

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# Insignia of the Gurkha Engineers

By Frank Stevens

In 1947 a decision was taken to recruit support arms for the Gurkha Division and these comprised Royal Artillery, Royal Engineers, Royal Signals, Royal Army Service Corps and Military Police. At the time of recruitment the personnel were enlisted into their parent Corps, not into the Gurkhas as a separate branch. All personnel were enlisted from existing units including those to be transferred to the Indian Army upon partition, so there was no such thing as a raw recruit.

Since the Nepalese make superb fighting soldiers, great difficulty was experienced in turning them into technical soldiers. When the Malayan emergency was in full swing, a decision was made to return the Royal Artillery Gurkhas to infantry units and the matter was not raised again. The Gurkha Military Police was also disbanded at a later date, but the author does not know the reasons for this.

The Engineer, Signal and Transport units still exist and form a valuable part of the British Army, although much reduced, in keeping with the remainder of the Army.

Referring back to the commencement of Gurkha soldiers in the R. E., they wore all the normal insignia of the Corps, brass George VI cap badge and brass shoulder title R. E. Later on the change of the badge, the bi-metal version was issued and later still, the bi-metal EIR cap badge was worn.

As far as possible, the Gurkhas followed the dress of the infantry units and therefore a blackened SIT was worn on the jungle green tunic. The officers had a badge of the type described below, mounted on a cord boss for the peaked cap, on blue for the khaki cap, and on red for the No. 1 Dress blue cap although later it was agreed to only use the red boss for all dress. By this time the new badge for the units, now known as Gurkha Engineers, had been approved and this consisted of crossed kukris, surmounted by a grenade with the motto 'UBIQUE' across the hilts of the kukris, all in white metal at that time and manufactured in the Far East until Ordnance supplies became available. The new badge was approved in 1955.

A unique event occurred with the Coronation contingent, an issue of battledress was made to all personnel and, as a special concession; the unit tailor wove shoulder titles as 'one offs.' These were black on red, and had 'Royal Engineers' over 'Gurkha' as the wording. At the same time the Sappers wore the Hat, Felt, Gurkha (H.F.G.) and the badge for that was the R.E. collar badge mounted on a 2" x 2 1/2" dark blue patch worn on the right side of the hat. Note that this was before 1955, and therefore still wearing R. E. insignia in the main.

Later a better type of title was made with blue lettering on red for issue to all ranks when wearing B. D. in Hong Kong. The final type of cloth S/T was 'GURKHA ENGINEERS' in blue on red from Ordnance sources. This became obsolete when battledress ceased and No.2 Dress came into use. For the jungle green uniform, the SIT became 'G.E.' in black. This was in 1955 at the time of the distinctive cap badge. Buttons for the No.2 Dress were anodised, and had the design of the badge upon them, the buttons resembling brass. At one stage the officers had black horn buttons made for them as a trial, but it is believed that there was only one batch made.

In 1977 the honour of the title Queen's Gurkha Engineers was granted, a similar honour also being granted to the Signals and Corps of Transport arms at the same time. At a time, which is not recorded, having the grenade and scroll gilt and the remainder in silver plate embellished the cap badge. The three forms of head-dress used by the Gurkha sappers are; beret, hats F.G., and a hat known as the KILMARNOCK, which, to many would be described as a 'pillbox,' around the body of which there is yellow braid. The hat commemorates the Royal Sappers and Miners who wore a similar head dress. The badge is worn in all three types of hat. The SIT currently in use by the Gurkhas is the letters Q.G.E. At the time of writing there remains only one squadron, which is 67 Fd Sqn, based in Maidstone.

A special feature for both British and Gurkha officers is the wearing of a shoulder belt in red leather (or imitation of), which has a large gilt badge thereon, surrounded by a wreath. The belt also bears a lion's head boss with whistle and chain, also in gilt. Nowhere else in the Corps is a shoulder belt worn.

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## Visitor to Charlie Dunk's Web site

Email received from Stuart?!! Fred Robson E-mail address: [carlosr@skyinet.net](mailto:carlosr@skyinet.net)

Remember the Readers Digest Humour in Uniform? There has to be a lot of humour out there from ex-Squadron members that is worth listening to! Why not try it? After all it's the fun times that tied us all together as much as the hard times. If you attend a reunion you find that a great majority of the guests are laughing and all from stories related from the past. Soldiering is a serious business but nothing can suppress humour! If it is possible to become a member from half a world away then tell me how and sign me up. Paddy McGinty (Chris Chambers) will tell you my name. If there is finance involved then charge it to Tommy Downie!

Keep up the good work!

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## Reg Orton

A soldier from the Corps of Royal Engineers – Ubique

By John G Elliott



Reg Orton was born in Birmingham in 1919 and lived with his parents in Acocks Green until the start of the War. There were seven children in the Orton family, three girls and four boys. A sister aged 91 is still alive and so is one of the brothers, Billy, who is aged 83. The family had a military background in that his father was one of the defenders of Ladysmith and one of his brothers finished the War as a RSM in Austria.

Reg joined the Army at the outbreak of War and went to France with BEF. His stay there was short and he was evacuated from Dunkirk with the survivors of the BEF. The experience probably shaped Reg's outlook on the Army and his future in it. In a letter written to a nephew his comments on the lack of proper equipment and the leadership of some of the Generals, who still thought that they were fighting the First World War were scathing. No doubt this influenced his decision to join an elite force, which he did by volunteering for parachute training with the newly formed Airborne Forces.

Reg was one of the early members of the Air Section of the Royal Engineers. The unit quickly expanded and was designated 1<sup>st</sup> Para Squadron RE. As part of the newly founded 1st Para Brigade they went with the invasion force to North Africa. The unit made two operational drops during the campaign in North Africa and fought with distinction until the German surrender in May 1943. Reg was fortunate to survive one particularly disastrous incident during which most of his section was killed when the Hawkins mines they were carrying during a night time operation behind the German lines exploded accidentally.

1<sup>st</sup> Squadron next saw action in Sicily as part of the Para force, which dropped on the Primasole Bridge. After Sicily, 1<sup>st</sup> Para Brigade was landed at Taranto in Italy by the Royal Navy where the Squadron was employed in an infantry role for four months before being recalled to England to prepare for the invasion of Northern Europe, as part of the new-formed 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division.

After much training and the frustration of preparing for several operations, which were cancelled, the 1st Airborne Division was dropped at Arnhem, as part of the Allied Airborne force whose task was to capture the bridges over the Neder Rhine. Reg and most of his troop reached the Bridge on the first day, and under the command of the then Captain Eric McKay, held the schoolhouse on the East bank of the Bridge despite all attempts by Germany armour and infantry to dislodge them. With the schoolhouse on fire, a cellar full of wounded, little ammunition or medical supplies left, Captain McKay ordered the survivors to evacuate the building and attempt to reach the rest of the Division, which, though completely surrounded, was still fighting in Oosterbeek. This proved to be impossible, as the Germans had formed a tight perimeter round the bridge and the survivors from the schoolhouse were either killed or captured. Reg was taken prisoner and though he escaped in the general confusion of the next few days, he was recaptured and spent the rest of the war as a POW working in the coal mines of East German with other POW's and slave labourers.

After the war Reg was posted to the Far East and spent three years in Hong Kong with a Works Unit restoring the war-damaged utilities of the Colony. Whilst on leave at the end of this tour, he volunteered for service in Korea and was soon in action with 55 Independent Field Squadron RE as a Troop Sergeant. During April 1951 his unit was engaged in a particularly fierce action whilst supporting an armoured column which was attempting to relieve the 1st Battalion the Gloucestershire Regiment, who had been surrounded on the Injlim River Crossing. It was in this action that he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. The citation for the awards states:

"From about 0830 hours to 1345 hours Sgt Orton was in charge of a party of 9 men acting as local protection to a CENTURION tank. During the early part of this period his men were deployed on either side of the tank and engaged continuously by enemy small arms and mortar fire. He and his men broke up at least one formed body of Chinese of more than platoon strength who attacked them. His tank was the last to withdraw and came under very violent attacks from Chinese lining the sides of the road grenading and smoking the tank. He organised and controlled the fire of all the tank passengers into two effective fire banks. When the tank caught fire and fell off the road he was, while still in a dazed condition, ordered in English to surrender by a Chinaman, armed with an

automatic weapon. He attacked this man with his fists and laid him out cold.”

He gathered the survivors together and got them onto another tank through the great number of Chinese who were in the area, grenading and firing at them. When Molotov cocktails halted this tank he immediately went to the front and put out the fire with his own clothes, thus saving the driver from being burnt or blinded.

The Commander of the tank was severely wounded at this time, and Sgt Orton moved to the turret where he took command of the tank himself. The tank gunner, under his control, successfully engaged several groups of the enemy, and succeeded in bringing the tank with its passengers, the majority of whom were wounded, to safety.

During the whole of this period Sgt Orton acted in a most cool and courageous manner taking on the responsibilities of infantry NCO and tank commander confidently and efficiently. By his actions he undoubtedly saved the lives of many British soldiers and almost certainly saved a tank from being lost, whilst at the same time inflicting the maximum damage possible to the enemy.”

Soon after this Sergeant Orton was selected to travel to the United States with a small party of servicemen from selected units of the UN Force, who had distinguished themselves during the fighting. These veterans were guests of President Harry Truman and as such appeared at several civic functions with him, though the main purpose of their visit was to tour munitions plants and factories giving firsthand accounts of the fighting in Korea. To honour these veterans the City of New York awarded them The Medal of Honour of New York City. (If you have very sharp vision and are ever watching a news clip of the aftermath of the Korean War you will see Reg beside President Truman on the steps of City Hall, New York). During this tour Reg was appointed ‘Colonel aide-de-camp’ on the staff of the Government of the State of New Mexico.

On his return to the UK in 1953 Reg was posted to the TA Liverpool as an Instructor. However this routine life as a ‘Civvy Soldier’ lasted for barely six months and by a certain amount of manipulation, Reg was posted to HQ, RM Commando Brigade in the Canal Zone as WOII, QMSI. The Commando Brigade subsequently moved to Singapore and then to Malta. After a short time the Commando Brigade moved to Cyprus as reinforcements for the Cyprus garrison and in preparation for the Anglo French intervention at Suez. During this part of his service with the Commando Brigade WOII, Orton was awarded the British Empire medal in recognition of his outstanding services whilst serving as Assistant to the Staff Officer, RE. HQ, 3 Commando Brigade R.M.

The 16th Independent Para Brigade was also in Cyprus on anti EOKA operations and standing by for the imminent operation against Col. Nasser. At this most important time, 9 Para Squadron RE was without an SSM and WOII Orton suddenly found himself as SSM of 9 Para Squadron, still wearing his green beret!

As many of the Reservists, who had been recalled to the colours, had been away from airborne life for various periods of time, the RAF Parachute instructors ran a series of short, sharp, familiarisation courses. Reg immediately joined one of the courses and by cutting corners, as usual, found himself in a stick, standing up ready to jump. With slight apprehension Reg realised that his last jump had been at Arnhem 12 years previously and that techniques had changed, however, as the red light was ‘ON’ he thought that it was rather late to mention it. Needless to say, he landed safely.

The Airborne part of operation Musketeer was launched on 5th November 1956 and Reg landed at Port Said with the Sea borne force the next day. After a few days ashore the Parachute Brigade was withdrawn to Cyprus, where they continued their anti-terrorist operations, until their return to UK in December 1956.

Reg stayed with the 9 Para Squadron RE until 1960, during which time he completed two short emergency tours in Cyprus and Jordan. On leaving 9 Para Squadron on the expiry of his tour, he returned to HQ Commando Brigade in Singapore.

In 1962 Reg retired from the Service and went to work for an oil exploration company in the Middle East. Whilst on a drilling survey in the desert near the old British campsite of Tel el Kebir, Egypt, he stepped on an old British AP mine and lost the lower part of his left leg. He was not found for several hours and even then it was some time before an emergency operation was performed on his shattered leg. Eventually he arrived at Roehampton, where he faced two more operations before he was fitted with an artificial limb.

During his stay at Roehampton Reg was nursed by Clare Stanley. Subsequently they married and had two sons.

Reg was liked and respected in the community for his work with the Samaritans, The Quakers and as a volunteer driver for the Social Services. His compassion, knowledge of life and down-to-earth advice were valued by all who met him. He died after a short illness in July 1989 remaining brave and uncomplaining to the last with Clare at his bedside.

His rank on retirement was Sgt. He never troubled to sit his Army Certificates of Education, which would have assured a higher substantive rank. Perhaps he was too busy fighting the Queen's enemies. One wonders what dizzy heights he would have aspired to if he had obtained those treasured certificates? Would he perhaps have been an even better soldier?

### **Epilogue**

After his Army service Reg worked in the Middle East on geophysical surveys for an oil exploration company. During this time his medals were sold without his agreement. Eventually they were traced to a Canadian collector, who had bought them in good faith. He was so impressed by 'The Man' whose medals he owned that he visited him in the UK and commissioned a portrait of the action in which Reg won his DCM. During 1999 Mrs Orton was able to purchase the medals from the Canadian collector, as it had always been Reg's wish that the medals should be in the UK, preferably in the Royal Engineers Museum for safe keeping.



Reg Orton's Medals



On 8th May 2000 Mrs Orton, in the company of her two sons David & Peter, presented the medals to Major General Drewlenkewicz, who accepted them on behalf of the Museum. Also present at the ceremony was Major General Younger, Reg's OC in Korea.

### **Author's Note**

This CV was compiled by me as a result of conversations with Reg, his family, old comrades, newspaper articles, war records, etc. and therefore there might be some minor inaccuracies. If I have ignored anyone or not given full coverage of an event, please excuse me, no offence was intended.

Finally, it must be mentioned that Major Martin White (late Royal Engineers) who spent so much time and effort getting this project off the ground was at the presentation to see all his efforts reach fruition

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## Three Men find it tough to be Heroes 'First day is worst'

Express Staff Reporter: Washington

It's the first 24 hours of being an official hero that's the hardest - or so it seemed to three Britons who awoke this morning in plush suites of Washington's luxury Mayflower Hotel.

A week ago, Royal Engineers Sergeant Reg Orton from Acocks Green in Birmingham, was waking up in a foxhole Northwest of Seoul.

Radio Operator Sergeant Pete Weston, from Winchester, was waiting for his RAF plane to go out on a Korea anti-sub patrol, and Petty Officer Frank Moss, a Barnsley man was in the engine-room of the frigate Black Swan on the way back from a daring sortie under Communist fire. Then something happened. They are not quite sure what, but their commanding officers asked a lot of questions, including:- "what do you know about the United Nations?" and "Can you carry your drink?" Said Moss " what me? After 19 years in the Navy?" Said Orton "After 11 months in Korea? Try me' Said Weston "Naturally."

### **30 Day Tour**

And yesterday, with 45 other men of the 19 United Nations from Korea there began in Washington a whirlwind 30-day tour of 34 of America's biggest cities.

Generals, Cabinet Ministers, and the President received them and made them blush in public.

In a fleet of high - powered limousines escorted by nothing below a full colonel, they were the victims of three official Washington cocktail parties and two banquets.

"And not a blooming beer in the lot" said Reg Orton.

The President told them at the White House: "Congratulation on your service to freedom."

On the steps of the Capitol with thousands watching, Dean Acheson greeted them with profound honour and respect"

Said Frank Moss: "They gave us a terrific build-up I had to look down at my feet." And Pete Weston: "It was so embarrassing I didn't know where to look."

### **Four Breweries**

The tour that followed was split up across the Northern and Southern States.

"There are four breweries on my tour," said Reg Orton and Frank Moss:- "We've got two breweries and two cigarette factories. " We need 'em. We're broke." "Spent it all in Honolulu."

But when they had had their morning coffee - from silver plated trays and their baths in marble tiled toilet rooms that morning, the British Treasury in Washington had some good news for them. They were to get a special allowance of 2 pounds nine shillings and 7 pence a day for the duration of their stay in America. "A sort of gesture you know."

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## The Parachute Regiment and Airborne Forces Service of Dedication

To Celebrate the Millennium at Brecon Cathedral – Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2000

A most memorable service to celebrate the Millennium was held in Brecon Cathedral on Saturday 25 March. It was extremely well attended despite the wretched weather forecast for the day. No doubt many who had experienced the atrocious weather on Sennybridge in the past stayed away but those who did turn up were lucky enough to march through the town after the service in sunshine. It was a parade, which drew plenty of hand clapping from the watching crowd.

There were about twenty standards on parade but as room only allowed eight to march in at the beginning of the service, the other standards were placed in position before the service. After the Lord Lieutenant of Powys and other dignitaries had arrived the eight standards and the colours of 3 Para were marched in to the strains of Elgar's Pomp and Circumstance: a very moving moment.

Dr Sandy Cavenagh read the first lesson; he was the MO of 3 Para at Suez and in Cyprus before that. General Anthony Farrar Hockley read the second lesson. The sermon was given by The Rev Paul Abram, who again, had been a 3 Para Chaplain in '66-70 and 74-75 and who is now a Chaplain in Ordinary to HM The Queen. He touched on the connection between Wales and the Welsh and Airborne Forces, which is quite extensive and not limited to the miseries of Sennybridge! Prayers were said by Major General the Rev Morgan Llewelyn formerly Colonel of The Royal Welch Fusiliers and now chaplain at Christ College Brecon, The Rev Rupert Jarvis, chaplain of The Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers (Militia) and The Rev Ashley Mitchell, chaplain of 3 Para.

At the end of the service the colours and standards were marched out to Ride of the Valkyries and after the blessing we left to the new Airborne Forces Millennium march called "Every Man an Emperor" and I can tell you it will really make you hold your head up, push your chest out and swing your arms. A great march.

We formed up "three thick" outside the cathedral thanks to some energetic sheep dogging by RSM 3 Para and his drill staff and marched off with the Parachute Regiment Band and the Band of the Ghurkhas at our head. They gave us a good solid beat at a lot less than 120 to the minute. There were nearly as many grey heads as red berets on the march! However, they speeded up the beat and we marched past the Hon Mrs Legge-Bourke, the Lord Lieutenant of Powys and General Farrar-Hockley to whom we gave a very smart "Eyes left."

We fell out very near the George Hotel where there was a fine parade of pies and pints and later, some pretty prodigious lamp swinging. As they say "A good time was had by all". Who was the all you ask? Well I saw Johnny Humphrey up from Swansea, standard-bearer Tom Brinkman from Bristol, Chas Hoskin from Newport, John Hooper from Monmouth, Bernard Hooper and Jim Scott from Birmingham way, and there were one or two more Sapper badges about, but your reporter failed to get their names.

I would guess that there were about two hundred on the march and quite a few more red berets on the pavement. With families and friends the cathedral was full to overflowing with extra seats in the aisles. A really good day!

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## The Comrade

By Osborne Cook, ex-3 Para

Was it the years or the polish you lent?  
The letter you read me when you had one sent?  
Or the beret we wore as brothers together,  
The butt-end we shared at the end of our tether?  
Deeper than this lay our blood brotherhood  
A fiercer love burning and less understood.  
It was pain, discomfort and curses (and tears)  
Nights of bleeding, screaming (and prayers).  
Leaping through darkness 'gainst terror unknown  
Are memories we cherish together alone.  
Fears we had smothered and tried to disguise  
Were present and naked in each other's eyes,  
The dirt on your face that streaked when you cried  
Had captured my heart when you fought at my side

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## Airborne Intelligence Units

I am researching the history of Airborne Intelligence Units and would like to hear from anyone who served with the Int Branch of any AB formation HQ or may have been attached to an AB Int Section. I know that there were at least two RE draughtsmen posts with the G (Int) Branches of 1 and 6 AB Divs during WW2 and that there were two RE draughtsmen posts with 6 Para Int Pl of 16 Para Bde.

**Please write to:**

Sgt Graeme Deeley, 89 (AB) Mil Ant Sect, Gryphon House, Goojerat Bks, Colchester CO2 7SW, or  
Tel: ATN (9) 4651 (BT 0 1 206 78) 2827.

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## In the Line of Fire

Tom Purves (Continued from the April Newsletter)

In the April issue of the Newsletter I wrote about returning to La Ronge in Canada to attend a reunion of former smoke jumpers. To say forest fire fighting methods had changed since the 50's and 60's would be a gross understatement, it was a revelation, and made our techniques back in those early years seem antediluvian! About 85% to 90% of forest fires are started by electrical strikes, around 5% to 10% are caused by careless hunters or fishermen (campfires, cigarette ends, matches etc.) and to a much lesser degree, incendiary fires which are started deliberately, usually for malicious reasons, or to obtain work if times are bad, as men are recruited from the area to work as temporary fire fighters. Basically there are three types of fire, the forest fire, brush fire and the grass fire.

### **Forest Fire (Temperature 1000°C)**

The most difficult to control and extinguish, it normally moves slowly, (about  $\frac{1}{4}$  to 1 mph) but can, depending on topography, climatic conditions, and type of fuel, (spruce or lodgepole pine will go up faster than Tamarac or poplar), move faster and jump large areas which can trap fire fighters.

### **Brush Fire (Temperature 800°C)**

An area covered with small trees and scrub, travels faster than the forest fire, up to 30 mph again depending on conditions. A greater threat to life and property as more people and dwellings are generally found in those areas,

### **Grass Fire (Temperature 500°C to 600°C)**

The least hazardous, presents little or no danger to people or property. A grass fire can reach speeds of up to 50 mph with a brisk wind, but can be put out easily and quickly if there are enough individuals on the fire line.

### **The Computer**

A computer programme was designed from information obtained from the forestry divisions of all the Canadian Provinces, along with data supplied by other sources outside the country. The programme is called I.F.M.S. (Instant Fire Management System), with each province modifying the programme to suit their requirements. Saskatchewan divides its total forest area into five (if I remember correctly) fire control regions. Each district or region having a number of weather station locations, all of which are on line to district fire management HQ, and to each other, and in some cases to other weather stations in neighbouring provinces. Every weather station is accessed three times per day, and the data fed into the I.F.M.S. computer at regional H.Q.

During the fire season an early morning meeting is held there every day and decisions made on the strength of the information obtained. The La Ronge region covers an area of 4060 square kilometres with the whole area sub divided into a one square kilometre grid pattern. The whole system gives a wide assortment of information ... location of firefighting aircraft, what type they are, which pilots are on standby, where ground crew leaders and men can be contacted, map of any specific area, location of fires during the current year which are now out or in some cases still burning, meteorological reports etc. Sensors are placed all over the district, which are able to detect an electrical strike, and with cross-reference the computer can plot its location to within 50 metres. The sensors can also recognise whether the discharge is positive or negative, positive lightning strikes are more likely to start a fire than a negative one for two reasons, firstly because it is more powerful, and secondly because it often occurs with the absence of rain, taking place ahead of, or at the edges of the storm front.

When a fire is detected the system goes into overdrive, fire attack aircraft are dispatched immediately, the objective being to hit the fire before it reaches 1.5 hectares in size.

Simultaneously the computer at fire management is accessing the one square kilometre grid which supplies a battery of data ... Type of trees in the area, current wind speed and direction, temperature and humidity in the area, when the last rain fell, and how much, the topography of the area, if there is a settlement in the path of the fire, the nearest lake or river suitable for aerial water pick up, and approximate flying time from fire to water source etc.

A model can be displayed of the whole district showing sections in four colours, red, yellow, blue and green. If the fire is sited inside a red area, the fire must be attacked within 20 minutes, if in a yellow sector within 35 minutes, blue 114 hours, and if it is in a green area can be left for 12 hours or more.

### **Air Attack**

Each province has its own method of firefighting. Saskatchewan's fire attack "air force" in 1997 consisted of six Grumman Trackers, three Cansos, four Canadair CL 215's also some light aircraft such as the Beechcraft Baron or Cessna 310, plus an assortment of helicopters most of which are on contract.

### **The Tracker**

Normally first at the fire, its function is to drop long-term fire retardant gel which sticks to foliage and deadfall on the ground. This helps to contain the fire until ground crews and water bombers arrive. The Tracker can carry 3000 litres of gel, which is coloured red so that the "bird dog" can quickly see where each load has been dropped, which is normally along the fire front. The aircraft cruises at around 350 kph and can stay aloft for nearly five hours without the need to refuel, returning to its base for a short stops to pick up more gel. It releases its load from 30 to 50 metres above tree top level. The Tracker is a land-based aircraft.

### **The Canso**

This aircraft is probably better known as the Catalina flying boat, which can operate from a land or water base.



It is modified to skim the lake picking up 3,500 litres in specially designed tanks, then it makes a low level drop to knock down the flames, allowing the ground crews to get close in to attack the fire. The Canso can drop loads non-stop for four to five hours before refuelling.

### **The Canadair CL 215**

The first purpose built aircraft to fight forest fires, which now operates in many parts of the world. It is powered by two radial engines, each generating 2,500 hp. It scoops up 5,500 litres (just over 1,200 gallons) of water in just ten seconds, pulling off the water at 110 knots. Working in pairs within ten miles of the pickup point, a load can be dumped on the fire every four minutes. Like the Tracker a CL 215 is also land based.

### **The Bird Dog**

This is a light twin-engine aircraft such as the Beechcraft Baron or Cessna 310. Its role is to act as an aerial traffic controller, co-ordinate where aircraft should drop their load of water or fire retardant, and on low drops the "bird dog" will often lead the water bomber in when visibility is poor. It also makes low-level runs just above the tree line to look for and warn pilots of 'snags,' which protrude above the canopy of the trees, and of any other aircraft in the vicinity. Its main job is communication, and is in contact with all other aircraft and ground crews



### **The Helicopter**

An essential part of fire control as it can operate in so many roles. It transports ground crews to the fire site, moves equipment and supplies, carries out infrared surveys when the fire line cannot be seen for smoke, sending the information to ground control. It can also be used to create a 'back fire' by dropping a line of self-igniting 'ping pong' balls, which contain a mix of potassium permanganate, which is injected with glycol just before release. The ground crew will control this burn, which starves the fire of fuel when it reaches the burned out area. It can also be used as a water bomber when necessary, the heavy lift Sky Crane can suck up 2,000 gallons of water with its massive hose in under a minute, and the Sikorsky S55T will lift around 800 gallons in its 'big bucket'.



The helicopter also becomes a search and rescue aircraft or air ambulance, lifting trapped firefighters out of danger or injured ones to hospital

### **Stress and Punishment**

The amount placed on men and machines is enormous, intense heat, smoke particles, dirt, long hours without a break, poor visibility, aircraft in tight 450 turns, high engine speeds suddenly reduced to almost stalling speeds and vice versa, up draughts, down draughts, cross winds etc. makes this type of work a high risk occupation. The work of fire crews on the ground is still similar to what it used to be so many years ago but fortunately they have much improved equipment, and communications are light years ahead of what they used to be in the 50's. The use of plastic explosives to make fire breaks, and the ability of being able to call for immediate air support is a big plus factor. However, having said that, people sitting at computers will not extinguish a crown fires, nor will water bombers or ground crews put out crown fires on their own, they have to work together

It's all a matter of teamwork!

**It is with great regret that Tom, sadly passed away just one week after forwarding this article to the editor.**

**This article is published with the consent of Mrs Iris Purves**

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# Snowdonia Adventure

19<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> May 2000



Front row - L to R - Louis Gallager, Dave Grimley, Chris O'Donovan  
Standing L to R- Dave Rutter, Mick Willis, Pete Bates. Phil Poulton, Tony Winn, Marilyn O'Donovan, Keith King, Charlie Dunk, Sue, Phil Chatterley, Dennis Healey, Tony Manley, Martin Walker  
(missing from the photo - Lorraine Dunk & Jeff Langford - they must have been on DROs & Bernie Rooney still in bed!)

## Introduction

"Why don't we go walk about one weekend?," suggested Chris O'Donovan. The Snowdonia national park would make a great venue! And so was born a weekend of beer, lots of laughs, excellent food, good company and a hike across the high ground of North Wales.

Location: The Joint Services Mountain Training Centre - Indefatigable on Anglesey

Facilities: Excellent. The accommodation for the 'couples' and the unaccompanied was really good. The kitchen fulfilled the high standards required by Tony Manley, and the dining room was even equipped with a TV. A 20 metre pool was also at our disposal, and we had the sole use of the bar facilities in the boat club - this again was suitably equipped with TV and music system. The boat club is situated on the shore of the Menai straits - and sat on the balcony with an inexhaustible supply of beer on hand, was most relaxing and enjoyable.

## Personal Observations – Phil Chatterley

### Friday

It took longer to collect my baggage from the carousel at Liverpool Airport than the flight across the Irish Sea. Needless to say the flight was late anyway. As I left the airport I recognised Barney Rooney instantly even after 20+ years. A quick hand shake and into his van for a one hour fifteen minute flight to JSMTC Indefatigable - Anglesey to meet the rest of the gang. We arrived at 0115 hours, and set about hunting for the rest of the group in the bar, no such luck, all in bed!!! A word of warning, never share a room with Barney if you want to sleep! I have never heard anyone snore so loud. I had to wear ear plugs!!!

### Saturday

My alarm went off at 0630 hours. I went to find the kitchen, to be met by Dave Rutter, Tony Manley and Pete (Lofty) Bates. Everyone else wandered into the breakfast room soon afterwards. It was quite strange, meeting everyone after all this time. However, it seemed I had never been away. Over breakfast we chewed the fat, catching up on lost time.

The bus arrived on time and everyone was raring to go! We arrived at Llanberis one hour before the mountain railway was due to depart. Tony Winn introduced himself but I recognised him instantly. The train departed on time, stopped, came back; we changed trains, and then set off again.

We arrived at Clogwyn Station full of high spirits (it could not have been from the night before) weather awful, waterproofs on! The group set off for a summit attempt and photograph, what summit, you could not see your hand in front of your face. We reorganised just below the summit at the standing stone where the paths split for Crib Goch, the Pyg and Miners tracks.

It was “make your mind up time,” stating that I would attempt Crib Goch, and asked if anyone like to “come for a look! (Not really expecting anyone to respond). Phil Poulton jumped forward as if he was going through the door of a C130. Eight others followed suit. Mick (Porky) Willis acted as my sensible head, route finder and 2IC. We set off up Crib-y-Driscol and met a party who were just finishing the ridge (they must have started at 0600 hours that morning!) Porky asked what the conditions were like on the ridge. “Okay,” was the reply. “It’s only blowing 30 mph”. I could sense the relief in everyone’s face.

The ridge was uneventful except it was wet, slippery and the wind was gusting 50-60 mph!!! We spent most of our time either crouching down or crawling on our bellies over the more exposed parts.

The only time anyone spoke was when Porky asked, if this was the purists route, as we climbed over the pinnacle(s) section of an exposed 1000ft drop (we could see this as the mist and cloud cleared for a split second). “No,” I replied, this is the mountaineers’ route, ‘the purists/tourist route’ is around the bottom! He uttered some expletives about his anal ring. I further boosted his confidence by saying “don’t worry mate, it’s not the fall that hurts, it’s the sudden stop at the bottom”!!

The only other memorable comment came from another party coming in the opposite direction, as we were just finishing. One member of that party offered me a running commentary on how dangerous that section of the ridge was! I asked how far it was to the end, about 10 minutes was the reply. He then asked, ‘how far is it to Crib-v-Driscol (where we had just come from) and how difficult was it? “About 2-3 hours, and more difficult than the section you have just come”. He left crying and muttering something about wanting to go home!

Everyone did extremely well, conditions were appalling. The only comforting thought would be that if this was the real ‘Welsh 3000’, the organisers (well they were ‘hats’) would have never let us get out of the train, and would almost certainly have cancelled the event.

A special mention (in dispatches) must go to, John, Dave Grimley’s 16-year-old prospective son. Well done mate, there were ex Paras that were scared too! Me included. To Tony Manley - thanks for organising the grub, excellent, and for looking after my wife’s culinary delights on the dinner night. Congratulations to Chris O’Donovan for organising an excellent weekend on behalf of the N.I. Branch of the AEA. Thanks to everyone who attended. (We intend to make you affiliated members of the Northern Ireland Branch). This boosts our numbers from 5 to one of the largest branch membership in the AEA.

#### **Age and beauty offer no barrier – Den Healey**

Next year, given better weather, perhaps we could make use of some of those Wayfarer sailing dinghies. The tide whips up and down the Swellies so they may be a bit chary about letting the boats out without local knowledge; mine is restricted to what I have read in Reeds and the CA Handbook. I have a Yacht master Offshore Cert. I was too old to stand the pace of the weekend so I made a tactical withdrawal after Sunday breakfast, Thank you Tony Manley.

It was most enjoyable apart from having to endure the woeful ignorance of the younger members about the history of the Corps, and some rather hurtful remarks alluding to my excessive age and total absence of beauty. I was saddened to learn that they thought that the Thetford Training Area was established to annoy our allies at USAF Lakenheath. Grimes Graves is a minor tourist attraction now, but in my day it was 16 Ordnance Supply Depot; the finest flints 7 RHA ever laid hands on. Barney asked me if we wore long puttees; two coats of woad below the knee used to do for us.

Peter Bates speculated on the correlation between longevity and two-handed recreation. I used to be ambidextrous in most things but as I got older, just before I left the Squadron, confusion set in and I didn’t know whether I was coming or going so I got married instead. Tall stories about sticks of fifty out of a Hercules didn’t impress me; a stick of three off a ballista was complicated enough for us.



### **Onward and Upward – Chris O’Donovan, Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> May**

After the bad weather of Saturday we had virtually written off Sunday, participants were starting to make plans to bail out early and there was a general air of depression. The coach had been asked to put in an appearance at the more civilised time of 1000hrs just in case we had thought of some alternative use to put it to. Saturday night’s weather forecast was however far more upbeat. It seemed that the atrocious weather hadn’t just been a vindictive vagary of Snowdonia’s weather, we had been dumped on by a westerly frontal system, which was passing on to create havoc over the rest of the country. The front having passed over us things were looking a lot more promising for the following day and we felt that it was worth venturing forth into the hills once more, ignoring the overcast sky with its occasional sprinkling of light rain.

The (fool) hardier of us, Phil, Martin, Charlie and myself headed for Ogwyn and the Glydders in the luxury of the coach. The remainder piled into the back of Barney’s van and headed for the scenic Aber falls. I didn’t fully grasp what the reasoning was behind the transport allocation it seemed to be all agreed by time I arrived at the coach. I had visions of Barney pulling into a site somewhere, giving each of his passengers a paintbrush and a plastic hat and asking them to slap a bit of paint onto something industrial while he went off to put a price on another job. They enjoyed the walk to the falls and were able to fit in a visit to Caernarfon as well.

We mountaineers had a brilliant day under Phil’s leadership. The weather stayed damp until early afternoon but displayed none of the cold aggression of the previous day. It meant that the rock on Bristly Ridge was stimulatingly wet. I quote from Steve Ashton’s reference to Bristly Ridge in his book Hill Walking In Snowdonia ‘The scrambling section is best avoided on windy days or if the rocks are wet’. Nice one Phil. If you want to know exactly how I felt, take a look at my face in the video when you see it at Blackpool. Navigational fun in the clouds with the GPS, then a pleasant running descent down to the Pen Y Gwryd Hotel for a couple of pints and pickup by the coach.

Back to the centre for another couple of pints, cleanup, then out for an evening meal at the pub in the village of Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogercchwyrdbwiltysiliogogoch at which we had congregated on the Friday night.

Sue took an advance party of the mobility-challenged ahead in her car to try to grab some seating space while the rest of us strolled up behind. On arrival at the pub she asked the landlady if it would be possible to push a few tables around so that we could sit together in time honoured Sqn fashion. ‘No problem!’ boasted the landlady, ‘On Friday we had a whole load of disabled and handicapped ex-paratroopers and SAS in here who all had to sit together, they had three lovely lady care workers minding them. Had a lovely time, they did, all singing with the band, never seen anything like it.’

“O wad some Power the giftie gie us, to see oursels as ithers see us!”



L to R: Phil, Martin, Chris & Charlie

### **Conclusion - Editor**

A really excellent weekend, well organised - thanks to Chris O'Donovan and Phil Chatterley - definitely a major success for the N. Ireland Branch.

Congratulations are extended to Sue, Marilyn and Lorraine - you really did show us that anything we can do, you could do likewise. The final word goes to Keith King, who, despite his health problems; maintained the true 'airborne spirit' by successfully reaching the summit of Snowdon. Well done mate, you're a credit to us all!



**Proof that we actually made it to the summit! No the camera is not out of focus, it's the typical Welsh summer weather!**

To those of you that feel you missed out - you'll be pleased to know that we're doing it all again next year!

**Watch this space**

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## The "Boys" from Down Under



Mal Scott shows the flag at the Remembrance Service – November 1999



Presentation of the AEA Plaque to the RSL Vice President  
L to R: Terry (RSL VP) Mal, Henry, Ken & Roy

### Where are they now?



Who's a Cheeky boy?



Geordie Richardson  
Taff Brice would like to contact him



Sitting: Gordon (Jock) Small  
L to R: Mick Phillips, Brian O'Sullivan (he's in Australia) & Pete Plowman  
Photo taken aboard HMS Maidstone enroute to Norway 1966



Bring back a few memories?

## The Longest Tow in Palestine

'280' + 40 ton Rogers Trailer with D7 Dozer and 8 yd Scraper

This photo was taken at St Jeans camp in Palestine in 1947. The men are part of 286 Airborne Park Sqn (later 249 Airborne Park Sqn and later still 147 Airborne Park Sqn). The one on the left is Ron 'Smokey' Gibson. Anybody know any of the others? And does anybody know of a longer tow than this?



## AGM & Reunion – Update

Norbreck Castle Hotel

Friday 13 October 2000 to Monday 16 October 2000

### Members Request

To help us spread the financial loading we would like to run a raffle each evening. It would be appreciated if attendees could bring a raffle prize - large or small - all will be gratefully received.

### Travel

Take up the Norbreck Travel offer National Express buses on £25-00 return from anywhere in the UK. Contact the Sales department 01253 352341 or complete proforma on the application form.

### 3 Nights - Gives you a Super weekend

<b>Friday Night</b>	Happy hour, reduced drink prices
<b>Saturday Morning</b>	Please note time 1100 hrs AGM Followed by OGM
<b>Saturday Evening</b>	1900hrs Mayor & Mayoress - Civic Wine Reception Followed by Millennium Gala Dinner & Dance Dress of Gala: 1. Jacket & tie 2. Lounge suit 3. D.J. optional
<b>Sunday Morning</b>	Optional - Church Services Walk along the beach Big Dipper rides
<b>Sunday Lunchtime</b>	Happy hour
<b>Sunday Evening</b>	Illuminated tram ride to the lights Cocktails Nostalgia 40's evening Hot & Cold Buffet Dinner

Disabled, Smoking & Non-Smoking Rooms Available - Specify when sending your booking form OR ring Advanced Reservation Dept. 01253 352341

Prices for Dinner, bed & breakfast	Rooms available for 1, 2 or 3 nights
One night	£35.00
Two nights	£69.00
Three nights	£89.00
	800 car park spaces available

Further application forms available from W. Rudd Tel No. 01423 536191

### Route to Circumnavigate Blackpool Town Centre

From M55, exit at junction 3 onto A585, signposted Fleetwood

At large junction, join A586 through Singleton and Poulton

Turn right onto A587 (note: on the A587 there are 2 Left signs for the A584 which are to be ignored)

Continue until the A587 terminates at a 'T' junction with traffic lights, and then turn left onto A584 towards Blackpool, which is the promenade road, which incorporates the tramway.

The Norbreck Castle Hotel is approx. 14 mile on your left hand side.

### **Blackpool – It's a Pleasure**

A holiday in Blackpool is like a roller coaster ride, for some it is over all too quickly. For others -it cannot end fast enough.

If you are into history, fine art and culture then this may not be just your cup of tea. Despite the local Tourist Office attempts to give the town a more European feel, Blackpool remains the traditional British seaside resort. What you need is somewhere, handily placed for the attractions, which offers some of the tranquillity required to achieve a relaxed state of mind & body.

Thankfully, you need look no further than your own temporary front door - The Norbreck Castle Hotel - Stay at home & chill out in the £1.5m Health & Leisure Centre, or restaurants or bars. JUST RELAX IN THE PLEASURE OF GOOD COMPANY.

What about the rest of this seaside town? Blackpool is "Kiss me Quick" & "I am only here for the beer," it's fish & chips, silly hats, ice creams & fairground rides, which may you wish you had not. A place to let your hair down. The only thing close to being European is the scaled-down version of the Eiffel Tower that has been a firm favourite for more than a century. With its Tower, Golden Mile, Pleasure Beach, Piers, Zoo, Pubs & Clubs Blackpool has a claim to the title of "Britain's Fun Capital." Heady stuff & hardly relaxing.

A little tacky, sometimes crude & certainly over the top, it is mad but it is fun.

### **Warning Order – Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> October**

1. (a) Continuation Training  
(b) Conversion Training  
(c) Refresher Training
2. Officer in Command (& Stick Commander) Bill Rudd
3. LOCATION Blackpool Pleasure Beach (South Promenade)
4. TIME 1030 - 1200 hours
5. TRANSPORT - Local Tram Service
6. EQUIPMENT - The BIG Dipper
7. DRESS Casual NB - Two pairs of pants are advisable. Wigs, dentures and spectacles should not be worn.
8. NOTES:
  - (a) In the event of inclement weather - training 'm' the verbal mode, will be carried out in YATES WINE LODGE on South Promenade.
  - (b) Ladies are invited to attend & participate.
  - (c) Members who produce a doctors medical sick note that they are excused "marching against the wind," may report directly to Yates Wine Lodge.

## Booking Situation

1. As at 1<sup>st</sup> July bookings have just climbed to 351. Consequently a further 20 rooms have been made available to our Association, should these extra rooms prove to be insufficient for our needs an overflow system will be in operation. The overflow system will still be operated by the Norbreck Castle Hotel (NCH) & for your convenience, all meals will be taken at NCH & all NCH facilities will be at your disposal. **BOOKING FORMS STILL SENT TO NCH FOR PROCESSING.**
2. Functions & meals as advertised, for Friday & Saturday evening are all-inclusive in the overall, price of the weekend. For those who have made their own arrangements for accommodation & who wish to attend the evening activities, will require admittance tickets at a cost of £15.00 per head, per night. Those requiring tickets should send an SAE & cheque for the correct price, made out to Yorkshire Branch, Airborne Engineer Association & sent to: **Bill Rudd at, Flat No 1 "Denegarth", 8 Springfield Road, Harrogate HG1 2HR. Tel: 01423 536191.** Your request should include the SURNAME & FORENAME of each guest, to enable a table booking to be made on their behalf & should arrive not later than the last week in August 2000.

**"WE MUST INSIST ON "NO TICKET - NO ENTRANCE."**

3. An Information Desk for the AEA will be set up outside the "Conway Suite," situated on the right hand side of the main Hotel Reception area. On arrival, after booking in at the Hotel Reception desk, would all members and guests please check into our own Information Desk to collect your information package & to view the information, which will be on display.
  4. Please appreciate that this weekend will involve many hidden extras over & above your personal hotel cost for the weekend. May we ask you to kindly bring a suitable raffle prize to enable us to defray some of these costs. Please leave your donation at the AEA Information Desk.
  5. **Sunday Night - Private Illuminated Tram Ride** (To view the Blackpool Lights Display). To date - (mid-May) - 237 members & guests have opted to stay at the Hotel on Sunday night. Private Illuminated trams have been booked to accommodate these numbers. The tram ride will take; 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> hours to complete and wines will be served during the trip. There will obviously be a charge per head for this exciting & fun filled evening event. At this stage it is impossible to estimate this cost accurately but this information will be available to us by 1 October 2000 & will be displayed at the AEA Information Desk together with a "request to attend" list and tickets will be on sale. Sunday night dinner will be served in the Ballroom upon our return.
  6. The Conway Suite will house the AEA Shop & as usual Jan Chambers will be the Officer in Charge.
  7. **This will be your last News & Update, prior to Blackpool 2000. It is very well supported up to now & that is a good indication that all is set for a most enjoyable weekend. The members of the Yorkshire Branch wish one & all a very memorable AGM Weekend.**
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## The Saragarhi Centennial 1897-1997

### Sikh Valour at Saragarhi, 12<sup>th</sup> September 1897

Saragarhi is the true story, of 21 men, heroes of the XXXVI Sikh Regiment (now 4th Sikh) who sacrificed their lives for the sake of devotion and duty. Each of them, fought bravely, till the very last, preferring death to surrender.

The Saragarhi battle is just one, of the eight stories of collective bravery, published by UNESCO and is taught to children in France, but hardly finds mention in Indian or British text books. A foreign journal has mentioned that Saragarhi is one of the 5 most significant events of its kind in the world beginning from the saga of Thermopylae associated with the heroic stand by a small Greek force against the mighty Persian army led by Xerxes in 480 BC.

Saragarhi was a small fortress and communication post, on Samana - Ridge in the NWFP (North West Frontier Province). The Post commander was Hav Ishar Singh. He had 21 men under his command. On 10<sup>th</sup> September 1897, the tribes started gathering and by 12<sup>th</sup> September they numbered about 25,000. From early morning they started battering the Fort. The Sikhs fought back valiantly. Charge after charge was repulsed. The chief tribesmen made many alluring promises to them, but Ishar Singh and his men decried every one of them, preferring to fight to the last.

Finally, the signaller, sepoy Gurmukh Singh was the only defender left alive. He signalled to Fort Lockhart: "The enemy are in; shall I go on signalling or shall I take a rifle?" He did the latter, and taking his rifle shouted "Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh" The Khalsa (The pure Sikhs) belong to the Lord almighty. Thus the victory must also be to the Lord Almighty. Gurmukh Singh fought valiantly and eventually joined his companions in martyrdom at the altar of duty.

There was universal appreciation of this bravery and dauntless courage. The British Parliament gave a standing ovation to these men, when a full account of this unprecedented bravery was narrated. A spontaneous award of IOM (Class - 1) to each of the Saragarhi heroes was announced. The IOM (Class - 1) was then the highest gallantry award granted to Indian troops. All the dependants' families of the Sargarhi heroes were awarded 50 acres of land and 500 rupees as financial assistance.

According Lt Gen. S.C. Menezes, who retired in 1980 as Vice Chief, of the Army Staff, a plaque, installed by the British in 1897 on a cairn, was still there when he visited it, from Fort Lockhart in June 1947

**Lest we forget.**

**Acknowledgement to Jagjiwan Birdi,  
Mike Holdsworth and extracts from the Sikh Review.**

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## The Association Standard

**Chris Chambers**

The London International Tattoo 2000, which was held at Wembley arena 27/28th May, was a great success with a 'full house' on both days. Its success is reflected in the fact that it is now to become an annual event. I was very proud to carry our AEA standard on parade alongside a further 41 standards. I must confess that I was a touch nervous, as this was the first occasion that I had acted as the Association standard bearer in front of over 2,000 spectators. However, I managed to do the business! There was only one Airborne Standard on parade; and only one airborne soldier, so you will be pleased to hear that the Association Standard with its Pegasus really did stand out, as most of the remainder were Royal British Legion, RAF and Royal Navy.

The Standard, alongside the Union flag, was also in attendance at the funeral of the late Tom Purves. The service was held in the Baptist church at Hazel Grove Cheshire. Members of the Association formed a guard of honour, and although it was a very sad occasion; I am sure Tom would have approved of his final send off. The service was conducted by the Rev. Bill Montgomery, who gave a very moving account of Tom's contribution to the local community, and of his life as an airborne sapper and of his exploits as a 'fire jumper'. The latter I'm sure you'll recall from Tom's article in the April newsletter and subsequently in this issue of the "Journal". Tom was extremely generous to the Association, and his book, 'The 9th' will ensure that his name lives on. His passing is a great loss to us all, and our sincere condolences are extended to his widow Iris and her family.

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## Visitor to Charlie Dunk's Web Site

Just browsing about and came across your airborne site. I was trying to locate anyone with WW2 experience in glider operations. Briefly, mine was with the 876th Airborne Engineers Aviation Battalion, also a volunteer organisation. We were stationed at several areas not far from London, such as Salisbury, Earl's Coine and Kingscliffe. Our airfield repair equipment consisted of miniaturised bulldozers, scrapers, tractors and the like designed to fit into the very small craft we used which were dwarfed by your huge gliders as you well know. I was sent home to the USA poor to the great invasion for medical reasons and my outfit landed on the French coast from ships, not gliders as it turned out.

Our reunion association now meets yearly with the next one coming up the first week of June.

Thank you for the interesting web site.

Best wishes!

Yours truly, Wm "Bill" Short BAR42BIL@aol.com

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## 9 Parachute Squadron RE London Marathon 2000

**Lt Joe Fossey RE**

We sat in Northern Macedonia awaiting the move into Kosovo, I turned to SSgt Tom Armstrong and suggested it would be a good idea to try and enter a team to tab London Marathon 2000. Quite why this had sprung my head at this particular time cannot be explained! We had both run the event before and thought it would be interesting day out and a good test of 'airborne' character if we were to tab the route carrying 35lbs. With that decided we had to convince two other men to join us and form a Squadron four-man team. I found two likely candidates in the form of Mark Livingstone and LCpl Wyer who were keen to do the event even though it would mean giving up some well-earned Easter leave.

After returning to the UK post Op AGRICOLA, I managed to contact the Friends of Airborne Forces Charity and convince them to obtain four tickets, which were duly provided in December 1999.

Sponsorship was now the next step and we turned to a whole host of connections to raise as much as possible. There are many people to thank and I would like to mention the branches of the Airborne Engineer Association, Vickers Engineering PLC Defence Systems, The Victory Services Club, Mrs Doreen Hughes, 12 Mechanised Brigade Warrant Officers & Sergeants Mess, the late Tom and Mrs Iris Purves, all the staff at Nokia, Farnborough, and all the members of 9 Parachute Squadron RE who contributed sponsorship to the team. Sadly our sponsorship efforts were hindered slightly by the effort required to train and prepare for deployment to Northern Ireland, however, the team managed to raise £1250 for a very worthwhile charity.

The event itself was an interesting experience. On Saturday 15 April 1999 SSgt Tom Armstrong, Sgt Mark Livingstone and LCpl Danny Wyer drove to the Victory Services Club in London to be greeted by a quick photo shoot, and an evening spent chatting to three Chelsea pensioners; whilst Lt Joe Fossey was at the Squadron Operations Officer's wedding reception! We all congregated for breakfast on the morning of the marathon and before we caught a taxi to Charing Cross posed for yet another set of photos and a quick foot taping session. The team along with some 40,000 runners tried to fit on to the special Marathon trains running from Charing Cross that morning. I cannot describe how cramped it was and it was a real joy to escape from the carriage and walk up to Shooters Hill, Blackheath, to the start line. We passed a team from the Grenadier Guards who were completely kitted out in Combat 95 and carrying a similar weight - we vowed to pass them as soon as we could! Luckily the team were right at the back of the Blue Start, and, as the London Marathon 2000 began, we had to wait some 16mins 20secs before we crossed the start line. Many of the runners commented on our bergens at the start and were dubious as to whether they contained anything - but were quickly persuaded otherwise!

The first 10 miles were completed in an impressive 1 hr 10mins (leaving the Guards in our wake) and the crowds supported us very well throughout the event. Which was a real boost. After, crossing London Bridge the team were met with a loud cheer by the other Squadron Officers who had also attended the wedding, which did much to raise our spirits. All of us found it very amusing to hear shouts of "Go on, Army men" and "Hup, 2, 3, 4, Come on Squaddies" - I think the public have an image that the whole of the British Army marches about in a bearskin!



The official finishing time was 5hrs 36mins 34secs, which was an outstanding effort when considering that we had done very little training.



Some of the best memories of the day will include; the open air bands from Greenwich to the East End, the Nurses who kept in front to provide that slight incentive, meeting the Commanding Officer of the Welsh Guards who recounted Belizean war stories with Sgt Livingstone, the impromptu interview by Garth Crooks broadcast on Radio 2, and the last mile where all team members donned the Maroon beret to a breathtaking applause from the onlookers outside Buckingham Palace.

**L to R**

**Lt Joe Fossey, LCpl Danny Wyer, Sgt Mark Livingstone & SSgt Tom Armstrong**

**All 1 Troop**

The next charity event for members of the Squadron will be to run the Marathon des Sables or the Sahara Marathon in April 2001.

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## Membership to the Airborne Engineers Association

Membership to our Association is available to all Sapper personnel who have served with, or who are serving on the strength of a unit establishment, which has a parachuting role as part of its military duties, i.e. SAS, EOD or Commando units, and has passed an Army Parachute Course. The cost for life membership is £20.00. A further annual subscription of £5.00, will entitle you to receive three issues of our "Journal" (April, August and December). We currently have Branches located in Aldershot, Birmingham Chatham, the Southwest, Northwest, Yorkshire, Edinburgh and Northern Ireland. For further details please contact our Membership Secretary: Chris Chambers - 24, Longfield Road, Ash, Aldershot, GU12 6NA or Tel: 01252 316679

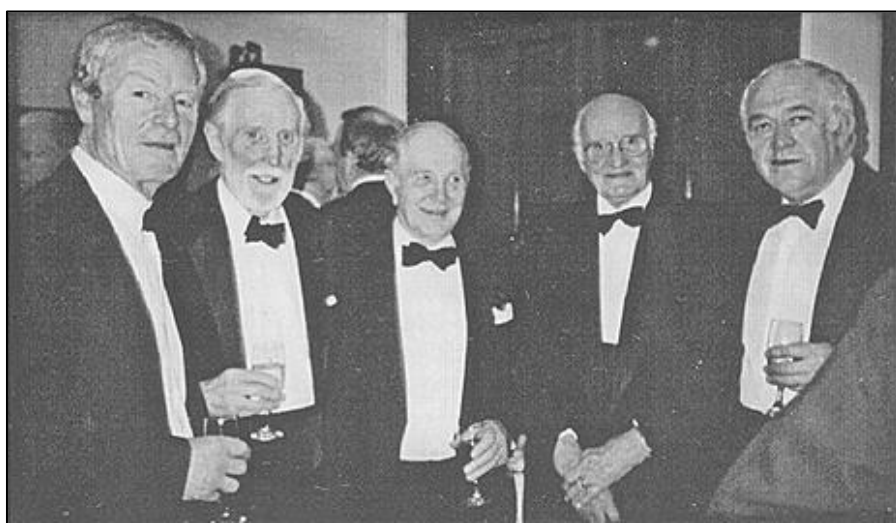
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## Airborne and Commando Royal Engineers Officers' Association

The Airborne Engineer Officers Association was formed in 1967, when 131 Regiment became a squadron, and was to include all officers, Regular, National Service and Territorial, who had served or were serving with Airborne Royal Engineer Units. In 1978 when 131 was transferred to support Commando Forces, the membership was expanded to include RE Officers, serving, or who had served in Commando Forces, and when the present title was adopted.

The Association holds a General Meeting and Dinner every two years, which is now devolved upon REHQ at Chatham.

This year the meeting was held on Friday 31st March, and which saw the, "Dining in", of the new RE Commando Silver Centrepiece, paid for by members subscriptions, and presented to 59 Independent Commando Squadron RE on their 100th anniversary.



**L to R. Lt Col Roger Christie, Maj Sid Rooth, Maj Thomas, Major M Green, Brig Garth Hewish**

161 members and guests sat down to dinner in the Headquarters Mess. The official guest was Rear Admiral P M Franklin, CB.MVO.RN., and the Engineer in Chief and the Commandant RSME also attended together with many other senior officers. At the dinner the presidency of the Association was handed over by Lt Col. IBH Murray TD. to Brigadier IDT McGill CBE. and this is achieved by the outgoing President pouring a drink into the, "Presidents Pot" (a silver goblet), and handing it to his successor. With compatible company the wine, champagne, port and conversation easily flowed - and continued to do so until after 4 a.m. on the Saturday morning. We all dispersed after breakfast to our many parts of the country - and Europe, and most will be back in 2002. It was heartening this year to see so many young officers in attendance - and long may it continue.

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## A Prayer for the Stressed

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change. The courage to change the things I cannot accept. The wisdom to hide the bodies of those I had to kill today, because they got on my nerves. And also, help me to be careful to the toes I step on today, as they may be connected to the feet I may have to kiss tomorrow.

Help me always to give 100% at work... 12% on Monday, 23% on Tuesday, 40% on Wednesday, 20% on Thursday and 5% on Friday.

And help me to remember.. .when I'm having a bad day and it seems that people are trying to wind me up. It takes 42 muscles to frown, 28 to smile, and only 4 to extend my arm and smack someone in the mouth!

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## Ex-Services Welfare Centre

A services welfare and support centre has been opened in Chatham, the first of its kind in Europe. Situated in the World Naval Base, The Historic Dockyard, it will provide help to those who have been connected with any of the three Armed Forces, offering support to ex-service members and their families by providing employment guidance and counselling along with advice on matters such as war pensions, benefits and housing.

The centre is currently open on Tuesday and Wednesday between 9 am and 5 pm, although these times will soon be extended. Anyone requiring information about the centre can call its Chairman, Eddie Mould, on 01634 681145

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## Airborne Forces Day – Elvington

### Editor

The first, of what is to become an annual Airborne Forces Day, was held at the Yorkshire Air Museum - Elvington on Sunday 25th June. The event attracted a very large gathering of former Airborne Forces members, many having travelled from far and wide for this inaugural event. The day was of particular significance to the Airborne Engineers Association as it hailed the official opening of the museum's Airborne Display. The opening ceremony for the display was conducted by Lt Gen Sir Michael Gray KCB OBE DL. The significance of the Airborne Display; is that all of the work, and most of the items on display, were provided by OUR Association, Much of the hard work and effort in "begging and borrowing" the display items, the painting and arrangement of the equipment and the dressing of the tailors dummies, was conducted by a dedicated team ably led by our President Bob Prosser. To his team of willing workers, comprising of Tom Thornton, John Waite, Bill Rudd and Roy King, we extend sincere thanks for their noble efforts.

Attendance at this inaugural event was far greater than the planners had expected, and it was particularly pleasing to see so many Association members present. The Yorkshire branch was well represented, so too was Aldershot, the Northwest, Birmingham and the Southwest branches. Congratulations are extended to Mike Newton (Southwest) who had travelled up from Devon to be present. A 'march past' attracted almost 200 representatives from various Airborne units, and was led by the music of the Re-enactment Association and the Yorkshire Volunteer Band. The salute was taken by Lt Gen Sir Michael Gray KCB, OBE, DL. Befitting the occasion; numerous Standards from various PRA branches were on parade, and most importantly, our own AEA Standard, carried by Roy King, (Yorkshire branch), was very much in evidence.

There were various static displays, including jet fighters, bombers, helicopters, gliders (one of the latter had been donated from the film set of "The Saving of Private Ryan"). A static display that attracted many visitors was provided by 9 Para Sqn RE, which featured weapons, equipment and parachutes. The NCOs manning the stand were a credit to the "Sqn", and on the behalf of the Association, we congratulate the professionalism and patience demonstrated by Cpls Jase Worsfold, Gez Todd, " Myra" Hindley and LCpl Ken Barlow.

A notable absentee from the occasion was Col Chris Davies MBE. However, I'm delighted to report; that he travelled up to Elvington the following day; to visit the museum and have lunch with several members of the Association committee. No 'extras' will therefore be forthcoming!

The final word of the day was left to Lt Gen Sir Michael Gray KCB, OBE, DL, who, paused as he was about to drive out of the car park, and spoke to a group of AEA members. He queried, "Why do Sappers gather in a 'clutch' of three?" "We've no idea Sir," came the reply. "One to read, one to write and the other to follow the intelligent ones," came the General's reply. Not to be outdone, Tom Thornton added his own version, which involved four Marines, the forth explained Tom; "To protect the others from the Paras!" With a chuckle, the General departed from our midst.

This event was a great family occasion; which will get bigger and better each year.

### Well done Yorkshire!



L to R Kneeling.  
Dave Rutter, Cpl Gez Todd,  
Charlie Dunk,  
Cpl Myra Hindley  
Standing:  
Bunny Brown,  
Ray Coleman,  
Tom Thornton, Brian Jones,  
Bob Prosser, Roy King,  
Met Metcalfe,  
Chris Chambers, Bill Rudd,  
Tom Carpenter,  
LCpl Ken Barlow and  
Bob Jones