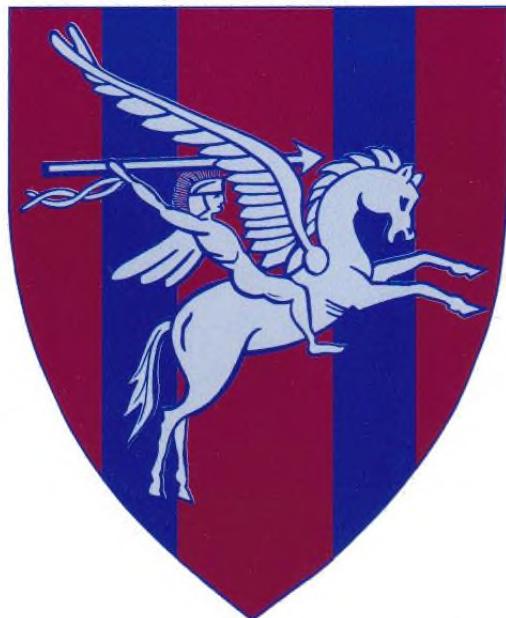




# THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS JOURNAL



**Airborne Engineers Association  
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# The Airborne Engineer

December 2006, Issue No. 20

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**Publication Deadline - April 2007 Edition**

Members submitting material for publication in the April 2007 edition of the Journal are advised that the closing date will be **Monday 12th March. (Branch Secretaries please NOTE!)** Kindly ensure that you forward your articles direct to the editor - address as shown above.

Please - don't leave it until the last minute

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## President's Message

**Bill Rudd MBE**

It has now been 12 month since I took the chair, might I say, I find it a most enjoyable experience. It is a great honour to be ask to fill the role of President and I certainly look forward to serving the Association to the best of my ability and with the members interests foremost in my mind.

Happily our Association remains a well-tried and tested success story and it's my intention that it continues to cultivate this success to reach new highs within our airborne family. The dust as finally settled and the playing fields are levelled and our newly formed branch of Airborne Engineers (REA) which, incidentally fully support our Association, will, I am sure become an integral part of the future activity within our airborne family.

We have most certainly moved into a new era. Our long standing committee, many from its formation days, have now stood down and made way for the younger generation. This has got to be a step in the right direction, I wish them every success.

It would be an injustice if I did not mention Bob Ferguson who founded the Association 17 years ago. Bob this Association owes you a big votes of thanks for your stupendous dedication and support you have given over the years supported by Eileen. I myself, and on behalf of all members wish you and Eileen a happy retirement in Portugal and good luck with the golf handicap.

The future looks bright with the formation of our 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Assault) and we certainly look forward to working alongside them in the years to come. Since its formation the Senior Officers and WOs & Sgts Mess have taken a very keen and enthusiastic approach to our Association, in sharing a culture moulded by both the distinctive airborne and sapper ethos.

Our branches, in many ways, are the backbone of our Association; they continue to lead from the front and are instrumental in the many decisions and activities that take place during the calendar year, to mention a few, Normandy visit, Arnhem pilgrimage, Wales weekend, Double Hills Remembrance, 1st Para Sqn Dinner, this does not include the many Branch functions that take place. I am delighted to see the near conclusion of the portrait fund. The portraits are now in situ in the appropriate Messes in Woodbridge and we must thank Brigadier John Hopper for his diligent work in producing an end result.

Lastly I warmly thank all committee members, most ably led by our Chairman Mick Humphries. It has been a great privilege for me to be part of a team which continues to breed success and move the Association, in what I feel is the right direction. Dorothy and I send to all members and their families our sincere good wishes for a Happy Christmas and Prosperous New Year.

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## Chairman's Report

### Mick Humphries

It is now 1 year since I took over from Bunny Brown as Chairman. We have had a very good year as well as an active one. The Branches in Birmingham, Aldershot, Chatham, Edinburgh and Yorkshire continue to flourish, sadly the West Country branch is struggling with numbers, however there is still the odd stalwart keeping it going.

The year has seen many fine parties and trips out, the largest of which was the trip to Normandy. The tour was organised by John Smith of the Aldershot branch and everyone who attended had an excellent time. We have laid wreaths from The Association at Normandy, Double Hills, Aldershot and many other venues around UK on Remembrance Day.

We have moved along our benevolence efforts throughout the year and at this year's AGM the entire raffle proceeds totalling £2,105 is to be donated to BLESMA. I have discussed this with members and many feel that this should continue in future years.

During the year out new membership secretary Billy Morris has been recruiting at full speed and has managed to entice a cheque from 40 New members. Many of these new members have come from trained paratroopers within the Regiment and many from 51 Parachute Squadron. As well as being the membership secretary Billy organises the association sports club and spends his spare minutes running half marathons.

On the subject of sporting achievements, Mike Ellery climbed to the summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro and raised the magnificent sum of £741 for the association in sponsorship.

Ray Coleman has been running the shop for a year and has made a profit of £992 since last October. This is a considerable amount compared to previous years. In addition to this he raised £2,370 on the World Cup Football Draw. Both of these achievements deserve special thanks, well done Ray.

Dave Rutter continues to do a sterling job as editor of the Journal and has managed, despite provocation from Royal Mail to keep the subscription level for another year. Dave has for many years been responsible for not only producing the Journal but he also collects the subscriptions and sells the advertising space. Dave thoroughly enjoys his job as Editor but he would like an assistant to help him raise advertising revenue. Any volunteers?

Over the year Dick Brown has been continuing to look after the association funds. Because of the increase in new members paying a life membership fee and the sterling efforts of Ray Coleman in the shop we have increased our funds by approximately £2,000 over the year.

Last year Birmingham Branch raised £350 at the reunion weekend. This year Aldershot branch have covered most of the cost of the reunion though there may be a small charge to the association for AGM expenses.

We have had a year of little controversy - long may it continue.

Christine and I extend sincere good wishes for the coming festive season.

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## Rogues Gallery



Syd Hoyle & Dave Ruddock



Gordon Small, Dave Weaver, John Barrie & Bob Jenkins - Bahrain 1965



Bob Kennedy & Mick Mathis - obviously having spent some time at the bar during the reunion weekend 2006



Len Lennon & Doug Phillips



Cpl's Mess Malta Barracks 1950

Freddy Heads, Ray Britton, Wally Linham, ? Barnes, Bert Bamforth, Hatch Lloyd, Offr unknown, Joe Batty, Seated: ?, Cpl McPhearson, Elwes, Biff Evans, Andy Hume, ?, Ford, Pyatt, Baker

Perhaps one of our readers can identify the unknown

## Selection to be a Parachute Engineer

### Fred Gray

There are many head dress distinctions in the armies of the world but only a tiny number where the wearer has had to go through a very painful selection course to achieve the right to wear that head dress. The French Foreign Legion with its white kepi, the Royal Marine Commandoes with their green beret, the Airborne with their red beret and the Special Air Service with their beige beret are amongst those that fall into this category. There is little between the severity of the selection courses but probably the SAS have to achieve more with the would-be SAS trooper having to have a greater knowledge of military matters and other skills during a longer course than the standard brutal physical fitness tests of the first three.

My own experience of the selection course was in 1956 when the parachute force of the British Army had only one Brigade with a total strength of about 4500 men. This Brigade was all that was left of the 1st and 6th Airborne Divisions of the 2nd World War. It was numbered and named the 16th Independent Parachute Brigade to show an amalgamation of the two wartime divisions. Volunteers were plentiful as National Service was in full swing with a constant movement of soldiers in and out of the units of the Brigade. As the experienced soldiers left the Army to return to civilian life raw recruits were brought in as replacements, but first they had to pass the selection course, and if they were successful in that phase would then go on to the four week parachute course at RAF Abingdon in Oxfordshire.

For my own preferred unit, 9 Independent Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers, the selection was in two parts. The first was at unit level and then at the Airborne Forces Depot (AFD) in Aldershot under the watchful eyes of the Parachute Regiment and the warrant officers of the Army Physical Training Corps (APTC).

On the morning of our assembly for the unit selection course myself and nine other volunteers were introduced to our instructor and immediately went off on a long road run wearing denim trousers, a light-weight pullover and steel studded boots.

The purpose of the unit "Pre Para Course" was to weed out those that didn't have those qualities required to be an Airborne Engineer and prevent embarrassment to the Squadron when they went to the AFD for final selection. It was surprising how many turned up to do the unit selection course without any prior training or preparation. Four years later when I was the corporal i/c pre-para, a Staff Sergeant arrived thinking that all he had to do was turn up and he would be selected. I took him and the rest of the new intake out on a ten mile run and march. When we arrived back at the barracks I dismissed all those that had completed the run and waited at the gate for the Staff Sergeant. When he finally arrived a good half-hour later I told him in no uncertain terms to pack his kit and return to wherever he had come from. He was not what the Squadron wanted. The instructor had complete control to do whatever he liked to test the suitability of the volunteers to go onto the second phase. All the tests were very physically demanding. Road-runs, assault courses, swimming, crossing water obstacles without equipment, long road and x-country marches carrying heavy loads, confidence testing, i.e. climbing and crossing bow sting girder bridges over water without the use of safety ropes, entering purpose built dark, wet, narrow, dank switch back tunnels in pairs to get a telegraph pole out at the other end. This was a test to see if anyone suffered from claustrophobia.

Team games and body strengthening would take place in the gymnasium as a break from the very demanding outdoor activities. The weather had no effect on the course content. It would go on regardless of snow, ice, rain or heat. The main aim was to get the individual to fail himself by asking for a return to his unit. After the first stage those that had survived the two-week unit selection then went on to the Airborne Forces Depot at Maida Barracks in Aldershot for selection into AB Forces and suitability for parachute training.

On a cold damp November morning 147 volunteers, including myself, paraded on the drill square of Maida Barracks ready for the start of what was to be the hardest, toughest, most brutal test of our lives so far. As a new course started every three weeks not all those on parade that morning were wanted, and only those that were sufficiently fit, and suitably motivated would go on to the No 1 Parachute School at RAF Abingdon for the parachute course that would enable them to wear the coveted parachute wings and the red beret.

Those on parade came from all regiments and corps of the British Army. Gunners, Engineers, Signallers, Medics, Cooks, Military Police, drivers and store men, all were represented. After being sorted into sections of fifteen we were marched off to the barbers shop for a very short back and sides that took less than a minute to complete. One military policeman with a beautiful head of jet black hair didn't want a short back and sides and immediately asked for an RTU (Return to unit). He got his RTU but only after he had his haircut and paid the going rate of one shilling. One down with one hundred and forty-six to go.

The morning was spent on interviews with a doctor and psychiatrist and sorting out other admin details. Another batch failed the interviews and were soon on their way back to their units. Each section had its photograph taken (which could be purchased when the course finished) and then we were ready to start our fourteen-day nightmare.

With the Company Sergeant-Major (Smoky Furness) leading and setting the pace we set off on our first of many road runs. The section Warrant Officers swarmed around the puffing, sweating, tiring would-be paratroopers like sheep dogs encouraging the

men to greater effort. When the run ended it was straight into the gym for team games. Not games associated with school days but games designed to see who stood back and let their team-mates do all the hard work. One game in particular was "murder tennis ball". A number of vaulting boxes had been placed end to end in the centre of the gym. Medicine balls (a very heavy ball made of leather weighing ten to fifteen pounds used for strength training) had been piled on top of the boxes. The course had been split into a number of teams and the idea was to get as many balls onto the other sides ground. At the command "Go" everyone would dash to the boxes throwing and pushing the balls over the boxes. The tactic of throwing a ball at some-ones head to knock him out of the game was fully accepted. Any one spotted hanging back and avoiding the action would have their name entered into the "black book", which every member of staff carried. After a lengthy battle the game would end and the winners were those with the greatest number of ball in their opponents half. The losers would have to do push-ups whilst the victors looked on. Another particular rough and tumble was the defence of any officer in your own section. A W/O would order his section to go and kidnap an officer of another section. This would produce a tremendous battle of attack and defence. It was a great disgrace to lose your officer.

The two- week course was a succession of road-runs, assault courses and x-country runs through as much mud as the Directing Staff (DS) could find. This was normally across the tank testing grounds where the tanks had turned the winter ground into a bog of mud. Climbing ropes into the roof of the gym, physical training, races carrying another soldier over your shoulders, and team exercises with logs that were used to develop stomach and leg muscles. Anything and everything to make the individual exhausted until they reached a point where they had reached their limit of endurance. Some failed on the first day and others would be told by the DS to pack their kit and RTU.

The second week would be more of the first week but with the addition of the confidence tests and the dreaded "LOG RACE". The confidence tests were carried out in the wooded area close to the barracks. These tests were designed to see if a soldier could overcome his natural fear of heights whilst crossing between platforms built in the trees using steel wire ropes suspended between the platforms. Swinging from a tree into a large net requiring the soldier to let go of the rope at the right time for him to land safely in the net. Many missed and ended up in the hospital with broken limbs. The "Death-slide" was probably the easiest of the tests as all this required was for the soldier to slide down a very long cable fixed high in a tree to ground level. He would be suspended underneath the cable, hanging on to a hand strap and enjoy the sensation of a free ride down the cable until he was brought to an abrupt halt just before reaching ground level. Friday dawned with the dread feeling of the log race yet to be endured. It could still spell the end for many of those wishing to become an Airborne Soldier. The log race was a one and three quarter mile race across Long Valley. Not far in distance, but a tremendous effort of willpower was required to reach the finish line.

Teams of ten men carried a telegraph pole attached to their wrists by a toggle rope. The race started on a soft sandy stretch of ground for about one hundred yards before it inclined upwards. The teams were screamed at by their respective section leader to get to a narrow gully to gain an advantage over the other teams. The ground then began to get steeper requiring more effort as the log began to get heavier as men dropped off and gave up the race. Then came the biggest test of strength and stamina. Trig Point Hill, or Hungry Hill as it was better known. A very steep hill covered in shingle where it was impossible to get a foot hold as the shingle slipped away beneath the men's boots. The hill is quite narrow and the teams, about eight in number, would be struggling to get the best advantage of the middle ground. After a tremendous struggle the top was reached and the descent started immediately but with a different emphasis on controlling the log. The teams now had to concentrate on preventing it running away from them as they tried to keep their feet on the shifting shingle. By this time more men had given up so the numbers on each log had been reduced to about half the original number. At the base of the hill the ground sloped away down to the water splash and then a long run in over soft sandy ground to the finish line. My team had been reduced to two, myself and a soldier in the Royal Signals who came from Liverpool. By this time we were dragging the log along the ground. Our section leader took the toggle rope that was still attached to the log and gave us help to carry it across the finishing line. I immediately collapsed unconscious and was taken to hospital along with others who had reached the limit of their endurance.

Friday was the day on which we were told who passed selection and those that had failed. Of the one hundred and forty-seven starters twelve days earlier only forty-one were successful, myself included

The final stage of the selection was the parachute course run by the RAF at Abingdon. The first two weeks was ground training under very expert parachute jumping instructors. This part was easy compared to what we had endured during the physical tests and was treated as a rest period before making our first descent. The first two jumps were from a cage slung underneath a barrage balloon. The jumping height was eight hundred feet. There was just enough room for five jumpers and an instructor. The ascent was slow and the tension in the cage high. The men and vehicles on the ground became smaller and smaller as the winch cable let the balloon rise. With a little jerk and bump the cage reached its height of eight hundred feet. The first man was called forward to the gap that acted as the door in the side of the cage. With the command "Stand in the door" the would-be parachutist took up his exit position. With a slight tap on the shoulder and the command "GO" he would launch himself into space. With arms tightly wrapped around his reserve parachute the parachutist would see his legs rise to almost head height in front of him. As the parachute was pulled out of its backpack he would automatically adopt a vertical position underneath his parachute. Not knowing

much about it, the parachute would blossom out above him with a nice gentle pull on his shoulders. From then on, with instructions being shouted from the ground through a megaphone, he would wait for the ground to come up and hit him.

The first jump is a blur and not much skill is applied. After a flight of thirty -two seconds, with a bump and a great sense of relief the first jump is over. On my course only one man refused to jump from the balloon cage. He was immediately RTU. After completing eight jumps including two from the balloon, two clean fatigue, two with equipment and two night jumps, the great day arrived when we were presented with our shoulder wings and the right to wear our red berets.

Joining our units for the first time was another ordeal to face. This would be my first experience of a unit outside of the training establishments. It had taken just over five months since joining the Army to reach my goal of joining 9 Independent Parachute Squadron RE.

A Parachute Engineer Squadron had a peacetime establishment of two hundred and ten men. This could be increased in time of war. Basically every man in the Squadron is a Combat Engineer capable of dealing with all the tasks that help the Army to FIGHT, LIVE and MOVE.

Most men also have a secondary trade or skill. Trades include, plant operators, carpenters, bricklayers, plumbers, painters and decorators, electricians, surveyors, draughtsmen, vehicle mechanics, armourers, clerks, radio operators, cooks and drivers. Other activities not considered to be a trade but essential to the wellbeing of the unit include platform riggers to prepare heavy and medium platforms which are parachuted onto the drop zone, qualified instructors in small arms, basic first aid, physical training and drill. All these trades and skills are required so that the Squadron remains an independent unit and can operate for many days without assistance, with the exception of the provision of food, fuel and ammunition. That has to be resupplied by a parachute drop if the unit is too far away from any normal supply base. A high degree of infantry tactical knowledge and weapons skill is essential as the Squadron is also used as a reserve infantry unit to the Parachute Regiment battalions in time of conflict.

At the time of my joining the squadron it was possible for soldier to do a full career of twenty-two years in airborne forces but that would also include a tour with the Territorial Army. In the case of Sappers that would be with 131 Parachute Engineer Regiment RE (TA), at that time the largest regiment in the Royal Engineers. The drawback of staying in the Squadron was the lack of promotion. For most, Staff Sergeant rank was the highest with the exception of the lucky few who became Squadron Sergeant Major. No longer are soldiers allowed to stay in the squadron for so long. Most are posted out to other units but can return after a tour elsewhere and many do just that. Prospects are much better now with the formation of 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Assault) and inter Squadron postings with 59 Commando Squadron RE. Many former 9 Sqn Sappers also return as commissioned officers mainly in the Quartermasters appointment.

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## As I Recall

### Brian 'Caz' Cazaly

Reading Fred Gray's article on the squadron in the August 2006 edition and remembering the adventures we all had through the years with the Sqn, Marlplaquet Barracks comes to mind. I joined the outfit in 1958 fresh out of Malaya and Hong Kong, ex 15th/19th Hussars then transferring to 24 Regiment in Hong Kong, left with 54 Independent Sqn in Hong Kong when 24 came home. On my return to UK I ended up in 9 Sqn on the advice of Piggy Jay.

I would like our members young and old to get an idea of how you became a Combat Engineer Reg Orton DCM style, etc; etc. and High Sheriff style.

After arriving at 9 Sqn and in 3 Troop still a signaller/driver/gunner AFV, it was discovered by Reg and others that I was not a Combat Engineer or whatever we were called in those days. The day came when I was summoned to the SSM's office. Many of the older guys will remember such summons I am sure. Arriving at the office I knocked on the door and was called in. If I remember Buster Shaw was doing his stint as Orderly Corporal. Reg is sat behind his desk, which as Fred related in his article, cash box at the ready for 48hr passes. Buster was sat in the corner. To my astonishment I was told to sit down. Whoops, I thought someone had died. Reg looked at me and spoke in the voice, which always reminded me of a frogs croak with a cold.

"So" he said, "you're an ex-donkey wallop". "That's so Sir" I replied "15/19th Hussars", he followed this up with "You are not a Combat Engineer"? "No Sir" I replied. "How you ended up here I don't know" he said. "Still, what do you know about Combat Engineering?" "Quite a lot" I replied. "Really, what's a Culvert?" Deep in my knowledge of Combat Engineering and driving over them many times in my Armoured Car, I replied "It's a ditch under a road" With this Reg grunted, "Ha! What's a shovel RE etc, etc, and a Spade RE etc, etc used for. Under Reg I had used these tools many times on a Saturday afternoon after being picked out on the Saturday morning parade along with many others for some misdemeanour. "Shovel for Shovelling coke and Spade for digging holes" I replied, with this Buster started laughing Reg actually smiled but continued with his questions.

"What do you know about demolitions?" asked Reg. "I can make a bomb" was my answer. "He can make a bomb Shaw" he said to Buster. "How do you do that then" he continued. "Well Sir", thinking hard "you get some PE stick a primer in it then a detonator, a bit of fuse, and Hey Presto one bomb". Reg looked at me gave one of his guttural laughs. "Shaw" he said "get him his B3 Combat Engineer, he knows as much as the rest of 3 troop".

With this I was dismissed not forgetting with prompting from Reg to put a 'silver donation' in the box. As you can see that was how I ended up on Signals and MT for eight great years.

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## AEA Official Website

Thanks to the sterling efforts of our Information Technology (IT) expert Dave Pace, the Association can now boast the existence of our very own website:

[www.airbornesappers.org.uk](http://www.airbornesappers.org.uk)

Check it out - and pass on suitable information and data to Dave to ensure that the site remains live and up-to-date.

Full contact details can be obtained direct from the Website.

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## 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers, the Real Forbear of the 9th

### **Peter Stainforth and Eric Booth**

In writing the brief history of the 9th Parachute Squadron R.E., for the April 2006 edition of the Airborne Engineers Journal, it was perhaps excusable for the author to link the 9th with the famous pre-war Field Company, R.E., especially as the latter was reorganised in May 1942 into the 9th Field Company R.E. (Airborne), the glider-borne engineer unit of the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division's 1<sup>st</sup> Air Landing Brigade. Unfortunately the writer goes on to assume that the 150 engineer paratroopers of the 1st Parachute Squadron R.E., which formed the engineer parachute unit of the 1st Parachute Brigade, were part of the 9th Field Company (Airborne) R.E. as though the former unit did not exist.

However it is quite unacceptable that the war record of the original 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron R.E., the most senior engineer airborne unit which predated the formation of the 9th Field Company (Airborne) by six months, should have its battle honours in North Africa, Sicily and at Arnhem Bridge credited to the 9th.

So let me, the only surviving officer of the First, set the record straight.

### The Very Beginning

When at the start of 1941, No. 2 Commando was converted into the 1st Parachute Battalion; it became apparent that after the partial failure of OPERATION COLLOSSUS to blow up the TRAGINO River aqueduct in Italy, a small specialist engineer unit as part of a balanced parachute force was needed. Accordingly, the 1st Air Troop R.E., under the command of Captain Stephen Dorman was formed and this grew rapidly into 1st Parachute Squadron R.E., which became operational in November of that year with Major Stephen Dorman as its first O.C. In those early days the Squadron was organised into three "Troops", A, B and C, each composed of a Captain, three subalterns and 36 other ranks, with Headquarters Troop with Captain Douglas Murray as 2i/c. At full strength it numbered about 150 with a large compliment of 11-12 officers to enable Sections to operate independently in hostile territory in "sticks" of 10.

In February 1942 Captain Dennis Vernon, commander of "B" Troop, led a "stick" accompanying Major John Frost's "C" Company of 2 Para on the brilliantly successful BRUNEVILLE raid on the coast of Northern France to capture vital parts of a German Radar station. Dennis was awarded the M.C. for his part in that operation, and went on to command "B" Troop through the Tunisian campaign, eventually in June 1943 being promoted to command the 2nd Parachute Squadron R.E., in Italy with the rank of Major.

### North Africa, November 1942- May 1943

While the 9th Field Company (Airborne) R.E. did not set foot in North Africa with the rest of the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division until the Tunisian Campaign was over in May 1943; the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron R.E. on the other hand took part in OPERATION TORCH with the 1ST Parachute Brigade Group almost from the day of the initial landings at the beginning of November 1942.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Parachute Battalion and the Squadron's "C" Troop flew out from England and, after a brief stopover at GIBRALTAR and ALGIERS, landed by parachute on BONE airfield near the Tunisian border on November 12th, thus securing a port and forward base for the 1st Army, now motoring eastwards as fast as a skeleton force of armour and infantry could move. On the same day the rest

of the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Brigade, (which included the 16th Parachute Field Ambulance R.A.M.C. and a R.A.F. Parachute Packing Section) arrived off ALGIERS in a huge convoy of ocean liners and began disembarking immediately to prepare for further parachute operations in TUNISIA within days.

"A" Troop was first away with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion on the 16<sup>th</sup>, landing without opposition on SOUK-EL-ARBA airfield, then advanced on foot carrying all their stores and equipment on their backs, or in requisitioned donkey-carts some forty miles to BEJA, an important town on the road to TUNIS. From there they pushed on into the hills to the north east to harry the German Forces that were pouring into Tunisia from their nearby bases in SICILY.

"B" Troop's turn came on November 28th when it took part with Lieut. Col. John Frost's 2 Para on the fatally flawed OUDNA operation, which was intended to destroy three German Airfields used by Stuka dive bombers against 1st Army's advance units with devastating effect. Not surprisingly they encountered a much more powerful force of German Paratroops, the 5<sup>th</sup> FJR Afrika (5<sup>th</sup> Fallschirmjager Regiment Africa) supported by tanks and heavy armoured cars and suffered heavily in 5 days of night marches and 3 hard fought battles during the daylight hours. Of the 500 paratroopers that had set out from ALGIERS, only 180 exhausted men in several parties staggered into MEDJEZ-EL BAB between December 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>. All our numerous wounded and the 16th Field Ambulance surgical team had to be left behind in German hands at OUDNA.

Throughout the 5 day operation, "B" Troop fought alongside their infantry comrades, and in the day long battle defending SIDI BOU HADJEBA HILL knocked out an Italian tank with Gammon bombs and hand grenades. After suffering three men killed and twice as many wounded and missing, the troop limped into MEDJEZ in several parties, totalling 25 strong, Capt. Dennis Vernon coming back riding on a donkey to nurse a badly injured knee. Compared to the rest of 2 Para we were very lucky. Meanwhile on the 24<sup>th</sup> November, "A" Troop suffered a dreadful disaster while supporting 1 Para in a mine laying role during a night attack. For the sake of speed they carried their fused Hawkins anti-tank mines (which they intended to lay behind the enemy's tank lager to prevent escape) in their packs on their backs. Tragically, one man slipped and fell while crossing a deep ravine in the pitch dark, setting off his mines, and all the rest exploded by sympathetic detonation, killing every one - the Troop Commander, Captain Pat Geary, Lieutenants Holland and White and sixteen other ranks. The rest of the Squadron were deeply shocked by this heavy loss.

A further disaster followed on the 18<sup>th</sup> December when 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron's O.C. Major Stephen Dorman and his batman were ambushed and killed while carrying out a personal recce of another strategic position in the mountains. Notwithstanding this serious setback, a few days later, Lieut. Trevor Livesey won the M.C. for carrying out a particularly brilliant three-day patrol behind the enemy lines east of MEDJEZ-EL-BAB to find out whether bridges on the road to TEBOURBA could carry tanks during the planned Christmas Eve offensive. As it had rained for a week making the tracks impassable the attack was called off, so all enjoyed a quiet Christmas.

After Christmas Rommel's Africa Corps routed an American Division in the KESSERINE PASS causing major reorganisation by the Allied Army. The 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Brigade Group was rushed into the front line at BOU ARADA, just in time to repulse an Axis offensive to the North and South of the town. That was when Capt. Steve George's "A" Troop stormed a hill, which the Germans had taken that morning, and Steve won the M.C. Sadly Lieut. Brown, who had just joined the Squadron at Christmas time, was killed in the attack. A little later when the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade counterattacked, and the 1st Battalion, with "A" Troop in support, stormed a huge hill feature called DJEBEL MANSOUR, Corporal Simpson won a very high American decoration, the Silver Star, when he rescued wounded paras under fire. Sadly Corporal Simpson was killed in the school at ARNHEM on the very last day, 20<sup>th</sup> September 1944.

At the end of February after the BOU ARADA front was stabilised, the Germans, launched a final offensive in the north with some of their best troops in order to establish a mountain redoubt round BIZERTA to cover an evacuation. For a while they made steady progress, severely savaging a brigade of 78 Division. Accordingly, the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Brigade was rushed northwards to stem the advance, 2 Para even being dropped off on the way to mount a counterattack, so desperate was the situation.

The rest of the Brigade, already weakened by the BOU ARADA battles, took up positions east of DJEBEL ABIOD on a number of hills covered with cork trees, and were immediately in action against the Grenadier Regiment of the 10<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division and a regiment of German parachute engineers commanded by Colonel Witzig, a very able officer who had won his Knights Cross in BELGIUM in 1940 by his brilliant airborne assault on the EBEN EMAEL frontier fortress.

In the ensuing month of determined defence and counterattack all three Battalions of the Brigade lost such a stream of killed and wounded that the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron R.E. was repeatedly called upon to loan subalterns to command an infantry platoon or even to provide a platoon for a weakened infantry company. In this way Lieut. Alan Scott-Fleming was sent to 1 Para, and took part in a successful counterattack against the Panzer Grenadiers, and Peter Stainforth took his section to form part of 2 Para's "C" Company fighting Witzig's paratroopers. Lieut. Alan Mothersill was killed during this period, and the whole Squadron suffered a number of wounded from shellfire and Stuka bombing.

After a month of savage fighting, the German offensive petered out, and the Brigade mounted a counter offensive, starting with a night attack in which 2 Para's "B" Company suffered such heavy casualties that Lieut. Col. Frost put the Squadron's Lieut. "Stiffy" Simpson in command to execute a flank attack. The result was a complete success. By the end of the battle, German opposition

had collapsed and the Brigade swept all before it, advancing 5 miles before being relieved by an American Division. Undoubtedly, that battle at TAMERA was the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Brigade's finest hour in which the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron, R.E. proved its battle worthiness, drawing well deserved praise from Lieut. Col. "Johnny" Frost who said that "His sappers were the best fighting soldiers he had had under his command"

Whilst the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Brigade Group received from their German opponents the accolade of "The Red Devils", and the highest praise from the 1<sup>st</sup> Army Command at the end of the Tunisian Campaign, the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron R.E. was poorly recognised by the senior engineer commander, the 1ST Airborne Divisional C.R.E. The sole award of the Military Cross to Major Douglas Murray, who had led the Squadron through six months of bitter fighting, was an inadequate recognition of the Squadron's performance. A D.S.O. would have been more appropriate.

## The Airborne Operations in Sicily

Both the 9th Field Coy. (Airborne) R.E. and the 1st Parachute Squadron R.E. took part in the early stages of the Sicilian Campaign, the 9<sup>th</sup> landing by gliders with 1<sup>st</sup> Airlanding Brigade on 8th/9th July 1943, while the first squadron parachuted with the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Brigade four days later. The objective of the Airlanding Brigade was to capture intact the huge road bridge, the PONTE GRANDE, at Syracuse, whilst that of the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Brigade was to secure the road bridge over the SIMETO River just south of CATANIA airfield, the PONTE PRIMOSOLE.

Both operations were a near disaster, but successful in attaining their operational objectives through the extraordinary skills of the few that reached the bridges.

The Airlanding Brigade's tugs and gliders flew to SICILY in the teeth of a 20 mph, headwind, and on nearing the coast, they encountered heavy "Flak". Many tugs cast off their gliders too far out to sea, and many of their troops were drowned when their Waco and Horsa Gliders came down in deep water. Those gliders that made it to the shore were widely scattered, but two gliders, one carrying a platoon of the South Staffordshire Regiment commanded by Lieut. Withers, and another bearing members of Lieut. Eric O'Callaghan's platoon of the 9<sup>th</sup> Field Coy. (Airborne) R.E. made it to the bridge. These two parties captured the southern end, and while O'Callaghan's sappers removed the explosive charges, Lieut. Withers and 6 men swam the river and captured the northern end. This handful of infantry and sappers fought off a heavy Italian counterattack until their ammunition ran out and they were briefly captured until a relief force of the Border Regiment restored the situation. For their gallant action, both Lieut. Withers and Lieut. Eric O'Callaghan received the M.C.

The 1st Parachute Brigade's drop on the night 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> July fared even worse. The huge fleet of Dakotas flying up the Sicilian coast met heavy anti-aircraft fire from the British Navy, which mistook the Dakotas for Heinkel bombers, and the planes were widely scattered. On nearing the SIMETO River they met intense "Flak" from CATANIA airfield, (the main German air base), both from 88mm. and 20mm. weapons, and several were shot down. The third hazard the paratroopers met on landing was that their Dropping Zones had been used by German Paratroopers of the 4th F.J.R. that very morning, so a well organised resistance was soon met.

Nevertheless about 70 men of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Parachute Battalions landing on the north side of the river, captured the bridge in the early hours., while 200 men of the 2nd Battalion under Lieut. Col. Johnny Frost took up position on three low hills about a mile to the south and held them against determined attacks of the 4th F.J.R. Meanwhile, Brigade H.Q. with Brigadier Lathbury, the Defence Platoon, and half a dozen sappers under Lieut. Peter Stainforth secured the southern end of the bridge, the latter setting about the job of dismantling the extensive preparations for the bridge's demolition.

Thereafter this tiny element of the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Brigade, held out throughout the long hot day under intense artillery fire and armoured attack from CATANIA, while Lieut. Col. Johnny Frost's men of 2 Para beat off attack after attack from the Fallschirmjager of 4 F.J.R. and were only saved by the 9 inch guns of HMS Newfoundland, which broke up a German attack at a critical moment. Finally, at dusk, when the defenders at the bridge ran out of ammunition, Brigadier Lathbury, completely in the dark as to what had happened to Frost's force, gave the order for the defenders to make their way, in small parties back to our own troops thought to be on the way up from the south.

The irony of the situation was that a number of British tanks and a Battalion of the Durham Regiment had at that very hour relieved Lieut. Col. Frost's men of 2 Para, but too late to prevent the Germans partially destroying the bridge with a lorry loaded with explosives.

For some reason, our C.R.E., Lieut. Col ("Honkers") Henniker gave an extraordinary garbled account of the actions at PONTE GRANDE and at the PONTE PRIMOSOLE. At the former, the outstanding brave action of Lieut. Eric O'Callaghan is not mentioned in the single brief paragraph in his book "An image of war". Instead of giving Eric the credit for the sapper's performance, the accolade is handed to the 9<sup>th</sup> Field Company's commander, Major Beasley, who arrived at the bridge after it had been cleared of explosives, but was killed in the Italian counterattack. Again, the PONTE PRIMOSOLE battle is dismissed in an equally brief paragraph, the sapper role being credited to Major Douglas Murray M.C. whose party was dropped many miles away and never made it to the

bridge area at all. "Honkers" was never very good at giving praise to junior officers who were only doing their job, albeit to a very high standard.

## The Defence of the School at Arnhem Bridge

In the battle for the main road bridge into ARNHEM, the roles of the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron and the 9<sup>th</sup> Field Coy (Airborne) over the passage of years been confused, particularly over the heroic defence of the VAN LIMBURG Stirumschool on the northeastern side of the ramp. As the savage three-day battle against the 10<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Division "Frundsberg" reinforced by a detachment of super heavy King Tiger tanks was the swan song of the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron R.E., it is important to get the facts right.

Both the 9<sup>th</sup> Field Coy R.E. and the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron R.E. landed on the first day of Operation Market Garden, Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> September 1944, with their respective Brigades, but their tasks were very different. The role of the 1<sup>st</sup> Airlanding Brigade was to secure the landing and dropping zones for the second lift on the 18<sup>th</sup>, but as there was no obvious engineering task for the 9<sup>th</sup> Field Coy R.E. it is referred to in General Urquhart's Order of Battle as "Divisional Troops". During the nine days of the battle, at no time did the bulk of the 9<sup>th</sup> Field Coy leave the Oosterbeek area with the one exception of Capt. Eric O'Callaghan M.C and a detachment of Sappers. Initially this platoon was placed under the command of Major Gough's Divisional Recce Company, whose task it was to race ahead in their Jeeps to try and prevent the ARNHEM bridges being destroyed before the infantry of the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Brigade could get there. This plan, however, was abandoned when the column ran into an ambush east of Wolfhezen and lost a number of vehicles and men. Whereupon Eric O'Callaghan's detachment was ordered to support the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Brigade's battalions in their bid to secure the Arnhem bridges the hard way.

Capt O'Callaghan, unaware of the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron's identical role, reached the Railway Bridge in his Jeep just in time to see it blow up in the faces of a platoon of 2 Para. (Lt Barry) which was attempting to race across to seize the southern end. That left two other bridges to be captured, so Eric O'Callaghan set off in the wake of 2 Para into Arnhem, 'following the sound of gunfire', as he put it.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron RE on the other hand had the objective of securing the three Arnhem bridges - the Railway Bridge, the Pontoon Bridge in the dock area, and the huge road bridge further on. 'A' and 'B' Troop were in the vanguard with Lt Col John Frost's 2 Para on the lower road, 'C' Troop with 3 Para on the Utrecht road, and Squadron Headquarters following with Brigade Headquarters behind. Considerable resistance was encountered by 3 Para on the Utrecht road; but 2 Para with the bulk of the 1<sup>st</sup> Para Sqn RE, after dropping off Lt Stainforth at the Railway Bridge to make it safe, met only light resistance on the Lower Road, and slipped through to the main road bridge area, where a battle developed in the dark for possession of the northern end.

Resistance was finally overcome when a 1<sup>st</sup> Para Sqn RE flame thrower team destroyed a pillbox and explosive store on the north ramp. Attempts to cross the bridge by Lt Grayburn's platoon of 2 Para were repulsed by S.S. panzer grenadiers holding the southern end, and the three day battle for the bridge began. Lt Grayburn was subsequently awarded a posthumous VC.

During the hours of darkness on Sunday night, Lt Col. Frost gradually built up a defensive perimeter round the northern end of the bridge. By dawn he had with him most of his 2 Para less one Company, a depleted Coy of 3 Para, which had skilfully by-passed enemy opposition in the dark; a troop of the Brigade's Anti-tank Battery with four 6 pounder guns; a platoon of the Airborne RASC with a Carrier loaded with ammunition; Brigade Headquarters troops and the Defence Platoon, but without the Brigadier; Major Gough with 2 Jeeps and men of his Recce Squadron, which had fortuitously joined up with Eric O'Callaghan's detachment, and together they occupied the Arnhem Water Works Building; and most of the 1<sup>st</sup> Para Sqn RE, less 'C' Troop. This tiny force, which numbered at most six hundred all ranks, withstood attack after attack from elements of two S.S. Panzer divisions reinforced with huge 150mm 'Ferdinand' S.P. guns and King Tiger Tanks, until all their positions were on fire and reduced to rubble one by one. Only when there was nowhere left to defend were they finally overwhelmed.

The defence of the school building by some forty sappers of 'A' and half B' Troop of the 1<sup>st</sup> Para Sqn RE under the command of Capt Eric Mackay, and fourteen men of 'C' Coy of 3 Para, has been well reported in most of the authoritative histories, and in Eric Mackay's personal account published in Blackwoods Magazine in 1945. So there is no need to go over the full story of their heroic battle again. Suffice to say that by Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> September, after three days and nights without sleep and little food, with their defences finally set on fire and blown apart by a King Tiger tank at less than eighty yards' range, sixteen of the defenders had been killed, two others died of their wounds in captivity, and most of the remainder had suffered wounds in various degrees of severity. When it was impossible to fight on, after ordering Lt Simpson to surrender with the wounded, Capt Eric Mackay led a handful of survivors in an attempt to break out. Needless to say they did not get very far.

Major Murray and Squadron Headquarters with the rest of 'B' troop, having remained for a while at the Pontoon Bridge to see whether it could be repaired, ended up in a building close to John Frost's 2 Para Headquarters, and there they fought hard to the very end, the squadron's Cpl Wilkinson being credited with knocking out several German armoured vehicles with his P.I.A.T. Eventually, with the building burning fiercely and with the cellars crammed with wounded, Lt Col John Frost, himself badly wounded with a shattered leg, ordered the Battalion MO, Jimmy Logan, to surrender and seek help from the Germans to rescue the wounded before the cellar ceiling collapsed.

With the surrender of that last building, 2 Para's resistance at Arnhem Bridge came to an end, and with it the original 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron RE ceased to exist. Only Capt Cox and nine men of 'C' Troop, who had been attached to the few survivors of 3 Para which had withdrawn to Oosterbeek after failing to break through to the bridge, got back over the Rhine on the 27th.

Also by an amazing feat of derring-do, Capt Mackay, Lt Simpson and Sergeants Weir and Humphries broke out of their temporary prison on the wrong side of the German border, stole down to the river where they found a rowing boat, and by skilful navigation floated down the left fork of the river, the Maas, to Nijmegen and safety.

As a footnote to the epic defence of Arnhem Bridge, (renamed after the war by the Dutch, 'Frost Bridge') S.S. General Harmel, commanding the 10th S.S. Panzer Division 'Frundsberg', congratulated the wounded with Lt Col Frost with words, 'You command very fine soldiers. Not even at Stalingrad have I seen such bravery or such stubborn resistance.' Such was the respect that the panzer grenadiers had for our wounded that Frost says that they 'were kind, chivalrous, even comforting, as they carried our men out of the burning building.

## Epilogue

After Arnhem the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron passes into history. Capt. Eric MacKay was awarded the American Silver Star for his part in the heroic defence of the school, while Lt. Simpson was awarded the M.C. Many more decorations were deserved, but with all the senior officers at the bridge wounded or prisoners of war there was no one left to write up the citations for actions that only came to light after the war. By then it was far too late.

However, the few survivors of the 1st and 4th parachute Squadrons, together with their respective seaborne elements and an intake of thirty reinforcements, were in February 1945 formed into a composite unit entitled the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Squadron R.E. This new unit, with Capt. "Stiffy" Simpson M.C., commanding one of the three troops, was posted to Norway in May 1945 to assist in German disarmament and mine clearing. Further changes took place due to demobilisation while they were in Norway, but after disembarkation leave in England in August, the unit found itself embarked for Palestine.

None of the other officers and men that went to Arnhem remained in Airborne Forces on their return from POW Camps in Germany. Some were recovering from severe wounds, and all having eked out an existence on a potato, a slice of black bread, soup and acorn coffee per day, were unfit for further parachute duties and were given less strenuous employment elsewhere. Even Capt. Eric Mackay after his dramatic escape was promoted to Major to command a Field Coy in Germany, and then rose steadily through Staff College and senior appointments before he retired as a Major General.

During 1946 and 1947 in Palestine, the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Squadron not only had the unenviable task of trying to control Jewish illegal immigrants and keeping the peace between Jews and Arabs, but also of fighting the terrorists of Irgun Zvi

Leumi and the Stern Gang and clearing their numerous mines and booby traps which caused the deaths of two officers and one other rank over the period. It also went through further contractions and amalgamations, taking in trained parachutists from the disbanded 3<sup>rd</sup> Parachute Squadron and 147 Field Park Squadron, ending with its final consolidation with the larger 9<sup>th</sup> Field Coy. (Airborne) R.E. It then became the sapper unit of the 16th Independent Parachute Brigade and was renamed the 9<sup>th</sup> Parachute Squadron R.E.

The gestation period for the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron to be reborn as the 9<sup>th</sup> Parachute Squadron R.E. had therefore taken about three years, and it had been painful.

However the tradition of the "Fighting First", which had become operational under Major Stephen Dorman in November 1941 and which went out in a blaze of glory under the command of Major Douglas Murray M.C. on the 20<sup>th</sup> September 1944, lives on to the present day. It is a fine tradition of which the modern squadron are justly proud.

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## Reminiscing

### Paul Baker (a young 93 year old)

I was very interested to see the further history of 9 Para Sqn in the August issue of the Journal and I thought some reminiscences of mine might be worth recording. When early in 1943 my unit was converted to form 2 Para Sqn we were accommodated in modern barracks at B near Amesbury with a helpful RAF station nearby at Nether Wallop. In the same area was the 9<sup>th</sup> (Air Landing) Field Coy RE, which I believe had been selected for this role because of their outstanding service in the Regular Army since WW1 and as a result of which they were known in the Corps as the 'Shiny Ninth'. For this new role they had been equipped with folding bicycles and I remember seeing them on a road exercise, passing by with a great whirr. Their column followed by an airborne jeep with a spare bike or two and the ability to provide running repairs to riders and bikes when the latter unexpectedly folded up!

The Ninth also had an extraordinary light weight bridge for short wet gaps consisting of two wire cables which could be stretched across and securely anchored and carried a canvas deck which could support the column if they moved quickly across it. I do not know whether the Ninth were ever called upon to use their bikes or their bridge in earnest or whether they were just quietly folded up and stowed away.

It is of interest to note that the Capt Brazier of 3 Troop, which is recorded at the bottom of page 6 as being dropped in action in the endeavour to recapture the Suez Canal in 1956, now Lt Col P H (Jock) Brazier RE, edited the book written by his father. Brig CCH Brazier RE) reviewed on page 27.

Jock's son Julian Brazier MP who had a National Service link with the Corps continues the family record of service.

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## Indian Airborne Engineers

### Pat Munro

To expand on Fred Grays's article on the history of 9 Sqn published in the August 2006 edition.

50 (Ind) Para Bde was raised in November 1941. Included in its orbat was 411 Para Sec IE (equivalent of a Tp in today's terminology), which was formed on 20 November 1941. Volunteers for 411 were Punjabi Mussalmans (PMs) drawn from both the Bengal and Bombay Sappers and Miners. It was expanded to a full Para Sqn two years later. The additional sappers were Mahrattas (Hindus) from the Bombay Sappers and its full title became 411 (R Bombay) Para Sqn IE.

Early in 1944 it was decided to expand 50 Bde into a full AB Div, consisting of a British Para Bde, an Indian one (50) and an Indian Airlanding Bde. However, later GHQ India was informed that a British Para Bde would not be available. This may have been due to a severe shortage of infantry in the British Army, which was due to the casualties incurred in the Normandy breakout. It was also decided to have three Para Bdes.

The Para Sqns were 12 RE (largely drawn from RE personnel in the second Chindit Force on its dissolution in February 1945), 33 (Bengal), 411 (Bombay) and 40 (Bengal) AB Pk Sqn. In 1946 all British units were withdrawn from 2 Ind AB Div. 12 Para Sqn was posted to Palestine, where its personnel were absorbed in 6 AB Div Engrs. It was replaced by 36 (Madras) Para Sqn.

On the partition of India into India and Pakistan, 411 's PMs were posted to 33 which, rarely at that time, was an all-Muslim unit. 411 returned from Karachi to India in October 1947 -The only operation order that I have ever written in earnest was to cover its move back by rail. I got recalled back to the UK to go on a degree course just before they were due to leave, so never saw it been implemented. I heard later that they had arrived safely, 411 was involved in the initial Kashmir war in support of 50 Para Bde, which started 10 weeks after the creation of the two countries. Most of its tasks were on road works - The existing roads could mostly be described as tracks, rather than roads; and there was only one "Road" from India into Jammu and Kashmir, which was the only means of land re-supply.

It is the longest serving AB unit of the Indian Army and its only para engr unit. It has never changed its number, although it is now titled 411(1) Para Fd Coy. Unlike the RE, which, post war, changed all Coys to Sqns; in India all became Coys. Its parent Para Bde also has never changed its number - Today it is 50 (I) Para Bde (The "I" today means Independent in both titles). Since 1947 (and up to 1991) it has produced four Lt Gens (including the only Bombay Sapper to become the E in C in Delhi; he says that this is because Poona, which is adjacent to their Depot in Kirkee, has a reputation for slow horses and fast women which does not go down well in Delhi!); five Maj Gens and six Brigs, not bad for a unit that is only about 160 all ranks.

I do not know what happened to 33 Para Sqn. That too may be still in existence in the Pakistan Army, as most of their Generals that appear on British TV have para wings.

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# Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

Held at the Novotel, Southampton on 21 October 2006

Meeting Opened at: 0945 hours. Members present: 89

## Chairman's Opening Address

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending the 17th AGM at Southampton and for their support, friendship and guidance during this term of office.

## Apologies

Numerous letters/phone calls were recorded from members offering their apologies for non-attendance.

## Silent Tribute

Members observed a period of silence in tribute to fallen comrades

## Previous Minutes

Matters arising: There were no matters that required further discussion or clarification

Proposed by: Joe Stoddart. Seconded by: Don Doherty that the previous minutes as presented be accepted.

Accepted: Unanimously

## Treasurers Report

Major Dick Brown RE read out the following audited Statement of Account as at 15 October 2006:

ASSETS	£
Cash in Hand	[REDACTED]
Cash in Bank	[REDACTED]
Deposit Account	[REDACTED]
Property Value	[REDACTED]
Shop Stock	[REDACTED]
TOTAL ASSETS	[REDACTED]
LIABILITIES	
Newsletter	[REDACTED]
Museum / Projects Fund	[REDACTED]
TOTAL LIABILITIES	[REDACTED]
WORKING CAPITAL	
Assets	[REDACTED]
Minus Liabilities	[REDACTED]
TOTAL WORKING CAPITAL	[REDACTED]

Proposed by: By John Smith Seconded by John Lee that the audited Treasures report as presented be accepted: Carried Unanimously

## **Editors Report**

Dave Rutter gave a comprehensive report; the main points being:

To rectify any misunderstanding concerning the history of 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Sqn, Mr Peter Stainforth and Mr Eric Booth have jointly provided the correct details of times, places and events of the 1st Para Sqn's history for publication in the December edition of the Journal.

**Postage:** Despite the Post office raising the cost of postage within the UK, there is to be no increase in the annual subscription for the AEA journal. The actual rise in UK postage for the journal is 5p per copy and this additional cost can be absorbed within the current subscription charges.

**Advertising/Sponsorship:** The editor would greatly appreciate if a member/s would take on the responsibility of seeking out new sources of advertising or sponsorship from private companies. Our current advertisers are paid up for a further 12 months - but new sources of income may be required after this period. The income from advertising/sponsorship offsets the cost of our publication to our subscribers.

**Outstanding Subscriptions:** 132 current subscribers have yet to forward payment for future publications and a final reminder will be sent out with the December issue.

**Branch News:** It is suggested that branch news should not become a vehicle for publicising health updates and medical reports of illnesses and operations within respective branches.

If holding functions branches should endeavour to include photographs to supplement their write-ups.

**Publication Deadline:** Published on the bottom of page 1 in every edition is the deadline cutoff date for the receipt of articles for inclusion in the next issue. A publication is only as good as its contents - so keep the supply of data coming in.

## **Membership Report:**

The Membership Secretary, Billy Morris stated that since taking over the post in November 2005 he had made it his mission to recruit 50 new members before the next AGM. He admitted he had failed to reach his intended target by only recruiting 40 new members; but had 16 potential members in the pipeline.

He offered a vote of thanks to Steve Collins of the Chatham Branch who has recruited at least 10 members from neighbouring areas. A good day was had at the Brompton Barracks open day with another big thank you to Smoky Gibson and Jim Rodgers who pulled in the crowd's with their charm. Billy is planning to meet with the SSM's of the Airborne Units in 23 Engr Regt (Air Assault) in an attempt to encourage more new members. The total membership numbers issued as at the 21 Oct 2006 stands at 1258.

## **Election of Officers**

### **Executive Committee**

Vice President Mr Bunny Brown

Vice President Mr John Lee

Hon Secretary Mr Michael Leather

### **Advisory Committee**

Shop Manager Mr Ray Coleman

IT Member Mr Dave Pace

All of the above mentioned appointments were unanimously approved.

## **Confirmation of Trustees**

The following elected officers were appointed as Trustees for the Association:

Mr Mick Humphries, Mr John Lee and Mr Bunny Brown

## **Constitution**

It was proposed that new members appointed to the Executive and Advisory committees take over their duties officially on the 1<sup>st</sup> January following the AGM. This is to alleviate any problems that may occur by one set of members organising the social function and others presiding over it.

That the constitution be amended to include the shop Manager and the IT Member as members of the Advisory committee.

The above amendments to the Constitution were approved unanimously.

## **Date and Location of Next AGM**

This is to be held at the Cairn Hotel, Harrogate on the 3rd November 2007.

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## Annual Reunion and Gala Dinner 2006

### **Fred Gray**

The AGM and Reunion of the Airborne Engineers Association was held over the weekend of 21—23 October at the Novotel in Southampton.

Numbers attending were slightly down on previous years but this in no way detracted from what turned out to be a very successful and enjoyable weekend. Travelling distance to the south coast, members being accommodated in two adjacent hotels, and not being able to pay deposits and final bills by cheque was perhaps a factor in the lower turnout. However a total of one hundred and seventy members, wives, girlfriends, partners and family members enjoyed a tremendous reunion. Our guests this year were Major General Peter Wall CBE, (a former OC 9 Parachute Squadron), Lt Col Ian Hutchison MBE RE, CO 23 Eng Regt (Air Assault) and WO1 (RSM) Ian Murison. We also had the pleasure of the company of Major and Mrs Copsey, (OC 9 Para Sqn) with WO2 (SSM) Mick Stewart.

After dinner speeches were made by General Wall, Mick Humphries (Chairman of the AEA) and an unexpected speech by our old friend of many years, Bill Rudd MBE who was recently elected President of the AEA. Bill's speech was really to thank all those members of the Aldershot Branch who had worked tirelessly over the last six months to bring the reunion to such a successful conclusion. Joe Stoddart MBE and John Smith BEM were the main movers having spent many hours holding meetings with the hotel management and attending to all those little details that go into organising an event such as this. They had also to cope with members who turned up unannounced requiring accommodation and seating for the dinner. The ladies were not forgotten as they had played their part in helping with the smooth running of the event.

A special presentation was made to Mrs Jan Chambers for her invaluable contribution to the Association over the last fifteen years by running the association shop and providing a very good profit from her sales.

The raffle was organised by Steve Stephenson aided by Sylvia Stoddart and Trixie Doherty. It proved to be the most successful and profitable raffle of any reunions held by the association. All profit is to be donated to a very worthy charity. A separate report by Steve appears elsewhere in the journal.

After many years in the wilderness it was good to see Eric Borlace, former Chief Clerk of the Squadron (c1960--64) and now an in-pensioner at the Royal Hospital Chelsea. Also attending for the first time was John Powell and his wife Sally. The last time John was seen was in Haig Lines, Crookham Cross Roads in 1965.

From overseas there was George and Rene Jones with their daughter Lesley who had made the long journey from Perth in Australia just for the reunion. Also from foreign parts was WW2 veteran Sid Burrell now living in Spain. Great to see them all once again and hope that we shall see them and many others at next year's reunion in Harrogate north Yorkshire.

From the compliments heard, the hotel proved to be very popular, with excellent facilities and superb food, both at the gala dinner and the breakfast meals. All in all a very good and successful reunion.

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# The AEA AGM 2006 Raffle Report

Steve Stephenson

I have been looking forward to writing this report for several weeks; thinking that when I did so it would all be over. But I was wrong! For there are still letters of thanks to write and phone calls to make and I now realise that I won't finally be able to "sign off" until I know that Sally Myatt is safely back on terra firma, after completing her tandem jump, and that Lindsey Horton has survived the kind of "loving care" that I'm sure Charlie Edwards is preparing for him in South Africa. However, these thoughts must not distract me from my most important duty: that of saying a sincere thank you to all of those special people who helped me to cope in the "uncharted waters," of running a raffle.

Firstly I should like to thank those who responded so positively to the letter that I wrote to branch representatives on 12th September. Almost immediately I received a phone call from the Edinburgh branch, wishing me success and informing me that Jimmy Simpson had already volunteered to collect money for raffle tickets from branch members. This call was quickly followed by one from Eric Blenkinsop, saying that the Chatham branch had proposed to match the Aldershot contribution, with another one hundred pound prize for the draw. However, having pointed out to him that this money would be more valuable to BLESMA if it were used to buy raffle tickets, a proposal to this effect was approved by his members at a branch meeting the following day. I then received a letter from Bob Runacres of the South West branch informing me that his members had also approved a donation of one hundred pounds. In my letter of thanks to him I again requested that the money might be used to purchase raffle tickets and this was also agreed. My letter to him also included the following observation, "I am mindful of the fact that your branch doesn't have the membership numbers that Aldershot and other branches enjoy and I am extremely grateful to you for your support for this very worthy cause."

My other request to Eric and Bob was that they should consider contributing to BLESMA, for auction or donation, any of the three "star prizes" won with their tickets. They both agreed this and most of the other raffle tickets that I personally sold were purchased on this basis. The significance of this decision for the South West members was that one of their tickets was drawn for the Hundred Pounds prize; increasing their branch donation to two hundred pounds! These 'advance sales', plus a few individual purchases, enabled me to set up my sales drive at the hotel on Friday afternoon with two hundred and fifty pounds already 'in the bank'.

My next acknowledgement must go to my sales team; Sylvia Stoddart and Trixie Doherty. They were invaluable and without them I'm sure that I could not have survived. Sylvia participated from the very beginning, which was after lunch on Friday, and Trixie joined us later that afternoon. Whilst I tried to manage the ticket sales, they received the prizes that were handed in, packed them up when necessary and selected appropriate positions for them in the draw sequence. But it was after dinner that evening when they really came into their element and I suspect it was by targeting the inebriated that they were able to hand over to me another two hundred and eighty pounds at breakfast the next morning. Their sales drive continued right up to the moment when it was requested that we should take our places in for the gala dinner. By then every ticket in the raffle book had been sold and, at one pound per ticket, we had raised one thousand pounds. All that we could hope for then was that we might have an opportunity to hold an auction.

It had been agreed at my request that the main draw should take place at 5pm and that the draw for the three Star Prizes would be made after the speeches in the evening. Prior to the final draw it had been my hopeful anticipation that the Hundred Pound prize would be donated and that the South African Holiday would be auctioned. But my 'banker' for increasing our donation to BLESMA lay strongly with a scenario, whereby the winner of the tandem jump (with feigned reluctance, of course) selflessly offers it for auction. It was with amazement, therefore, when I realised that Sally Myatt really did want and really did intend to make this jump! Thankfully, though, the show wasn't over and my amazement became incredulity when Mick Humphries (with auctioning skills rarely witnessed outside a Sotheby's showroom) and Lindsey Horton, plus other unidentified participants, with wonderful generosity added an extra one thousand pounds to our total! To everyone that contributed in any way to the success of this rather special event I should like to say a very big thank you.

In conclusion, whilst I am reluctant to finish on a negative note I feel that I should let you know of my disappointment in the poor response to my request for prizes (complimentary tickets) from two of our national institutions. Writing personally, by name, to the Director General of the Imperial War Museum and the Director of the National Army Museum, I told them of our forthcoming AGM and of the draw that was planned in aid of BLESMA. I also told them that with us at our gathering would be representatives of the original wartime airborne sapper units and of others right up to the present day.

Having received no replies to my letters of 2nd October, I wrote again on the 16th October; explaining my need to complete a raffle prize list before the weekend. In these follow-up letters I emphasised again that the draw was in aid of BLESMA. However, when I left for Southampton on Friday, 20th October my letters had not been acknowledged.

Two days after arriving home from Southampton, on Tuesday 24th October, I received a card from the Royal Mail's Bulford sorting office; indicating that they were holding a letter addressed to me. The letter, having been mailed in London without postage stamps, was being held there for my collection. It also informed me that, upon payment of a fee of £1.55, it could be collected from their

office between the hours of 7am and 8.30am. Having made the 4-mile round trip to recover it the following day, I found that it was from the Imperial War Museum. The envelope contained one ticket, admitting "One Family", and two tickets, each admitting "One Adult". The accompanying letter, dated 19th October 2006, was from a lady who identified herself a Visitor Services Officer. Other pamphlets were enclosed and the last paragraph of her letter said, "I also enclose some leaflets about the Henry Moore exhibition and I would be very grateful if you could display them or hand them out to your supporters". At least someone at the Imperial War Museum eventually got round to making some sort of effort. The Director of the National Army Museum ignored my letters completely!

Perhaps I am being over critical; but some of the people involved in this incident will be earning the kind of salaries that the majority of our servicemen could only dream about. They earn their comfortable livelihoods from the portrayal in their museums of the courage and the selflessness of servicemen throughout military history. With us at our reunion were many who are portrayed in these people's workplaces and who happily and generously contributed to our raffle in aid of those who have lost limbs and who have so much to thank BLESMA for.

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## Raffle Prizes- Beware!

Peter Myatt

When they called out the raffle number 614 at the AEA gala dinner, I knew we were in trouble. I'd bought the tickets and given them to Sally because she always has much better luck than me and sure enough, we end up winning the first prize - a chance to become a member of the two-mile high club. 'Steve' Stephenson had previously told me that old 'gaffers' i.e. that's about ninety percent of the Association would only qualify for the Tandem jumps. I'd expressed my reservations about doing a Tandem Jump stating that if we won then I would only be doing static or the Accelerated Free fall jump.

Bearing this in mind, Sally waltzed up to claim the prize and stating that she would jump herself. When I heard this my eyes just about popped out on stalks with surprise. It wasn't the 'wine' talking either; she had drunk nothing alcoholic the entire evening. She's not keen on flying, so you can image just how 'Gob smacked' I was - however I decided to keep quiet and see what developed.

After we arrived home I still wasn't sure whether Sally was keen to jump. However, she never hesitated and said the sooner the better. Steve phoned later that week and Sally expressed a desire to jump as soon as possible. Steve replied that he had a DVD and a CVR made by the Army Parachute School showing the various types of Jumps on offer. He'd meant to show it during the Association Week end but the opportunity never occurred. Sally was thrilled with what she saw and was more determined than ever to do the 'Tandem jump'. It was at this point I decided I had no other option but to accompany her - though this meant paying for the privilege. Steve played a 'blinder'. It transpired that the Chief Instructor of the School is a Staff Sergeant 'Nige' Allen and, would you believe it! Serving in 9 Parachute Squadron RE. Steve immediately negotiates with 'Nige' favourable fees for my jump and the cost for videoing it.

'Nige' advised us that a Wednesday or Fridays were the best times to jump, as the weekends were rather crowded and hectic. My 'Bride' immediately jumped in with both feet saying that she would like to jump the next Wednesday. I checked on the Internet and got the seven-day forecast. It appeared that the Gods were with us; it was forecast to be sunny but chilly.

We arranged with the Joint Services Parachute Centre to have the necessary medical forms faxed to our Medical Centre. After much muttering about my 'Blood Pressure' our Doctor completed and signed the forms but stated quite categorically that we were both 'crazy'. That thought had also occurred to me!

The day of the jump loomed loud and clear and for once the long-range weather forecast was extremely accurate. It was a beautiful day, blue sky and not a cloud in sight.

We met Steve and Maggie at their residence on the river as arranged. Maggie appeared more excited than either Sally or I. Fred, Betty and Steve's daughter Joann joined us shortly after and we all set off for Netheravon where we were received with courtesy and enthusiasm.

After signing up the necessary paperwork we were given about fifteen minutes of ground training and introduced to our Tandem Instructors; 'Nige' Allen and an ex-Naval/Marine Parachutist called Phil Elston. Phil who was about six feet four tall announced in a most positive manner that he would take the 'Hot Blonde'. I was just about to jump into his lap and kiss him when I suddenly realised he meant Sally - not me! He turned to 'Nige' and said you can take the old geyser with the grey hair-in case you haven't guessed, that was me!

The jump was delayed for about one hour as the RAF stooged overhead with a Hercules. Finally at three o'clock; zero hour arrived. To my surprise Sally had continued to remain cool and showed no signs of her resolve weakening. We boarded the Cessna Sky

Van - Sally and 'Phil first, followed by 'Nige' and me and then, what appeared to be half the Parachute Regiment. I'm not sure how many got on board but now I know what a sardine feels like. I asked; 'Nige' how many they normally took off with. He grunted that sometimes they took off with eighteen Para's (He could only grunt because I was sitting on top of him). During the climb to height there was a lot of fun and laughter especially from Sally finding herself in an all-male environment. The Video camera men (Ryan Mancey and Gav Tuckley) would clamber over mountains of flesh to take photos of Sally and me giving us a cheeky grin and a 'thumbs up' (I think they were just trying to keep our morale up).

'Nige' pointed to his wrist altimeter, which indicated 12,000ft. The cabin door was rolled up. The lads in front of us (those that could reach) gave us the 'knuckle to knuckle' acknowledgement, followed by a 'thumbs up' and a big grin, they then left rapidly through the door as though they'd just heard that the NAAFI was giving away free beer. The pilot continued to climb and manoeuvre for a second run over the airfield - we were now at 13,000ft and the moment of truth had arrived. To get to the door we had to shuffle towards it on our bottoms strapped to our jump masters; a sort of; heel, bum, heel bum. Sally first, followed by yours truly. At this stage the noise of the slipstream made speech almost impossible but Sally never faltered, she took up the correct position in the door sill with her feet under the fuselage as briefed. The video camera man was now outside the aircraft holding onto a strut filming Sally in the door.



**Sally in mid flight**

The Tandem master gave three rocks and then they were gone - falling with all the aerodynamic properties of a house brick. Now it was my turn. We'd shuffled down the fuselage behind Sally (heel, bum, etc) until we were sat on the door sill.

Legs under the fuselage as briefed, head back and a grin to the camera man prior to departure. Steve Stephenson later remarked that it was a very toothy grin I gave the cameraman; however, with the slip stream trying to tear your face off I'm not sure what other type of grin you can give!



**Peter gets ready for the drop**

Three rocks in the door and we were away. We completed one somersault then stabilised and 'Nige' deployed the drogue. The initial acceleration for five second was the most exhilarating part of the fall after which you have reached terminal velocity. The strength of the slipstream is surprising and the buffeting you get is quite considerable. After taking up the stabilised attitude the first thing I became aware of was this sudden apparition of a grinning camera man (Ryan) immediately to my front with the lens the size of a toilet bowl jammed in the front of my face. I'd last seen him hanging on to a rail outside the door taking a video of me leaving the aircraft. He'd managed to catch us up during the first five seconds of the free fall! He then manoeuvred

around me taking videos from all angles. Meanwhile yours truly was desperately trying to grin and look nonchalant. The freefall part of the jump last 45-50seconds during which time you freefall just over a mile after which, 'Nige' pulled the rip cord and the canopy deployed, although it didn't jerk the fillings out of my teeth, it was certainly more vigorous than the static line jumps I'd previously experienced.

During the descent 'Nige' had trouble in disconnecting the two lower attachments points to my harness, which would have enabled me to hang more freely.



Peter in mid flight

However, this did not prevent me from observing the marvellous view and tranquillity during the descent. (As a pilot at these heights, I would normally have an engine in front or above me). The parachute descent under the canopy lasted approximately five minutes. This gives you plenty of time to look around and orientate yourself.

The landing, in flying parlance, was more of an arrival than a landing. This was mainly due to Nige' being unable to release the two lower attachment points which would have allowed me to get my body further forward. Consequently we landed like two bundles of firewood strapped together. The landing was quite hard; in fact when I got to my feet, the spire of Salisbury Cathedral was still wobbling. 'Nige' apologised for the arrival and stated that in sixteen years of Tandem jumping this was only the second time he'd been unable to release the lower attachments. As usual, before I could get my wits together and manufacture a 'Hollywood smile', our ubiquitous camera man (Ryan) was there, filming and firing questions asking me how it went and what were the best parts of the jump etc (I felt like saying that 'this bit where I'm stood firmly on the ground'). Sally had landed quite safely suffered no ill effects and was over the moon with excitement. More filming and congratulations by Steve, Maggie, Betty and Fred before we retired to Steve and Maggie's house to celebrate and have a bite to eat.

I would like to end by thanking Steve and Maggie for all the hard work and effort they put in not only on the Raffle but all the subsequent work put in by Steve in getting the jumps organised to suit our convenience. He seemed to be working non-stop on our behalf to make sure that all the problems were ironed out before we arrived to jump. I would also like to thank the Joint Services Parachute Centre for all the care and consideration they gave ensuring us it was a day to be remembered. It most certainly was. However would you please note, the 'Pink goggles' were not my choice



Peter and Sally back on terra firma

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## Edinburgh Branch Going Over the Edge

Forth Rail Bridge Abseil 2006

John Donaldson

Edinburgh Branch member Colin Reid, who resides at South Queensferry, first mentioned the possibility of an abseil from the Forth Rail Bridge, in aid of the charity Chest, Heart & Stroke Scotland, at our Branch Meeting on Sunday 16 July 2006. He said that the event would probably take place around April 2007.

When asked if anyone would want to take part in this death-defying leap from a perfectly stable bridge, a number of hands went up. I don't know if the beer had anything to do with it, or it just seemed that April was a long way off and it would be forgotten about, but it was agreed to discuss the event at a later date when Colin would have more details.

However, it was not long before telephone calls were received from Colin intimating that the abseil had been brought forward and would now take place on Sunday 15 October 2006.

Six volunteers were required for the abseil, but we could only muster five as Dougie Archibald was celebrating his 65th Birthday on a short cruise, Mick Walker was in the USA and Brian Earl was unable to participate. This left Colin Reid, Ronnie Drummond, Kim Panton, Jim Simpson and John Donaldson, whose ages total 354 years, to do the business. An advance payment of £20.00 per applicant was initially paid by Colin, which would be added to the total sponsorship money collected.

Detailed documentation, including a sponsorship form, was later received by each applicant informing them what was required of them on the day and the time they were due to abseil, which in our case was 1038hrs.

At 0945hrs on Sunday 15 October 2006, which was a rather misty morning, we met at the Hawes Inn, South Queensferry and thereafter headed for the Registration Point where we handed over our sponsorship money and collected our free C.H.S.S. "T" Shirt.

We were later called forward and fitted with the abseil harness, helmets and gloves and then had to walk from the Registration Point via an extremely steep stepped bank to the base of the bridge pillar and then up another set of steps constructed with scaffolding and on to the bridge. We were knackered by the time we got to that point.

We were met on the bridge and given instructions how to move along it to the abseil area. There were nylon ropes attached to the bridge and we had to connect the karabiner on our harness to the rope before moving off. The part of the bridge used for the abseil was actually under the span used by the trains and trains were crossing during the abseil.

On our arrival at the abseil area an instructor on how to abseil briefed us, and the ropes were attached to our respective harnesses. The most difficult part of the event was trying to get a leg over the guard rail and then hang in space 165' above the ground on a thin rope. With the left hand on the fixed part of the rope and the right hand gripping the running part of the rope all one had to do was to allow the rope to run through the hand and to raise and lower the right arm to control the rate of descent. I presume if you were left-handed the opposite would be the case. The rate of descent could also be controlled by the instructor should anything have gone wrong. All five of us managed to get down safely, some faster than others, and cheered on by friends and families. An exhilarating experience to say the least. We then collected our Certificate and receipt for sponsorship money from the Registration Point.

Afterwards we all moved swiftly to the Moorings Public House located at the other end of the town where Colin had arranged food and drink to be available for members and their families. John Kennedy, the publican and his wife Elaine laid on a splendid buffet, which was thoroughly enjoyed and greatly appreciated by all.

This was a great day out where we all achieved something we had never done before or ever-contemplated doing and raising in excess of £1,200.00 for a well-deserved charity.

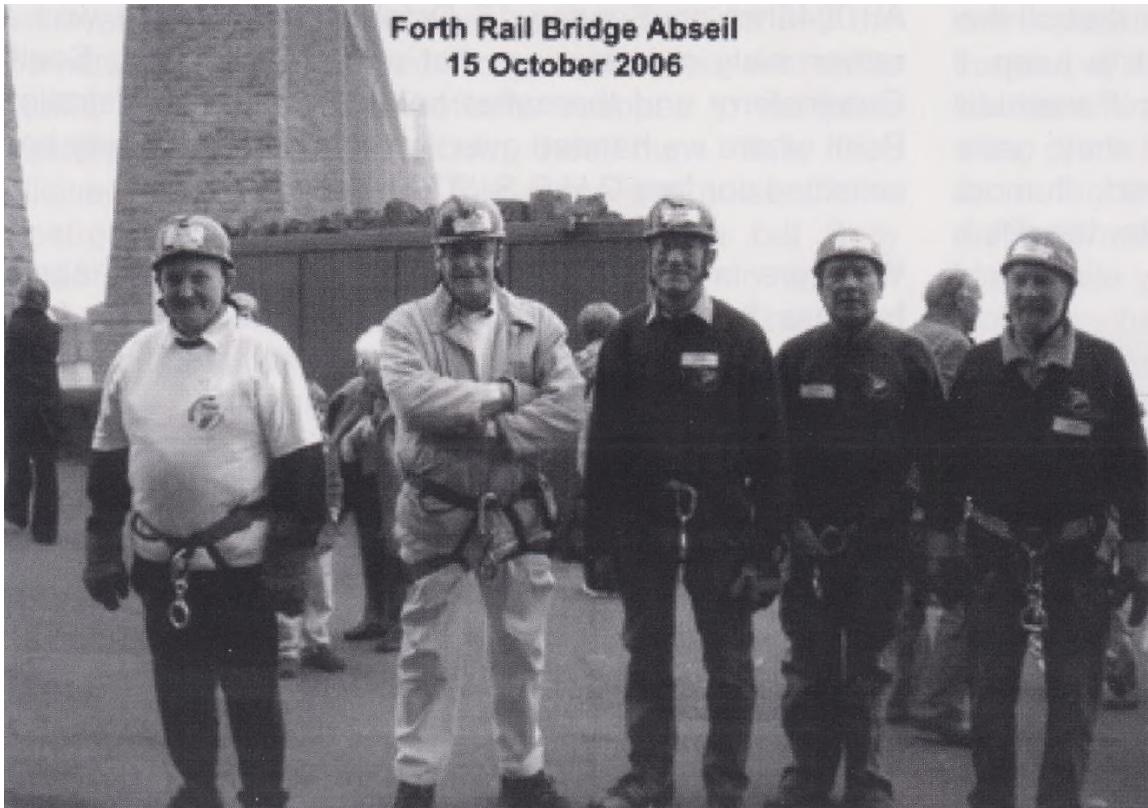
Well done Colin and Sandra for organising a great day.

The next abseil event from the Forth Rail Bridge takes place on Sunday 22 April 2007, should anyone be interested in joining us.

The video taken of the event by my son John was for private use only but when he edited it he thought it would be a great advert for the Airborne Engineers Association and included it on as well as the branch website :

[www.edinburgh-branch-airborne-engineers-association.co.uk](http://www.edinburgh-branch-airborne-engineers-association.co.uk)

**Forth Rail Bridge Abseil**  
**15 October 2006**



Jim Simpson, Colin Reid, John Donaldson, Kim Panton and Ronnie Drummond

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## Reunion 2006- The Evidence



Froth Beer, Phil Poulton, Ken Turk & Jim Simpson



John Elliott, George Jones & Eric Blenkinsop



Lorraine Stricketon, Bob Ferguson & Mike Robertson



Major Dick Brown with wife Mary



Presentation by Maj Gen Peter Wall CBE to Mrs Jan Chambers in appreciation for the many years running the Association shop



Eric Borlace & John (Geordie) McCarthy



Chris O'Donovan, Mike & Bridget Robertson & Marilyn O'Donovan



Mark (Lofty) Barron and partner enjoy a laugh



Lt Col Ian Hutchinson's presentation of the 'Fergie' Semple Golf trophy to Billy Morris; winner of the Golf Tournament



Nobby Clark, Tony Manley & Pat Fenton



Baz Henderson & John Hughes



John Moorehouse & Peter Smith (former 3 Para Sqn RE)



As holder of the 1<sup>st</sup> prize winning ticket in the Grand Raffle, Chairman Mick Humphries presents Sally Myatt with a certified invitation to a tandem 12,000ft parachute descent



Jeff Strickleton, Nobby Clark & Bob Ferguson



Edna Sullivan in the company of 'Smokey' Gibson



Stewart Clark, Steve Wildman, WO1 (RSM) Ian Murison & Steve Collins



Issy Leather leading the girls astray!



Just good friends!



At least the ladies have got something to smile about!



Leah Turk with Sylvia & Ken Roberts



But you said, "We never get our photo in the Journal"



Nice display of airborne ties!

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## 50th Anniversary Reunion Dinner 3 Para Bn Group

El Gamil 1956 Operation Musketeer Suez 1956

### Mr John Smith BEM

Thirteen ex members of 3 Troop 9 Independent Parachute Squadron R.E. attended two 50th Anniversary Dinners to Commemorate the Airborne Assault on to El Gamil Airfield, Port Said, Suez, on the 5th November 1956.

The first of the Anniversary Dinners was hosted by 3 Para Group (El Gamil 1956) on the 4th November 2006, in the WO's and Sgts Mess, Hammersley Barracks, Aldershot.

The group attendance totalled 178 persons all of whom were greeted with welcoming drinks in the Officers Mess; this was followed by " Beating The Retreat" by the band of the Parachute Regiment who gave a splendid display of musicianship despite the freezing cold night air. This was suitably rounded off by the bandmasters newly written composition " The El Gamil March" Superb Stuff and well worth purchasing upon release in a couple of months' time.

The formal dinner was held in the specially erected luxury appointed marquee situated beside the WO's & Sgts Mess. The evening was presided over by Major General M.J.H. Walsh CB CBE DSO DL. In all it was a splendid evening.

The second reunion was solely an ex 3 Troop 9 Independent Parachute Squadron R.E. gathering, held on the 5th November 2006 in the Royal Garrison Officers Club within Potters International Hotel Aldershot. Thirteen members plus wives totalling twenty-three persons assembled. We pored through photographs albums, reminisced, posed for photographs, then wined and dined our way through a superb three course carvery luncheon.

After the formal speeches, the toasts and the pleasure of receiving a letter from Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth in response to our message of Loyal Greetings to our Colonel in Chief, we sadly said our farewells and our trust in the lord some of us will be fit and able to attend the 60th Anniversary.

### Members who Attended

Lt. Col (Retd) P.H. Brazier R.E.

Col (Retd) J.R.M Hill R.E. & Mrs Jane Hill

John & Glenda Smith

Jack & Sally Braithwaite

Bert & Mary Flatters

Brian & Margaret Gibson

Brian & Doreen Hubbard

Barry & Kath Ladlow

Len Lennon

Jim & Renee O'Hagan

Peter Prynn

Alex Scott

Steve & Margaret Stephenson

Fred Gray (Archivist, Photographer & Historian)



L-R. Jack Braithwaite, Sandy Scott, Brian Hubbard, John Smith, Brian Gibson, Len Lennon, Barry Ladlow .  
seated: Peter Prynn, Steve Stephenson, Jim O'Hagan, Col "Jock" Brazier, Col John Hill, Bert Flatters

#### Appreciation

Our grateful thanks are extended to Fred Gray for patiently filming and recording the 3 Troop programme for historical records and individual members family albums. Much appreciated Fred.

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## 2 Troop Escapades

### Tom Gilks

I recently just read an article in the Sunday Mail about live WW2 mines being found at H.M.S Daedalus at Lee on Solent.

I think it was in 1957 that 2 troop were down there working on a new idea of sub assembling a bailey bridge behind the lines and then using helicopters lifted them on to site for full assembly. We spent several weeks down there practising and perfecting the operation ready for the big day when what seemed like hundreds of top bras from all over the world came to see us perform. The whole point of this letter is to tell you that we laid loads of explosives down all over the place to add to the affect, at the same time being strafed by navel jets at very low level. I cannot imagine what would have happened if it had set off one of those mines or in fact why it didn't.

I might also add that we were on the naval rum ration all the time we were there, needless to say a good time was had by all.

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## 9 Parachute Squadron RE

### Operation Highbrow

#### Lt Ross Wendover RE

I first met the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, The Light Infantry (2LI), on a CAST exercise in June this year. I rocked up with little experience or knowledge of CAST and was unsure as to what to expect. I met the CO and 2IC before being greeted by the rest of the junior Officers, a welcome relief. We dived straight into a Non Combatant Evacuation Operation planning scenario (an amazing coincidence with what was later to happen) and rolled through similar serials throughout the week. As Brigade Group Engineers (BGE) I worked on Questions 1&2 of the estimate and worked directly with the Intelligence Officer (IO) in order to produce the threat evaluation. Briefing to a room with 20 strangers all of captain rank and above is fairly daunting, when no doubt the last time was to 4 of your mate's on Royal Engineers Troop Commands Course (RETCC!) As BGE the ME is the break in and successful occupation of a seat at the 'bird table' during the planning phase! You have a lot to offer but are sometimes unappreciated by an unfamiliar audience. The CAST completed, I returned home and began to prepare for the move to Rock Barracks.

In July 2006, due to Israeli operations within Lebanon SLE was warned off to conduct a National Evacuation Operation (NEO) for British subjects from Lebanon. At this time 9 Para Sqn RE was providing Engr Sp to the SLE. I received the call on a Sunday afternoon. All we knew was that we were on 12 hours' notice to move from 1200, with a likely deployment to Cyprus for an SLE NEO. I would form part of the advance party with the OC. I threw together a 'battle-Bergen' with the aim of a very light role deployment and dug through the estimate to establish potential engineer tasks; meanwhile the rest of the Sqn were rushing around trying to establish a realistic troop ORBAT. Within 18 hours of the phone call I was manifesting kit through the Joint Air Movements Centre (JAMC) with 2 LI and all the other attached personnel. Almost like a scene out of 'Jarhead' with a mad rush of collecting kit, packing of weapons and vehicles, TV with Sky news broadcasts and busy Ops room facilitating the deployment.

#### Quick be-bus from the Chinook

I deployed to Cyprus as part of the Bn Tac group. Luckily, having already met the BG and being quite 'necky' I was well established in Bn HQ! The Ops cell was set up in the same building as Joint Task Force HQ as part of British Forces Cyprus. We were working in the joint environment with UKSF, RM, RN and elements of RAF. The BG deployed to Akrotiri Camp, Episkopi and mounted the NEO into Beirut to be referred to as Op Highbrow.



7 and 8 Pit of C Coy, 2LI, deployed forward from Cyprus to aid with the processing of persons from the Embassy and the Evacuation Handling Centre (EHC). The Lebanese Police formed a ring of (almost!) steel around Beirut port as EPs were brought forward. Meanwhile the JTFHQ and 2LI Ops room was a frenzy of planning including Commander Amphibious Task Group (CATG), RN, UKSF, SLE, RAF and all the other attached arms (signallers, medics, Geo).. Overall it was an amazing environment to be involved in.

#### Our air transport at Beirut airport



With 21 Engr Regt already on Ex LIONS SUN, they rapidly re-rolled to help with camp maintenance and processing of EPs in Cyprus, though there was very little specific Engr action required. Force protection and sustain ability was still a possibility if the troops were to remain on the ground in Beirut for any length of time. Within 5 days of deployment, almost 2000 EPs were evacuated using HMS GLOUCESTER, HMS BULWARK, HMS YORK, HMS ILLUSTRIOUS and CH47's.



**Evacuees boarding HMS York**

In summary, it was a short but very interesting deployment. The 2LI BG, having left OPTAG to deploy to Beirut are now busy re-tasking for a TELIC deployment, with the associated enormous G4 tail following! 23 Engr Regt (Air Assault) have soldiers on Op HERRICK, Op TELIC, and are preparing for a Tp task to support Ex GRAND PRIX in Kenya. Additionally we are the RE element to SLE, preparing to take on the Air Asslt Task Force and looking forward to reconstituting the Airborne Task Force in January. A very exciting Regiment to be involved with, my deployment on Op HIGHLIGHT typifies the fast natured requirements and opportunities that young Lieutenants (often doing the job of a Captain) are expected to embrace as Troop Commanders. The Regiment is brand new, dynamic and

raring to deploy; at the same time housed in arguably the best barracks in the country.

## Operation HERRICK IV

**Lt Mike Burton, 3 Tp Comd 9 Parachute Squadron RE.**

Mike deployed on Op HERRICK 4 as part of 51 Para Sqn Gp in support of 3 PARA BG operations throughout Helmand Province, returning mid tour (Aug 06) to undertake an in-service Degree Course at Southampton University.

In late April, 3Tp 9 Parachute Sqn, deployed to Afghanistan HELMAND province in close support to 3 PARA BG. Within a week of deploying we found ourselves launched to the Forward Operating Base Price in support to A Coy 3 Para.



**Safety in numbers!**

The first month and a half the troop were kept exceptionally busy with 1 Sect bouncing from FOB Price further North to Nowzad to support B Coy, acting as a Royal Engineer Search Team (REST). SSgt Wheeler was attached to the Path Finders for a 4-day patrol up the Sangin Valley that turned into an extremely eventful 17-day patrol involving skirmishes with the Taliban requiring American A10 air support assistance. A small recce party from 51 Para Sqn including Sgt Edwards, LCpl Brookes and LCpl Gilley were sent north into the Sangin valley. Again they found themselves in the thick of the action proving themselves to be extremely professionally.

Initially we began to improve the field defences of the camp, as the threat level was deemed to be reasonably high due to the proximity of the town of Gereshk. This involved building sangars, assisting EOD to clear the numerous UXO and building the inevitable HESCO walls. Within 2 weeks of our arrival C Coy relieved A Coy in place and we began to embed ourselves into their patrol matrix.

The patrols varied in their mission from dominating the ground in and around the town of Gereshk to carrying out detailed recce's on the police station, minefields and Vehicle Check Points (VCP's). The foot patrols varied in their intensity and duration with the troop clearing the venerable points before the main body of the patrol proceeded forward.

The conditions on the foot patrols were extreme to say the least, with temperatures reaching 45 degrees it became a task in itself to carry adequate water let alone the ECM, up-scaled ammunition, Bowman and other equipment you would associate with a 6 hour patrol.



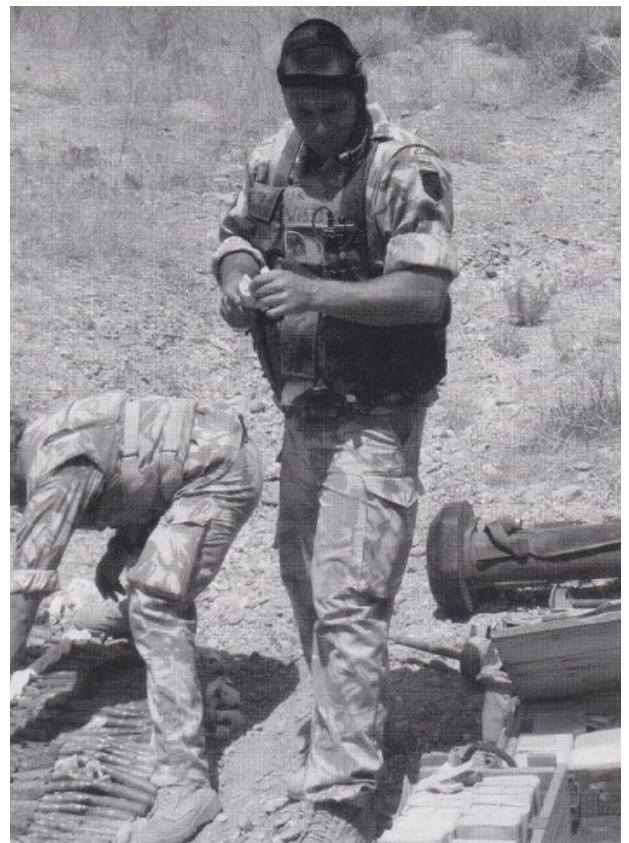
After a month 51 PARA Sqn arrived in theatre and relieved the troop at FOB Price and we returned back to Camp Bastion taking our well-earned R&R package. On our return from R&R the troop was launched North to MusaQualh to assist 7 Para RHA with the field defences of the Forward Operating Base, as the threat level in the north had increased dramatically with the deaths of 6 British soldiers in 3 and a half weeks.

#### To Battle by Air

Up to this point the tour has been extremely demanding and I can see in the months ahead it will only become more so. I wish the Tp and all of 51 Para Sqn all the best in the months to come.



**No shortage of fire power on this vehicle!**



**Clearing up some of the nasty stuff**

## Real Ale

**Baz Henderson (CAMRA Life Member)**

Real ale is the name for draught or bottled beer brewed from traditional ingredients, malt, hops, water and yeast, matured by secondary fermentation in the container from which it is dispensed, and served without the extraneous use of carbon dioxide or nitrogen via hand pumps. Real ale is also call Cask conditioned.

Real ale is unlike Keg, Nitro keg or Smooth beer in that it is a living thing. Keg, Nitro keg and Smooth beers are brewed in much the same way until the natural yeast is killed. The dead beer is then resurrected by means of chemicals and served chilled and bland through electric fonts (in the same way as British brewed lager).

Dave, our editor is lucky enough to live close to a champion real ale brewery, the Hogs Back Brewery in Tongham, which is nestled below the chalk ridge from which it takes its name. The brewery has just won the Champion Winter Beer of Britain (2005/6) with its draught version of A over T (A over T does not mean what you think X9) which means Aroma over Tongham. Draught beer versions usually have a lower ABV for session drinking, but A over T is primarily a bottled beer at ABV 9%, not to be drunk in pints.

Another beer from the Hogs Back Brewery is B.S.A. or Burma Star ale. A share of the profits of this ale go to the Burma Star Association. The father of a co-founder of the brewery took part in the Burma campaign and features on the label. Perhaps the local members of the Aldershot branch could have a “tasting” session at the brewery visitor’s centre and pass on their verdict of the many brews produced. CHEERS!

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## News from the Branches

### Aldershot

#### **Joe Stoddart MBE**

Since our last issue we have been a bit like Nomads as since the squadron left Aldershot we were left homeless as a Branch. However with different ideas being put up we decided the answer was a few recce's. Also, through Rick Mogg we asked his wife to contact Doris Potter from Potters International where we used to hold our Sunday lunches after our meetings, as she was an old school friend, and a task that John Smith had been pursuing this for some weeks. After an anxious wait a reply was received from Potters granting us the use of a room for our meeting, the ladies would be comfortable (with tea's & coffee's) downstairs and we would all meet up for lunch afterwards. So many thanks to Ann for her input. All's well that ends well.

Any visiting members are always welcome to join us. Phone Chairman or Secretary for details.

New Secretary. At the time of this going to press Betty Gray will once again become the New Secretary details. Email lworld.com Phone no. 01252 668339. We are sorry to see Don Doherty leave us but he decided that it was time to go. Don has worked tirelessly for the branch at no cost. He has always been on call, even carried the standard, attended all the functions and has proved himself to be an excellent communicator on the Internet. On behalf of the Branch I thank Don for all his hard work and efforts and although we are not losing him as a Branch Member hope he will continue to contribute as I know he will.



Hoe Down: August 5th was a night to remember it was Ruth Barrie's Birthday she in turn organised a Hoe Down at the village hall in Normandy. With a terrific band and a superb caller the dancing was well patronized. Anyone but everyone was on the floor square dancing at some time or another, coupled with good friends, adequate booze and a western meal of sausages and beans made it an evening to be remembered. Thanks to Ruth for the invites and the hard work put in by her family.

The next time we would all meet would be the annual BBQ.

Our BBQ this year was once again held at 65 Westover Road (Fred & Betty's house). The usual participated Tony & Dave on the cooking with Betty and the girls setting up doing coffee, sweets cleaning up laying out etc. how can we express our thanks for all the work they do. On the same fact the boys put up all the pagodas and set up the tables. Although we take it for granted that it will be all right on the day, we mustn't, everyone needs to help, but with that in mind we had a great day. Sadly missed was Major John Shave and John Mason hopefully we will see them at a future event.

A.G.M. 2006: Well we crossed the Ts' and dotted the Ts' and now we came to the event, we set up a reception area with Nicole Hicks and Smokey Gibson and waited. Despite our apprehensions everything went smoothly. I would like to thank the following committee members and wives for their input:

John Smith - Entertainments

Steve Stephenson - Raffle

Sylvia Stoddart and Trixie Doherty - for their sterling work selling raffle tickets (just over £1,000-00 worth)

Betty Gray - for the superb menus and place settings Tony Manley - for arranging the Gala Dinner seating (makes a change from cooking)

We had a superb evening and I won't dwell on it as a separate article is being written, but thanks from Aldershot to Frank Menzies Hearn and John Parker for the pipes and the Standard to be forefront of the occasion. I would like to thank all who attended and gave so generously to the charitable cause.

## Chatham

### Eric Blenkinsop

So here we are opening up our news at the July meeting. This was special because we had the RE Band in Concert in attendance but not by choice. Using a good level of ABI we commenced the meeting in a half circle in the bar and then when the concert finished we moved into the anteroom. So despite the confusion we had a most useful meeting.

This brought us to the Corps Memorial Weekend, which celebrated The 200th Anniversary of Brompton Barracks in the form of an Open Day. The display of RE equipment and activities on the day really was superb with a nice sprinkling of re-enactors through the ages not swamped by them like Arnhem. The RE Museum was open for free and the Corps did itself proud.

The Association was well represented by Billy Morris with tent, ably assisted by our Steve Collins and the two stalwarts Jim Rogers & Smokey Gibson. It is understood that they managed to recruit a few new members.

Managed to have a few words with Frank (Gunga) Tew who was down from Crewe for the day and acknowledged Hughie who was perambulating the barracks making sure that all was in order.

September meeting.

At this meeting a positive effort was made to firmly forward plan our branch events, so please annotate your diaries/calendars now if you think you may wish to attend. 2007.

John Rock Dinner - Saturday evening 23rd June.

This will be a formal occasion, suits dinner jackets if preferred, association tie, or bow tie, miniature medals as applicable. Ladies as always suitably dressed for the occasion.

If successful this will become an annual event on the nearest Saturday to the 24th June.

Full details for booking will be displayed in the April issue of the Journal.

BBQ A Saturday lunch time in August at Fort Clarence Rochester. The date to be notified later.

The 2006 AGM/Reunion in Southampton

On behalf of the attendees from the Chatham Branch our thanks to Joe Stoddart and his team for putting on such a splendid, well organised function. In particular the warm welcome from Gerry & Nicole Hicks and our own Smokey Gibson who officiated throughout Friday & Saturday.

Finally a big thank you to the Executive Committee for entrusting the branch with procuring the John Rock Bust and giving us the Green Light to push ahead, following the most generous support from the Aldershot Branch President Col Dennis Eagan.

## Yorkshire

### Bill Rudd MBE

A short note from the Yorkshire Branch, we are holding our own, after what has been a fairly quiet period since our last report in August.

John Parker our Association standard bearer along with Mat Newall, Joe Timberlake and friends attended the annual pilgrimage to Arnhem in September gone. The standard was most prominent at the various parades held over a period of three days, many thanks to John and boys for their efforts.

Our Association annual thrash, attended by members was a most enjoyable weekend in Southampton and we thank the Aldershot Branch for all their hard work, this ensured a most successful weekend. Future important dates for the calendar are our Xmas Dinner which will be held in the Unicorn Hotel on the 16th Dec 06. Our annual dinner is now confirmed for 31st March 07, this will be held in the WO's/ Sgt's Mess in Ripon. Finally our branch visit to Normandy in June is moving in the right direction, we hope to meet up with our Dutch friends as we did this year.

A little reminder to the many Association members who live within shooting distance of York, those who don't attend, we would ask you to make a big effort to support your Association and just as important the Yorkshire Branch. From all members of the Branch we wish our Association friends a Merry Xmas and Prosperous New Year.

## AEA Sports Club Running Section

### Billy Morris

#### Salisbury 5-4-3-2-1 Trail Marathon 13 Aug 2006

Last year I ran this race on my own, as my running partner Bob Chatterton was putting a roof on a house for someone. This year it was a 100% turnout of the AEASC running section. The above race is part of the Salisbury Fire Station challenge series in that you can run or walk over distances of 5,10, 20, 30, 40 km , and the marathon route that was 28 miles. The marathon route was the one that Bob and I entered it takes into account that you will count down during the race 5 rivers, 4 large hills, 3 large country estates, 2 castles and 1 cathedral "Salisbury" that you can't miss. We started at Salisbury Fire station near the 5 rivers leisure centre, in the morning prior to the start we bumped into Brig Ian McGill who came over and had a chat and wished us well, he was down to see one of his friends who was also in the marathon as well. The race got underway in near perfect conditions a little to hot, we both said that we would run together all the way, and that was the plan. Running along soaking in the scenery having the crack with other runners along the way made for an enjoyable Sunday. We could have gone faster and almost stopped for a pint at one of the checkpoints in a pub in a village. But it was a good day and not a drama. The last part of the race takes you through the cathedral grounds and through the city centre, Due to the hot weather, Bob had taken off his top to prevent runner's nipple, and load of Americans with camera's had a field day. A comfortable days run we crossed the line in 4 hrs 35 minutes. Might do the walking route next year and take in some of the pub's we passed along the way. Any one fancies it give us a call?

#### Snowdonia Marathon 29 Oct 06

The weekend before the Snowdonia marathon was spent having a ball at the AGM in Southampton, and having a bit of luck on the golf course. On the way down to the AGM I stopped at Bob's house in Basingstoke for a quick brew, and to let the traffic die down on the M3 South. Bob had bad news and was not looking to well, He had to tell me that he had to pull out of next week's marathon due to ill health and being run down. I must say he did not look the same man as the shirtless airborne warrior striding through Salisbury back in Aug.

No problems I said, but I will see you for the Grim in Aldershot in Dec, a big yes, and I went on my way. During the Sat night I was talking to Steve Collins about Bob and his sorry state, " I know a bloke who will be up for it", Mickey Mooney the Sqn chippie who made my wooden plaque, he will do it. The next minute I was handed a mobile phone and was talking to this poor chap, who I feel was smooth talked into running the hardest marathon in UK the following week, by the silver-tongued devil Collins.

A couple of calls that week and Mickey was ready and up for the challenge in more ways than one. He had never run a marathon before, and had not done any training, apart from his own high standard whilst on his A1 chippie course at Chatham. It was a bonus that Mickey lives in Aldershot so Sat morning I picked him up and we drove to North Wales. Talking on the way, as I had never met the man and with 23 years difference in age, conversation was pretty one way. The road trip passed and we found ourselves at Matt Wells Outlook Expeditions Centre, the place Bob and I stayed in last year, but this time we had to sleep in my tent, as Matt had a party of school kids from Liverpool or that area on a weekend adventure training.

We drove down to the race reception centre and booked in and collected our timing chips to tie on your trainer, it records your time at the start of the race and when you cross the line at the finish. A massive bag of chicken and chips was the pre-race evening meal sat back at the tent, I could not believe the weather calm, warm Oct evening sat outside on camp chairs, oh yes with the kids 12-15 year olds running around behind us playing chase.

Sunday morning up and ready for the day's marathon, perfect weather, not like last year, we walked to the start and met up with Taff Adams another Ex 9 Sqn warrior who was the first Brit over the line in this year's Marathon Des Sables, Airborne! A massive big up to Taff for that one. The start was at Nant Peris and then went straight up the Llanberis Pass to Pen-y-Pass hotel and then a long downhill section of 8.5 miles down to Beddgelert; Mickey had long left me after about 1 mile only to be expected.

It was going OK for me until I got around 14 miles, the half marathon that I had done on the Wednesday before had come back to haunt me.

I had wanted to get in that run on the Sunday after the AGM but needed sleep. Had to pull out a few stops and after a big chunk of mars bar at the next feed station pulled myself together. With the black eyed peas in my ears from my wife's i pod I started to get back in it, tabbed up the last 2.5 miles and then over the top and a steep downhill grass section off the mountain with a 2 mile run through Llanberis to the finish line. As I passed over the line Mickey was stretching off just passed the finishing line. He told me he had this personal battle with some 'hat' over the last mile and had to keep up the tradition, but now cramp was his down fall. I have to take off my beret to LCpl Mickey Moonie and the effort he put in to finish. The hardest marathon in UK and his first, Airborne! Oh yes the times not as good for me this year, Taff Adams 3:33:39. Mickey Mooney 4:04:52. Billy Morris 4:05:54

Roll on next year -anyone care to join us?

## Mickey & Billy post-race



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## Mad Men's Army

**Harry Barnsley**

I have yet to see a dafter programme on the 'guts ache box' than "Bad Lads' Army" which is currently being broadcast on ITV1. It is even worse than "Love Island" and I thought the bottom of the barrel had been reached with that! I switched on to ITV1 one Tuesday evening at 9.00 p.m. and have never witnessed such a load of codswallop in my life.

It is a good job the person who dreamed up the script for that had no brains; if he had he would be dangerous. First and foremost the drill sergeant had his beret drawn down over his left ear with the cap badge over the right eye, so I assume he was French; then the Union Flag was flying upside down and it could hardly be described as a family programme with the excessive use of filth, which, even in the wartime army would have given the Padre a stroke.

The treatment was supposed to increase their mental strength and boost their willpower. By being subjected to that they would become as non-compos mentis as the mindless idiots who were supposed to be training them. Such rubbish is bound to be detrimental and off-putting to potential volunteers. I wonder why the MOD takes no action?

I did all my training for the Airborne forces during hostilities. I admit it was tough, but necessary, and I will concede that our instructors had a fair vocabulary of bad language, but nothing like what was portrayed in that idiotic charade. It is not fit to be broadcast and I am sure many old sweats will think the same.

That type of recruit is not wanted anyway

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## Arnhem 2006

### John Parker

With Bill Rudd, due to unforeseen circumstances having to cancel his visit to Arnhem this year, I decided to organise a trip with three colleagues from the Blackpool PRA, Joe Timberlake (AEA), Lauri Long (AEA) and Alf Wyatt (PRA). Leaving Blackpool on the 14th September and travelling via Hull to Rotterdam we arrived at our campsite in the vicinity of Arnhem just after lunch the following day. Having unloaded our gear into the fairly spacious chalet we made ourselves at home. Dutch friend, Edd Vanderlaan later joined us, he had been kind enough to arrange our accommodation and transport needs, plus providing us with a selection of 'goodies'.

In the early evening we went into Arnhem to the "Frost Plaza" and attended the 'silent tribute' and church service, returning back to the chalet for an evening meal and a 'few' drinks. As Edd was sharing our accommodation for the weekend we sat up 'til the early hours nattering and sinking one or two more beers.

Ginkel Heath was our port of call on Saturday to watch the Para Drop and to attend the ceremony where I proudly carried the Association Standard. We later moved across the river to Driel for the Polish memorial unveiling in honour of the Polish Para Brigade. The Polish General's great grandson conducted the unveiling ceremony. Once again, the AEA Standard was on display. From the Polish memorial we moved on to the 'Engineers' monument at Driel, which was well attended by junior Royal Engineer officers. As I carried the only 'standard' I gave the salute and we later laid a wreath.

Meeting up with Matt Newall on Sunday morning in Oosterbeek we attended the service in the cemetery and later visited the re-supply ceremony. Prior to our departure on Monday we spent some time in the museum before setting off back to England.

As always, a moving and memorable trip - needless to say, a good time was had by all.

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## Interview with Australia's Oldest Active Skydiver



In a recent edition of the "Australian Skydiver Magazine" an interview was conducted with our Association member Jim Brierley.

Conducting the interview was Ian (Robbo) Robertson who posed a series of questions to Jim.

Q. When and where did you do your first parachute jump and when did you start jumping in Australia?

A. My last military jump was in 1944. My first wife died in 1982 and in 1983 decided to become a skydiver. I started at Labertouche under Claude Gillard. Several jumps and accidents later Claude relocated to Pakenham and I was absorbed into the Commando Skydivers. I have now amassed a total of a few jumps short of 2800.

Q. Any regrets, missed opportunities, things you'd rather not have happened insofar as skydiving is concerned?

A. Skydiving has given me many years of pleasure and I hope that it will continue to be regarded as a sport for young and old. I would have liked to have jumped from 35,000 ft and been part of the group creating a new Australian record. I would have liked to be skilled enough to be involved in a new POP formation record. I have jumped out of many different types of aircraft, gliders and balloons but not yet out of a 727. That would be fun.

What the Tooradin jumpers have to say about Jim: He's on every load that he can get on, rain, hail or shine. He may be an old bugger, but he's always there pushing the plane in the hangar at the end of the day while others are too busy drinking.

He rings the DZ every weekend to check the weather before coming down (lives an hour away on Phillip Island) and even if it's bad he comes down anyway.

He takes about 5 minutes to get up, turn around and get into exit position in the Cessna these days, so you have to spot short.

He's an absolute gentleman and an outrageous flirt but does it with such class that all the women love him.

DZ safety officers are scared of him!

So are we talking of some young upstart? No, Jim's credentials are as follows:

Born 1924 in Lahore, Pakistan

Joined the British army as a boy soldier (Royal Engineers) 1939

Completed his parachute course at Kabrit, Egypt in 1942. Became a Parachute Engineer.

Served in Middle East, North Africa and Central Mediterranean finishing up in Italy at the end of WW2 Returned to the UK in 1945. The Squadron was disbanded and Jim was transferred to East Africa. Purchased his release from the army in 1948.



**Gordon Turner, Pete Hannaford, Jim Brierley, Norm Hocking & Graham Burgess**

Moved to Uganda for a construction company in 1949 and later joined British Colonial Service.

Left for Australia in 1963 some months after Uganda became independent.

First job in Australia was with the ABC as an announcer. Second job with Monash University working as an assistant to the Buildings Officer developing the new campus.

Joined Australian Wool board as Property Director - retired in 1985.

Congratulations Jim, the sky is obviously your playground!

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## Members of the Executive Committee



**President – Bill Rudd**



**Chairman – Mick Humphries**



**Treasurer – Major Dick Brown**



**Secretary – Mick Leather**

## Membership Report

### Steve "Billy" Morris MSM - Membership Secretary

It has been a good year for new members joining our ranks, but next year I hope to do even better by focusing on the Airborne units that have been formed as part of 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Asslt) plus the TA Sapper unit. Our total membership (less those departed) is 1262 as at 4 November 2006. There are hundreds of former airborne sappers who still have not heard of our existence - spread the word and assist in my quest for more members.

**We welcome to the "Airborne Engineers Association" the following new members:**

Mark Barron	9 Para Sqn RE	1988- 1993
Mark Swanton	9 Para Sqn RE	1986- 1989
Christopher Price (Capt)	9 Para Sqn RE	2006 - still serving
James Moore (Lt)	9 Para Sqn RE	2006 - still serving
Peter Guilfoyle	131 Para Engr Regt	1962- 1968
Robert Van Tai	51 Para Sqn RE	2003 - still serving
Dave Pace	9 Indep Para Sqn RE	1974- 1978
Alan Morrison	9 Indep Para Sqn RE	1971 - 1975
Peter Prynn	9 Indep Para Sqn RE	1952-1956
John Fisher	9 Para Sqn / 51 Para Sqn / 49 EOD	1993-2006
Robert Copsey	9 Para Sqn RE	1993-1995
Michael Mooney	9 Para Sqn RE	2002 - still serving
Ian Rathbone	9 Para Sqn RE	1999 - still serving

**Do you remember these characters?**



Photo taken in Cyprus when the Sqn were on their way back from Jordon in 1958 - your starter - Alfie McLean is 2nd from the left

## Association Shop

Ray Coleman

Description	Price	P&P (UK Post Rate)
<b>Ties</b>		
Association Ties (Pegasus logo)	£15.00	£1.00
Anniversary Ties (Wings & Pegasus logo)	£15.00	£1.00
9 Para Sqn Ties (Wings logo)	£15.00	£1.00
Bow Ties (Pegasus & wings logo)	£9.50	£1.00
<b>Badges</b>		
Association Blazer Badges	£14.00	£1.00
Lapel Wings - Blue Enamel S/C	£3.50	£1.00
<b>Clothing</b>		
Association Jumpers (sizes 38 - 48) Maroon or Blue with Pegasus logo embroidered 'Airborne Engineers'	£25.00	£3.10
Association Sweatshirts - Maroon with blue logo - Small/med/lge or X large	£16.50	£3.10
Association Polo Shirts - Fred Perry style - Maroon or blue with Pegasus logo - small/med/lge or Xlge	£15.50	£2.50
Association 'T' Shirts - Maroon with logo - small/med/lge/Xlge	£9.00	£1.80
Association Shower proof Maroon Fleece -with embroidered 'Airborne Engineers' logo - Med/Lge/Xlge	£28.00	£3.00
Baseball Cap (in blue or maroon) - with combined Pegasus & Wings crest	£7.00	£1.00
<b>Miscellaneous</b>		
Association Shield	£18.00	£1.00
"The 9th "(1787 - 1960) by the late Tom Purves	£7.00	£3.80
Association Cuff Links (slightly smaller than lapel badge)	£8.50	£1.60
Silk Cravats (Wings & Pegasus logo)	£17.50	£1.00
Association Cummerbunds (Wings & Pegasus logo)	£17.50	£1.00
Ladies Association long Polyester Scarves (Pegasus logo)	£15.00	£1.00

## Obituaries

**Maj Sid Rooth MBE** former Officer Commanding 9 Indep Para Sqn RE passed away 9 June 2006. Funeral held in home town of Hunstanton on 20th June 2006.

### **Frederick Gordon (Bill) Hill**

Having suffered Alzheimer disease the past 2 years Bill passed away peacefully on 11th September 2006. Following his 12 years as a regular in the R.A.F on his discharge he became a T.A. soldier in the 16th, 18th, 301 Para's and finally in the 23rd S.A.S. His service life gave him so many wonderful years and he was always immensely proud of his service to his country. Many people dread the word Alzheimer' but Bill, during his illness became very much the old soldier again and kept all around him greatly amused with his tales and anecdotes. Everyone that came along to tend his needs received a salute from him (Back ramrod straight despite being wheelchair bound) and he expected salutes to be returned. Latterly his conversations were all about the military exercises he was about to embark on and all visitors were expected to be ready for action. His red beret was placed proudly atop his Union Jack draped coffin as he embarked on his final journey He will be dreadfully missed by his wife Pam, and his family in Australia, stepdaughter Ruth and his 5 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren.

### **Maurice Sefton Knight** died 12th May 2006

Maurice was one of five brothers.

In 1939 he joined to Territorial Army 207 Squadron Royal Engineers with some of his friends. He was stationed at Stockton House and then Bulford and his first duty was to sandbag Frome Victoria Hospital.

He later volunteered for the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division (9 Field Company Royal Engineers) and saw action in North Africa and Salerno, Italy clearing mines from the beaches.

Later he went to Arnhem as a glider-borne troop, where he was wounded. He finished his war service in Stavanger, Norway, diffusing and lifting mines.

It was while he was home on leave that he met his wife Eileen and the married in 1943 and went on to have 2 children, Sefton and Michael.

In 1964 Maurice set up a heating company known as Frome Heating Specialists and was also a member of the town council at this time.

He will be greatly missed by family, friends and colleagues.

**Arthur Walton** died in September 2006. He was a veteran of the Bruneval landing where F/Sgt Cox RAF dismantled the German Radar equipment and brought it back to the UK. The sappers at Bruneval also handled mines and explosives. At the time of his passing Arthur was aged 88 years and his funeral was held in Alverton, South Avon on 2nd October.

### **Last Post**

**Eric Skentelberry** in-pensioner at the Chelsea Hospital, passed away 23 October 2006.

**Roy Kirk** - comrade of John Hollis from their days in Palestine passed away early November 2006.

**Harry Thompson** former member 9 Field Company passed away 24 September 2005

**Walter Bowyer** passed away in July 2006

**John Cable** a former member of 1st Para Sqn RE serving in Norway and later with 9 Airborne Sqn RE served in Palestine, passed away on 29 July 2006. His service period was from 1944 -1948.

**Trevor Simmons** passed away 14th July 2006

**AJ Evans** passed away 19 August 2006

**We Will Remember Them**