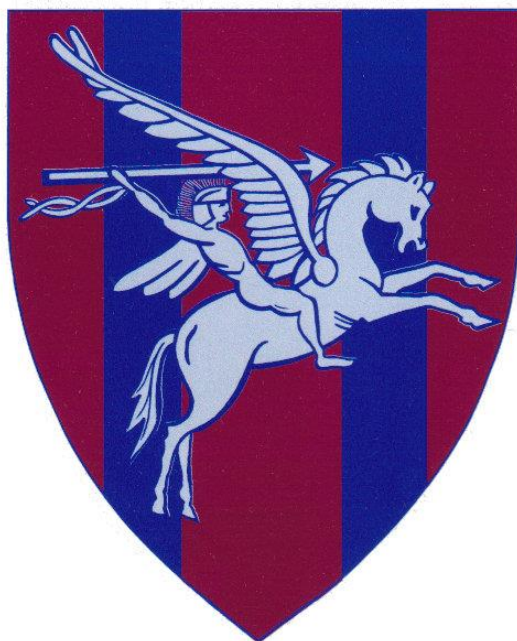


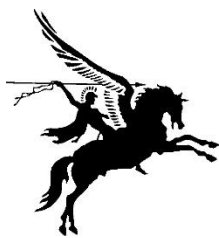


THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS JOURNAL



**Airborne Engineers Association
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The Airborne Engineer

August 2007 Issue No. 22

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Publication Deadline - December 2007 Edition

Members submitting material for publication in the December 2007 edition of the Journal are advised that the closing date will be Wednesday 14th November **(Branch Secretaries please NOTE!)** Kindly ensure that you forward your articles direct to the editor - address as shown above.

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Chairman's Address

Mick Humphries

Well what a busy few months we have all had, it seems that we have not had a free weekend for many months. During June Chris and myself had the pleasure of attending several functions many in relation to the 25th Anniversary of the Falklands War. I am sure that many of you would have seen Louis in the front row at Horse guards on TV. That was an incredible and emotional day for all of us that attended it was good to bump into so many people I hadn't seen for 25 years. The following week we attended a John Rock/Falklands Dinner in Chatham. I would like to thank Eric Blenkinsop and his team for an excellent evening, in very good company.

The last weekend in June was spent with 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Assault) celebrating the Freedom of Woodbridge. We were entertained and hosted exceptionally well by the Regiment and we extend a sincere vote of thanks to the Commanding Officer, Lt Col Hutchinson and in particular to WO1 (RSM) Ian Murison (photographs appear on pages 20&21).

Unfortunately I was unable to attend the dedication of the Airborne Sapper Bench in Normandy, but I have had many reports that it was a very good trip and successful event. Can I put on record a big thank you to John Mason for all of the hard work that he put into this project, there is no doubt that it would not have happened had he not undertaken the work, thank you John.

Looking forward, can I remind you all to get booked in for Harrogate. Our President Bill Rudd tells me that the hotel is filling up fast so it is important to book now. This will be a fantastic weekend and the committee has decided that this year's charity to benefit from the AGM weekend will be "Combat Stress". I would therefore request to all attendees that they bring along a suitable raffle prize so that we can once again raise a substantial sum of money for this worthy cause.

Can I lastly say a fond farewell to Lt Col Ian Hutchinson who is leaving 23 Air Assault Regiment in the Autumn. He is unsure where his next job will be as he has been rewarded with 6 months in a sandy place after leaving the Regiment. Ian has been very supportive of the AEA during his 2 years in command and we wish him well for the future.

Notice of Annual General Meeting

The 2007 AGM of The Airborne Engineers Association will take place at The Cairn Hotel Harrogate on Saturday 3rd November commencing at 10:00 am. At the time of going to press all members of the Executive and Advisory committee have indicated that they are willing to remain in office for a further year. There are no nominations for new members of either committee. There is only 1 proposed amendment to the constitution; this will be the introduction of a president's commendation. The Committee has agreed the principals of this amendment and final wording will be given to members prior to a vote at the AGM.

AGM/Reunion 2- 4 November 2007

Bill Rudd MBE

The following is a progress update on our Annual Reunion Weekend in Harrogate on the dates shown above. Harrogate is ideally located within 4 miles of the A1/M1 from the North and South. Main rail and bus stations are ideally situated in the town centre with regular services from York / Leeds every 20 minutes. Leeds airport is only 30 minutes' drive to the centre of Harrogate.

In general Harrogate is a thriving Spa town with an abundance of shops, bars and cafes and restaurants including the world famous 'Betty's Tea Shop which is a must for a visit.

The Cairn Hotel - This is one of the oldest hotels in Harrogate, it is pre Victorian, which has been carefully modernised but still retaining its old world charm. It's located within 5 minutes' walk from the centre of town and there is a bus stop outside the hotel for the not so fit!

To date 140 members, wives and friends have confirmed bookings; this figure does not include Gala Dinner only bookings. Please note there is no extra cost for single accommodation but these rooms are limited, don't miss out get booked in now!

A 50-seat coach has now been booked at no cost for those wishing to see our lovely Yorkshire Dales. This will include a tour of the Emmerdale Farm countryside, with a visit to the Woolpack Inn (if open). The trip will depart on Saturday morning at approx. 1000hrs. The first 50 seats booked (booking form) will take priority.

The Golf competition will now be held on the Friday afternoon - contact John Hughes for more information on 01482 666140. The event will be held at the Ripon Golf Club.

The AGM & OGM will commence at approx. 1000 hrs on Saturday. Lastly do not forget your raffle prize (wrapped if possible). It is the Yorkshire Branch intentions to ensure that all attending have a most informal and enjoyable weekend.

Time is running out, so to avoid disappointment, get your bookings in now please.

Further bookings forms are available from Bill Rudd on 01765 607898.

Rogues Gallery



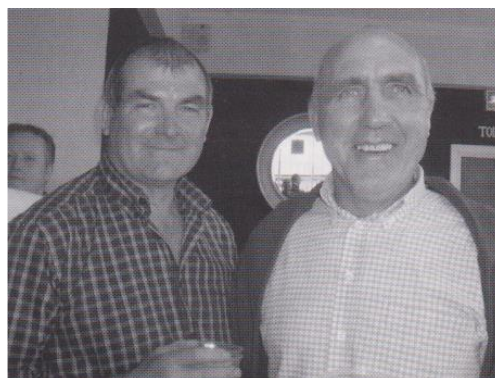
Chalkie' White, Steve Ainley, Cas Cassterton & Ginge Shipway - Bessbrook, N, Ireland 1974



Dressed to 'kill' or is it 'kilt' Clog Cloughton with Sam Hewitt & dad Dennis



Bob (hello sailor) Kennedy aboard his recent acquisition



**Roger Mockford & Paddy Denning
Twickenham - May 2007**



**Ray Coleman, George Barrett, Brian Care & Tom Carpenter
Portsmouth & Southsea Para Spectacular - 7th July 2007**



**Nobody's stealing my man! Rock barracks Sgts' Mess
social evening - 30 June 2007**

Cpl Mick Melia

Mick Melia served as a section commander in 2 Troop, 9 Para Sqn from 1980 to 1982. Mick left Aldershot in early 1982 to return to 59 Commando in Plymouth. Mick deployed on Op Corporate (Falklands Conflict) with recce troop 59 and was killed in action during the battle for Goose Green on 28th May 1982. At the end of the campaign Mick's name was not included on the Airborne Forces memorial in Aldershot Military Cemetery. It seemed to many people that this was an injustice as he was an airborne soldier and had died while supporting 2 Para. Happily we can now report that thanks to the efforts of Freddie Kemp and WOI (GSM) John Ferry, Mick's name is now on the memorial. The association was happy to pay for the work to be carried out.

A Nostalgic Return to the Oman!

John (Indiana Geordie) Thompson

In my last article I left you all on the remote island of Socotra 500 kilometres south of Yemen in the Indian Ocean. Since then I have run a further expedition to the island and found my main target and identified her. She was carrying a cargo of 350 tons of copper ingots and Chinese porcelain. To date we recovered around 4 tons of copper but no porcelain. We now believe we have been looking on the wrong side of the reef. We have put this one to bed at present but with world prices of copper going through the ceiling; we will return.

My research on the island of Socotra has led me to a much bigger prize in the marine archaeological world. In the last twelve months I have run two very successful expeditions to the remote islands off Oman. In fact the Omanis are so excited with our finds that they paid for the expedition in March of 2007.

My story really begins on the island of Bahrain in 1961/62 when I was with 3 Troop attached to the 3rd Battalion Parachute Regiment. The Middle East had become a boiling point. With the British interests in the oil fields it was imperative to have a defence force in the area. Hence, the reason for the military being there in Bahrain. In our first tour we lay the base foundations for the camp at Hamala. I'm sure this will cause controversy amongst the Squadron and even the Battalions. They all say they built Hamala. In fact every troop had a very large input in the construction! Would you believe there is a very large brass plaque at the main entrance to Hamala stating built by the 1st Parachute Battalion! On another nostalgic return visit in 1976 I went to see the camp and was confronted by the brass plate. I tried to unscrew it with my Swiss penknife only to be put inside by the Bahrain police. I was then released after explaining the situation to a Scots guy who was a Captain in the police.

Back to the main story! There was a lot of anti-British sentiment after the Suez debacle and international politics was in turmoil. I must state however that the guys who went in to do the business, especially the elements of the Squadron did an amazing job. However it was a political nightmare. After the British pulled out of Egypt, Nasser the then President of Egypt turned to the Soviet Union for support. This started the beginning of communist insurgency in the region.

In the Oman the Sultan supported by the British was a despot. His answer to problems was to march his troops into the mountains and shoot as many as possible and then throw explosive down the village wells. Water is the worth more than gold in some areas. Some of the mountain tribes turned to the communists for support! One tribe in the north of Oman became a threat to the Sultan. They were located in the mountains and their stronghold was on top of Jebel Akhdar, the largest mountain in the country at 7000' feet high.

The SAS, who had just finished a successful long campaign in the jungles of Malaya, were on their way back to UK when they were diverted to Oman. Or I should say around a squadron of them. Jebel Akhdar, translated from the Arabic meaning "Green Mountain" had been a stronghold for over a thousand years and had never been conquered. The SAS were given the task of climbing the sheer face of the mountain, to engage a very fierce and tough fighting force. They were successful in their task after a period of three months and suppressed a major uprising unlike the long protracted Dhofar war that happened later in the southern mountains of Oman.

We had been in Bahrain for around five months, every day after parade, climbing into our three-ton truck, to face a long arduous day in the unrelenting heat of the Middle East working on Hamala camp. Our only social life was a very small bar in the camp of Jufair where we were based. Normally we would drink ourselves blotto, singing the same old songs and telling the same old stories. It was quite amazing really. Where in the world would they get a workforce so easily pleased?

I remember being told that some of us were going on an Omex patrol in the mountains of Oman. We frequently invited guys down from 3 Para who had told us about going on this type of patrol. I was looking forward to getting away from the humdrum life of the camp construction and doing what I was best at, soldiering!

Seven of us were selected from the Troop as I remember? Myself, Bill Rudd, Ben Guest, Biddy MacMillan, Sammy (The Bin) Clyde, Moss Metcalf, Willy Willa and the Troop Commander, perhaps there were more my memory fails sometimes!. We flew to the small RAF base in Bait Al Falajh. We were then transported by truck deep into the mountains of Oman. The Trucial Oman Scouts policed the area at that time. In fact a mercenary force of Baluchistanis with British Officers. After a very long journey we arrived at a place called Whadi Bid Bid, a Trucial Oman Scout camp based high in the mountains. We were given an area within the camp around a small but very deep pool. In no time were we leaping into the cooling water only to be jumping out quickly. There were fish in there that took a bite out of you.

After cleaning up and our first meal for a while we received a briefing from the Commanding Officer of the Scouts. A very tall gentleman, who actually came from Inverness. Of course MacMillan knew him. This peed me off because we could be deep in the desert or in the jungle and he would meet someone from Inverness.

The Commanding officer told us that there had been a drought for three months and all the known water holes had dried up. "Stay in the Whadis and on no account climb the mountains!" he stated! The following day we were trucked in so far, then we set off on foot on patrol. The mountains of the Oman are stark and pitiless but have an intoxicating beauty. I'm sure in my genes or DNA there is a mountain man. I am always very comfortable looking down on the earth. Our Baluchi guide was very enthusiastic and kept looking back smiling all the time, giving the thumbs up salute. Soon the relentless sun was beating down on our heads. Water was very strictly being rationed. We slowly wended our way through endless Whadis, looking, turning, and watching. More a show of strength than anything, but still with fingers poised on the triggers of the old SLR.

In the distance we saw the overwhelming site of Jebel Akhadar. In no time we arrived at the base of a very formidable mountain. Our Troop officer then made quite an amazing statement. " We are going to the top!" he pointed to the top and the Baluchi guide started to shake his head. " No. No " he replied, "You will die." He immediately took off all his heavy gear and kept his belt with water bottles giving us a look of exasperation. We looked at each other and shrugged our shoulders and hitched up our very heavy backpacks. Soon we were moving slowly up an old goat track, drenched in sweat. It was an extremely long and hard toil to the top, which took all of the day. All the booze of the many months of hard drinking in Bahrain had gone in one day. To say the least some of us were beginning to wilt. The Jebel had so many false crests and we were not marching fit after weeks and weeks working on the camp in Bahrain. We finally reached the main plateau to see an amazing site of mountains stretching hundreds of miles. Our Troop, commander said, "We will stay overnight." The Baluchi replied, "You will be dead by tomorrow it is freezing up here at night." Our Troop Commander made a very reluctant decision and said, "Let's go down!"

By this time Moss Metcalfe who is a very big guy was near collapse. The Troop Commander told Sammy Clyde and Biddy Macmillan to head down to see if they could bring back water with the Baluchi guide. They headed down before us. I had run out of water and gave Moss Metcalfe the juice from my tin of carrots. We then started slowly downwards. At one stage Metcalfe's eyes had rolled and all I could see was the whites of his eyes. I dragged him, pulled him and at one stage nearly threw my rifle away. That's how bad it was. About two thirds of the way down, we heard a shout. It was the Baluchi guide with a few water bottles. Soon we were replenished and Moss Metcalfe was back on his feet. We finally met Sam and Biddy at a very small water hole. We used our mess tins to slowly bring the brackish brown water to the surface and made endless cups of tea. Being who we were, part of probably the best unit in the British army, or perhaps the world, we were soon replenished and back on patrol.

We came down a long Whadi into a much smaller Whadi. Wow it was an oasis amongst the hostile mountains with palm trees and a small stream. The young Sheik came smiling to meet us shaking all our hands. He took us into his walled garden and gave us Pau Pau fruit. I had never seen it before. It was very juicy and soon the juice was running down our now very happy smiling faces. He invited us inside and gave us water so cold it was almost undrinkable. We then sat down to probably one of the best meals in my life. He had killed a goat in our honour! The Troop Officer had the honour of eating the eyes. "He said, " I know the etiquette of these people so be careful and do what I do! He promptly picked up the finger bowl which had been placed in front of us and drank his!" The young Sheik looked at me. I smiled and shrugged my shoulders.

After the meal the Sheik took me by my hand and showed me a gas-operated fridge he had. He pointed to the back where there was the kite mark of the British Standards Institute. He smilingly said "Tumam" meaning very good in Arabic. I felt so proud!



Ben Guest, Josh Wills, Biddy MacMillan, Sammy Clyde, John (Tommo) Thompson & Bill Rudd

We carried on with our patrol and after many days of Whadi bashing we ended up back at Bait Al Falajh. Our Troop Officer promptly disappeared and an RAF Sergeant confronted us. This guy was tremendous, he put on an enormous pot of stew and got out bottles of beer. Three hours later we

were suitably fed and watered when the Troop Officer returned. He took one look and in typical officers under statement said "You are having it good!" Ben Guest threw something at him and he left.

The following day we had a few beers in their RAF corporals' mess. I'm not sure where I went to but some of the guys said they had been invited to a beach barbecue. Ben Guest got hold of a 4 ton truck and off they went. They returned later telling us Ben had hit one of the cannons placed either side of road near the fort of Bait Al Falajh. The following day Ben went on a charge and received a severe warning. The following day we flew out of Bait Al Falajh back to Bahrain in an old lumbering Beverley very relieved! Some of the guys reckoned the Troop Officer had handpicked all the wasters in the troop to give them a showing up. I think he got a bit of a shock by our resilience.

In the late sixties and early seventies there began the long war in the southern mountains of the Dhofar region, which had a lot of political ramifications. It showed the government that they could conduct a low profile war using the SAS with back up from other forces named the now Sultans Armed Forces. There had been a coup carried out supported by the British. The son, Sultan Qaboos, of the despot old Sultan, had overthrown his father. His father was shot in the leg and flown to a hospital in UK, then put on an estate in Surrey where he lived the rest of his days quite happily surrounded by his concubines.

The SAS lost quite a few guys in this conflict. One of the troopers was Geordie Small ex 3 Troop, 9 Sqn. Apparently he was shot in the leg by the Adoo, hill tribesmen. Lofty Gallagher another stalwart of 3 Troop helped carry Geordie the seven kilometres to Salalah, where he died from loss of blood on reaching the airfield. Young Geordie was one of the fittest guys I ever met during my military service.



Another conflict was at Mirbat where they had a BATT (British Army Training Team) located! There are two ancient forts at Mirbat one by the sea and the other facing the mountains. Close to the outer perimeter and adjacent to the fort, the SAS had set up a Sanger containing an old 25 pounder. They had a GPMG but hardly any heavy weapons.

Mirbat Fort

During the night of 18 July they were attacked by around 250 Adoo. They had mortars and many other heavy weapons. It was to be a show of strength and could have turned the tide of the war if they had of been successful. The attackers were determined and had soon reached the outer barbed wire fencing. Labalaba an enormous Fijian ran to the Sanger and took over the firing of the 25 pounder. Firing over the sights at near point-

blank range until the weapon was red hot. He was then aided by another Fijian called Takavesi (Tak) who was shot in the back. Labalaba (Laba) then received a shot to the head and was killed. The SAS officer could not contact the Sanger by radio and made a heroic dash with a medic called Tony Tobin (known as Toby). On arrival at the Sanger they found Takavesi lying on his back still firing his rifle with one hand. Tobin then received a bullet, which fatally wounded him. It was a desperate situation until suddenly out of the sky appeared two Strike Master jets strafing the positions of the Adoo. They disappeared and another two aircraft came firing into the Adoo. At the same time helicopters brought in reinforcements from G Squadron newly arrived in Oman. The combination of these fresh forces and the constant air attacks finally broke the will of the attackers and they withdrew leaving over thirty dead behind them. By all accounts it was quite a battle and a DSO, DCM, MM and MID were awarded.

This signalled the beginning of the end for the Adoo. In another year the whole of the area was cleared of conflict. The year was 1973.

I had not long left the army and was working as a deep-sea diver. I initially went out to the Middle East on an underwater demolition job, which did not transpire. It was for a French company called Comex based in Dubai. My manager at the time was called John Corbierre asked me if I would like a doddle of a job. All the way down the North coast of Oman had been laid tide gauges. In very shallow water but needed a diver to check them out. Would I be interested in doing the job? It took me all of one second to say yes. Soon I was heading down a very dusty road from Sharjah into Oman with a long wheelbase Land Rover full of diving cylinders all by myself. I steadily worked my way south of Muskat over a period of one week and had arrived opposite the island of Masirah. I was sitting on a beach contemplating my navel when a Land Rover turned up and out jumped an RAF Officer with a corporal by his side. At that stage I was going through demob hysteria and had extremely long hair and a beard. He approached me without introducing himself and said, "Who the hell are you, do you realise you are heading into a war zone?" I replied "**** off, or I'll throw you and the corporal into the sea." He went purple and jumped into the Land Rover and sped off. So I jumped into my Land Rover and sped off too. After another couple of tide gauge inspections I reluctantly headed back to Sharjah.

November 2006, this time on expedition we stayed overnight in Muskat then flew down the next day to Salalah. To get to the islands we had to pass through Mirbat where we stopped at the sanger adjacent to the fort. I said a prayer for the guys who had lost their lives fighting for a freedom in a world that would not be appreciated by their own people. Passing by a small town called

Sodhar I was amazed at the opulence and beautiful houses. In my time it was all adobe built mud houses. Apparently the occupants of Sodhar dive for abalone and can make a \$1000 a day. The magnificent road system and the greenery everywhere impressed me. What I am trying to say that because of the life of our comrades lost, here was one country that had gone on to develop and use the expertise of the British. I was more than impressed and later got the opportunity to head up into the mountains after our expedition. Amazingly fascinating!

I would like to say I have tried to keep this short and concise so our editor will accept it for publication.

I would like to have expanded on the personalities of the guys I served with on the Omex patrol. Take Bill Rudd, it would take more than four pages just to describe him!

Action Stations

Spr Chapman (299 Troop)

For those of you who aren't aware, 299 Troop has been re-rolled back to its original Parachute status. At incredibly short notice (nothing new there, then), after the top brass in Whitehall had eventually given us the go ahead, four of us received our joining instructions to attend the Basic Para Course at RAF Brize Norton. Medicals in the bag, Cpl 'Buzz' Busby, Cpl Frank Morrish and senior Sappers Shaun Allan and myself hot-footed it over to 4th (Volunteer) Battalion The Parachute Regiment near Leeds to undergo a day's basic training with their resident Parachute Jump Instructor (PJI). You have to receive this basic training before the course at Brize. Lots of parachute landing falls on the gym crash mats and suspended harness drills later, we were all given the thumbs up to do it for real.

July was scorching with tropical weather and minimal winds - we couldn't fail to make the required number of jumps for our wings. Famous last words...

On arrival at 'The Home of Military Parachuting' we were directed to our digs that would be home for the following three weeks - Portacabins in their most basic form Oust). These were situated at the furthest point on the air base from the Training Hangar where we would spend most of our time and so close to the main runway that you could almost be shaken out of your bunk with the vibrations from giant aircraft at all hours. Who needs an alarm clock?



Day one. a Saturday, saw us parading at the Training Hangar with the rest of the course who were all TA Paras. Draw kit from stores, get put into syndicates, introduced to the instructors and away we go - suspended harness drills, exit drills, reserve drills and landing practice, repeat, repeat, repeat. Introduction to equipment - the LLP (low level parachute), main parachute and the RLLP (reserve low level parachute). Total weight of these babies approx. 75 lbs. Learn how to fit and check the kit. More landings, harness drills, exit drills and reserve drills. Sweat city in the heat, but we didn't care because we were going to be jumping out of big aircraft very soon.

On the fourth day of training we were deemed to be 'just good enough' to make our first descent which was to be made in 'clean fatigue', i.e. not carrying any equipment. Kit on and detailed which stick you were in, what number you were in the stick and which side of the aircraft you would be exiting from. It was at this point that all of the gobby penguins (that's a para who hasn't yet earned his wings) became very quiet and also lost their attitudes. Crunch time, literally, for some.

Spr Chapman waits to emplane on the C130

Flight time from Brize to the drop zone at Weston on the Green was approximately 10 minutes. Plenty of time to get the adrenaline pumping and wishing you'd gone for a nervous pee earlier. Flying flat and level at 1000 feet, the side doors are wrenched open, the blast of cool air a relief from the heat and the smell of aviation fuel, sweat and fear in the cabin. 'PREPARE FOR ACTION' is bellowed over the noise and the first stick stand up, hook up their static lines and go through their equipment checks. 'ACTION STATIONS' and the stick do its practised synchronised shuffle towards the door. 'RED ON' and the number one braced himself to make that leap into the unknown.

Green light on and 'GO'. One thousand, Two thousand, Three thousand, CHECK CANOPY. Great - I've got one that works! Silence. Clear any line twists, all-round observation, steer away from the nearest canopy, check your drift across the ground, pull on the risers to slow the drift. Feet and knees tight together, prepare for landing. THUMP. Wow. You're back on terra firma, conscious and still in one piece. Disconnect the parachute, run to the end of it, twist it up, field-pack it, put in backpack and stagger off the DZ before the next stick lands on your head. 40 seconds under canopy. A mad rush, literally.

Despite the best weather you could ever ask for, it was to be another ten days of incessant round-robins of landings, exits, malfunction and reserve drills before we made our next jump. The reason? The largest RAF base in the UK didn't have any aircraft. Try working that one out! Excuses such as ferrying refugees from the Lebanon and Cyprus just didn't wash. Boredom and frustration kicked in big time. The only thing that made the waiting worthwhile was the standard of food in the galley, sorry, cookhouse.

Pudding races became the norm and that Big Bad Airborne Trooper, Frank Morrish, managed to demolish five in one sitting. Standards! The penguins kept trying to prove how hard they were by running every day while us more dignified green lids tried our hands at more extreme sports like badminton and ten pin bowling. Quality! We couldn't even have a beer in the renowned Spotlight Club on an evening just in case we may be jumping the following day.

Jump two. Clean Fatigue. 800 feet exit altitude. One para has a reserve ride and lands on his backside. Ouch. Another para bottles it completely and is promptly RTU'd (Returned to Unit).



Spr Allan - "Action Stations"

Jump three. Equipment. 800 feet exit altitude. By now, we had practised how to bundle up our 70 pound bergens, attach them to our harness and how to 'drop' the bergen under canopy before landing so that it doesn't break your legs. Doing it for real is no mean feat, especially when stood in the aircraft waiting for ages before the drop with the weight of all your gear hanging off you. After landing, you have to stagger off the DZ carrying around 150lbs of kit. Jump four. Same as jump three but a para breaks his ankle on this one.

Jump five. 800 feet exit with equipment and weapon - at night! There were some thumping landings as the ground comes up at you very fast and unseen

Jump six. 600 feet (not very far from the ground). Qualifying jump. Equipment, weapons, body armour (Crazy). Twenty seconds only under canopy. It's not very long, I can tell you, as you have so much to do and think about. Land, survived, big cheesy grins and handshakes all round, (even with the Paras). Back to the hangar, parade, given a warning order from the SSM that basically entails that you now accept to jump operationally or you will not be awarded your wings and you will

never jump again. Presented with your wings and welcomed into an exclusive club.

An Appeal for Photos

Gentleman, Sgt Davies of 51 Parachute Squadron, 23 Engineer Regiment is currently constructing a display board depicting the entire history of the Airborne Engineers. Once completed, this board will be professionally framed and hung inside the main foyer of the Regimental Headquarters at Rock Barracks, Woodbridge. He has asked if any of our readers can help him in this matter by providing photographs of Airborne Engineers on operations throughout our history.

You can send him the pictures in electronic (e-mail or on disc) or original format and all originals will be scanned and returned. It would also be a great help if you could provide information on the pictures, like who is in the picture, what they are doing, where and when. Many thanks.

Standard Bearer

John (Spaceman) Parker

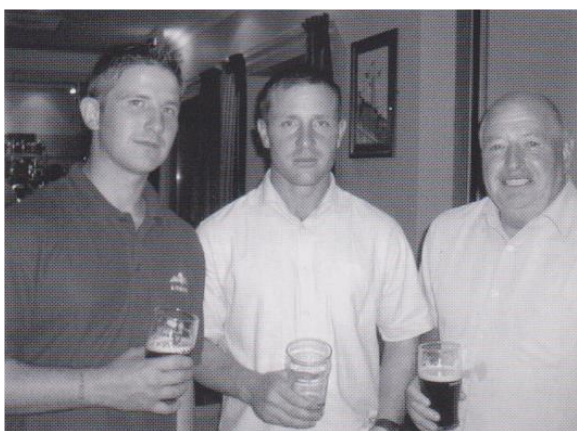
I would like to thank the AEA committee and members for giving me the privilege of carrying the Association standard for the past few years. I hope I have done it justice. The position carries with it a feeling of pride and also sorrow. As I see it, when the standard is on parade it represents your past, present and future. During the past 3 years I have attended many funerals (the sorrow) at the departure of the old and not so old veterans who have said their last farewells. (The Pride) The parades attended have included Blackpool, Ripon, Hebburn, Eden Camp Veterans, ABF North, Normandy, Arnhem and the Association annual AGM/Reunions.

One of the saddest occasions and probably one of the proudest farewells was for one of our original brave veterans of Spalding, Lincs on 5 March 2007, namely Arthur Hendy of the 1st AB Sqn RE. Talking to his friends and comrades, Arthur had a courageous past. Rescued from Dunkirk, one of the first volunteers for the airborne, service in North Africa, Sicily and Arnhem. In the latter of these campaigns he was said to have been extremely brave and saved many lives - for which he was not recognised (it's not what

you do, but who sees you doing it that matters). All his friends and comrades, particularly those who came from the Spalding, will sadly miss him. His sendoff was worthy of the man he was - seven Standards accompanied by over 50 veterans, regular soldiers, British Legion and members of the Army Cadets (with whom Arthur worked very closely) and his good friend Eric Booth. They also say that he was justly proud of his 'Red Beret', which he wore on all parades and pilgrimages. As a footnote for all the men who served in these battles, I would be proud to attend their final farewell and give them the heroes sendoff they justly deserve (provided I'm still around!). That of course goes for the rest of you when your time comes - hopefully, well into the future.

Fly Fishing

The Airborne Fly Fishers are currently seeking new members. The annual subscription is £20-00. The club holds 5 meetings through the season with this year's locations at John O'Gaunt's Fishery (near Stockbridge), Broadford Fishery (near Hartley Witney), Bushyleaze Fishery (near Letchford) and two visits to Bourley Lakes Fishery (Aldershot). If you're interested in membership or would like further information - contact the Journal editor by phone or e-mail (details are published on page 1). Membership is open to all former and serving airborne personnel.



Maintaining the Airborne ethos between the paratroopers of today and Mick Willis of yesteryear. Rock barracks Sgts Mess 30 June 2007. Well the beer helped too!

Indian Reminiscences

Pat Munro

In late June 1944, whilst at pre-OCTU, I volunteered to go out to India for my OCTU. There is an old Army adage "Never volunteer for anything", but then most readers of this article, who are younger than about 66, have probably volunteered at least twice in their lives, both to enlist and later to serve in AB Forces.

At that time, doing one's OCTU in India did have several advantages: The pay of a Pioneer D III (the then equivalent of today's Cbt Engr B III) in today's money, was 17.5p/day; in India, as a Cadet, one's pay was that of a Sgt (37.5p/day) - For the record, para pay was 12.5 p/day. Secondly, one lived in the Cadets' Mess and had a room to oneself; and lastly (and probably most important), a bearer to do all ones blancoing, pressing and cleaning, the last activity excluded rifles - Rifles were kept in an armoury with chains through all their trigger guards, so we did not use them on normal parades. There was one other intangible advantage. The official name given to the British Army that invaded Normandy on 6 June 1944 was the 'British Liberation Army'; its unofficial nickname was "Burma Later Anyway". So far as the RE Cadets in our class at pre-OCTU who went to the RE OCTU at Newark, I later found out that over 60% finished up in India, knowing extremely little, on arrival, about the Country, its Army or its language (Urdu).

We sailed from Gourock in late July and finally arrived at Bombay a month later. Unfortunately, on docking, there was no information as to where the RE cadets should be sent (there were three options). After spending a week at the main British reinforcement depot at Deolali, we finally arrived at Roorkee (about 100 miles north of Delhi) after a train journey that lasted 48 hours.

As a background, the Sappers of the Indian Army were organised in three separate (I am tempted to add "Independent") Groups. To give them their full titles KGVO's Bengal Sapper and Miners (S&M) at Roorkee, QVO Madras S & M at Bangalore and the Royal Bombay S & M at Kirkee (near Poona). In a Divisional Engineers one permed any 5 from 3. The net result was, as an example, in the 2 Ind AB Div there were three Bengal units (HQRE, a Para Sqn and the AB Pk Sqn), and a Para Sqn each from Madras and

Bombay S&M. In 1946, Inter posting between units of different Groups in a Div Engrs had to be referred to GHQ(I). Today, in the Indian Army, all the Engrs in a Division are drawn from the same Group.

Our Chief Instructor at the Engr Officers Training School (EOTS) at Roorkee was Maj Ian Lyall Grant MC RE, who later became well known in AB Spr circles, firstly as OC of 9 Indep AB Sqn RE and later as the CO of 131 AB Engr Regt (TA). Whilst as OC of 9 Sqn, he had to suffer me as his 1 Tp Comd for almost two years! Cadet Training lasted 8 months (which included two months infantry and MT training), followed by 3 weeks post commissioning plant training, where one actually operated (albeit very badly) bulldozers, motor graders and cable-operated excavators. Our Pass Off parade was pragmatic. Instead of a formal parade, at midnight we bowed three times, in turn, to a representative animal's head on the wall. A glass of beer was poured over one's head, and one's white cadets epaulettes were replaced by ones with single pips. Reputedly, the first class of cadets shot a tiger whilst on an exercise, but they never found the torso. In its place, the "Head" consisted of a pair of army boots placed sole to sole with a bicycle's handlebars to represent its horns, and was called "Kuch nay" (a polite translation would be "Nothing")

Following on from a circular from GHQ(I) issued whilst I was a cadet, another cadet and myself had put our names forward as volunteers for AB Forces. A while later, we received orders to go to Dehra Dun (some 25 miles from Roorkee) for a medical. I had just taken off my bush shirt, when someone knocked on the door and told the MO (a major) that there had been a major traffic accident, a 3 tonner with cadets aboard had overturned; and they had to send all possible medical aid to the scene. The MO was a realist and told us "Cadets you had better go back to Roorkee, and I will arrange a further medical". We returned to the EOTS, and about a fortnight later we both received a chit saying that we were medically fit for AB Forces. A few weeks before we were commissioned, we also got a general circular from GHQ(I) stating that officer cadets, who had volunteered for AB Forces, were not to be posted on commissioning direct to an AB unit but had to spend some time at their respective depot, before being posted to an AB unit. With hindsight this was correct, as it enabled one to find one's feet as an officer, which is just as difficult as for a Spr on promotion to L/Cpl, and also find out a little about their Regimental Depot.

I was lucky enough to get my first choice to be posted to the Royal Bombay S & M at Kirkee. My reasons for opting for Kirkee were threefold: it was close to Poona, which was "civilisation" in relative terms to Roorkee, secondly they had the only Para Sqn (I did not know at that time, that the Para Bde was being expanded to a full AB Div); and, thirdly, it was only about 300 miles from Secundrabad. My sister's Godmother and her husband lived there, and I had an open invitation to spend any leave there. A spin off from that was that I met my future wife on my last leave there in March 1947, and we married two years later, and are still 57 years later.

I arrived at Kirkee, and within about 5 minutes of arriving in the HQ, I was given an Indian Army Order (IAO) to read about divorce, if it involved a brother officer's wife - For the record, one was "Out" if it happened. Having read it, I then had to sign that I had read it.

I was then posted to be the Adjt of the Boys Bn. Boys, in this context, consisted youths aged 16 to 18. During their time in the Bn they were taught foot and rifle drill, elementary field craft, musketry, education, some trade training and their physical strength was built up. In total the strength of the Bn was around 1,000 and had 8 officers. When an officer went on leave, another one covered their duties. I recall that, for a fortnight, I doubled up as OC A Coy. The Jemadar Chief Clerk one morning came into my office and said, "A Coy is late again with their return; here is a memo to send to them". I signed it, and that afternoon, wearing my hat as OC A Coy, the Coy Havildar Clerk came in and said "Sir, sorry but we were late again with our return, here is a memo of apology". I signed it and next day the Jemadar Chief Clerk came in grinning all over with my reply.

An explanation about Indian Army Ranks. Naik was the equivalent of a Cpl, Havildar a Sgt. In addition there was a unique Officer grade called Viceroy's Commissioned Officers (VCOs). There were three grades - Jemadar (at Tp level), Subadar (at Sqn/Coy level) and a Subadar Major (at Regt/Bn level). They were long term soldiers, probably pre-war, with at least 10 years' service. They were saluted by NCOs and Sprs; they, in turn, saluted a King's Commissioned Officer. In addressing them, one always added "Sahib" after their rank and woe betide you if you forgot. In 2 Ind AB Div, the Subadar Major had enlisted on the day that I was born, and I always felt about an inch high when addressing him.

The Boys Bn had expanded considerably since it had been formed in 1941, and the PT ground had become far too small. To enlarge it, a narrow rocky outcrop had to be removed. This was a typical borehole job, involving around 20 shallow boreholes, with 1-2 ozs of PE in each hole. The standard British Army PE was 808, which had a nitro-glycerine base. In hot climates, the nitro-glycerine tended to seep out of the plasticizer, and it was rather "Touchy" in that state. In India, Plastic Explosive Kirkee (PEK) had been developed, using picric acid as the explosive base. I put in an indent for some PEK, and got it returned, marked "out of stock, gunpowder issued in lieu" — This was 1945, not 1605! I asked the Jemadar Adjt, who had served in Eritrea in 1941, and had quite a practical knowledge of demolitions, if he had ever used gunpowder. His answer was a very short "No". We pondered over what to do, and decided that as, we would still have to use boreholes, to put an ounce of gunpowder in each hole, insert a length of orange fuse (which was used in booby trap training which burnt at 80ft/sec), followed by another ounce of gunpowder, which was then tamp it with earth. We improvised a ring main by scarfing the orange fuse lengths to expose the gunpowder core and binding

the two lengths tightly together; and finally using a length of safety fuse for initiation. We cleared the area and lit the fuse. Since that day, I have had a tremendous respect for gunpowder - Pieces of rock flew well past us, and we were 300 yards away!

During this time, regulations were published about applications to convert a wartime emergency commission into a regular commission. When I became eligible, I applied for one and duly appeared before Regular Commission Board in Bangalore. I remember two tasks set for our syndicate (of 10 people). We had to take a wooden crate, filled with sand, from a high bank past a line on the ground about 30 ft away, without touching the ground. In between was an inverted "U frame" from which a long ladder was hung by two ropes, but not as its midpoint. We were also given a rope lashing. We struggled for over 30 minutes but never succeeded. We asked the DS how was it done, we were told "No one has ever done it"!

The second obstacle was to get the group over a barbed wire fence about 6 ft high in less than 15 minutes. Four poles were provided (one pole was longer than the rest) together with a rope lashing. The solution was to use the three equal poles as a base, using a gin lashing; rest the longer pole on it; part of the group would then clamber along it to get over the fence; then the rest would pass over the poles, re-erect it for the last few to get over. By pure chance there was another Spr (David Laing) with me, so we together made up the gin lashing (which may no longer be taught to Cbt Engrs today), and after half the team had crossed over, we passed it over the fence to be erected on the other side. David and I were still on the home side. In summing up the Chairman (a Maj Gen) made the comment "You could tell on which side of the fence the Sprs were". I passed and was granted a regular commission. The first information that I had been gazetted was a letter from the Secretary of the Institution of Royal Engineers "Suggesting" that I joined the Institution.

I was then posted (giving its full title) to 411 (R Bombay) Parachute Squadron RIE. 411 was the original Sapper unit of 50 (Ind) Para Bde, which had been raised in November 1941. Initially the Sqn was raised as a Section (a Troop in today's terminology) composed of Punjabi Musslemans (PMs) drawn from both the Bengal and Bombay Groups. The Tp was increased to a full para sqn in 1943, the additional soldiers being Mahrattas (Hindus) from the Bombay Group. The Bde had its baptism of fire in March 1944 at Sangshak, some 30 miles NE of Imphal. It was undergoing jungle training, but had no steel helmets, defence stores, and limited ammunition. It found itself, with virtually no warning, having to face the whole of 31 Japanese Division. It only had two of its three para bns, the third one had been left behind (with 411) at Litan, about 10 miles SE of Sangshak, due to lack of transport. It took under command another bn (4/5 Mahratta) which it was relieving but had in fact had not yet withdrawn. In addition to its own MMG Coy, it also had a mountain battery (15 [Jhelum] Mtn Bty I A) and a mortar troop (D Tp 582 Bty RA). The Bde fought the Division to a standstill, thus gaining time for reinforcements to be moved to block the advance, initially at Litan. The two para bns suffered a large number of casualties. In 152 bn (which suffered the initial assault), 23 out of 27 officers became casualties: in 153 bn, 9 out of 14.

HQ 2 Ind AB Div was at Karachi, with two Para Bdes at Malir Cantonment some 15 miles north of Karachi, with the third Para Bde located at Quetta. The Div Engrs were located as follows: HQRE at Div HQ, 33 Para Sqn at Quetta in support of 50 Para Bde, 12 Para Sqn RE and 411 at Malir (in support of 77 and 14 Para Bdes respectively), together with the AB Pk Sqn. A central guardroom was operated, but when the guard formally changed, rifle drill presented a problem. The Indian Army shouldered arms, the British sloped arms. The net result was that 40 and 411 were probably the only Indian Army units that sloped arms when taking/handing over guard duties to 12 Para Sqn.

On arrival, I was notified that I would be the Administration Officer - another name for the Quartermaster as the Indian Army did not have any quartermaster commissions. What a QM did was not covered at all at OCTU, except for the homily "If you issue anything, get a signature" - Which is still probably true today. In those days, Sqns were self-accounting units, unlike today when they are part of Regts. Consequently they ran their own stores, MT and accounting systems. I learnt the hard way rather quickly to operate Stores ledgers, together with Imprest, PRI and Officers' Mess accounts. I did not then realise what advantage it would be of having actually being a QM. Much later, I could argue through strength with a QM, especially when he was trying to avoid some extra work for his staff - One Regtl QM even said that I knew far too much for my own good!

There was an interesting example of the division of responsibilities for army wide orders. The Indian Army was not permitted to issue any order (i.e. IAOs) that had financial implications; such orders were issued under the auspices of the Indian Treasury, and were titled Army instructions (India), known as Alls. I often wondered if the Finance Mandarins realised the consequences of this arrangement - The important "Filtering" had been done; one skimmed through IAOs but rigorously read all Alls. I found out that units could send an officer once per year to their depot to check any pay queries of their soldiers. A second fact was that British personnel travelling from Karachi to Bombay could not take a "Short cut" across the Sind desert from Hyderabad to Ahmadabad between 1 April and 30 September because of the heat. Instead, one had to travel north to Lahore, eastward to Delhi and then south to Bombay; around some 1,000+ miles extra. The "Net profit" on travel allowances for such a journey and its return was more than a month's pay (and tax free)!

With the SQMH (H = Havildar) we carried out an initial stores check. I found that we were a prismatic compass short. Then, such stores were classified at War Office Controlled Stores (WOCS), and their details (such as serial numbers) were recorded in a special ledger. I reported this to the OC, and we pondered for a long time over what to do. The reason for the deficiency was that an officer

had left for the UK for demobilisation and took it with him. Many years later I met him and mentioned this compass - He was somewhat reticent over the matter. However, suddenly a solution was created. In the summer of 1946, all British units were withdrawn from 2 Ind AB Div and the Indian Parachute Regiment was disbanded (these Bns were replaced by designated infantry Bns which included the word "Para" in their designation). 12 Para Sqn RE was posted to Palestine to join the Div RE of 6 AB Div - They were replaced by 36 (QVO) Madras Para Sqn. They were ordered to hand over 18 prismatic compasses to 411. I gave their SQMS a receipt for 18 compasses, plus a bottle of whisky; he gave me 18 compasses, but with an issue voucher for 17. When all the details had been entered into our WOCS register, I was reasonably certain that one incorrect serial number would not be noticed.

Another problem was torches. The issue torch had a very weak fragile Bakelite body. If one was dropped on to a hard surface, it just shattered into pieces. Out of 22, we had around 5 complete, and a few pieces of Bakelite. A condemnation board was held (I was its chairman, assisted by another officer and the SQMH), which condemned the deficiency and recommended that the pieces be returned to the local ordnance depot (which was some 5 miles away). At that time, to save petrol we had to use camel carts to take/collect stores from the local ordnance depot. This was an all-day expedition for the SQMH. The few pieces of Bakelite were put in a sandbag, and officially it fell off the camel cart. A Court of Inquiry was convened (again I was its Chairman) which decided to have the broken torches written off, as they had zero value. The OC duly wrote them off (he was limited to £ 5 per month), and everyone was happy.

There had been a major problem with parachute wings. When the Ind Para Bde was formed, wings were mounted on a broach and worn on the right breast (as they are worn today by many other armies). This caused no problems. However when the bde was expanded to a full AB div, its first GOC was Maj Gen E E Down, had been the GOC of 1 AB Div. He ordained that the Ind AB div should follow British practice and wear their wings on their right shoulder. These had to be sewn on, as, if worn on a broach; they tended to be ripped off. However with laundering by a dhobi, they only lasted a few months before they just disintegrated. The solution had been quite expensive. At the unit's own cost, wings were embroidered on to a rectangle patch of either KD or olive green drill, and the patch was then sewn on the one's shirt/ bush shirt.

The withdrawal of British units from the AB Div, coupled with the disbandment of the Indian Parachute Regiment created a tremendous load on the parachute school at Chaklala, whose throughput was about 400 per month. They had to para train personnel of three para bns, five gunner regts (three Field, one AA and one ATK) and a Spr para sqn, in addition to replacements of British personnel of Indian units as repatriation back to the UK had started, either due to completion of time served overseas, or for demobilisation. This added up to around 5/6,000 trainees. I had to wait for almost 4 months before I did my basic para course, but my para pay was backdated to my posting date. When I later joined 9 Sqn, I noticed that there had been a minor difference between the British and Indian exit drill from a Dakota/Valetta. In the former, on jumping, one put one's left hand on the rear side of the exit to steady oneself against the slipstream. In India one did not do so (apparently the Indian soldier tended to cling on to it), instead one clasped the side of one's trousers firmly with your left hand. In this instance, the No 1 of the stick, having received the order to "Stand in the door", was standing unsupported just in front of the door. Towards the end of 1946, I took a mixed Tp up to Chaklala for a refresher para course. On one jump, just after the red light came on, the plane tilted to port, I overbalanced and fell out, followed by the rest of the stick. I landed a long way from the start of the DZ and had to hump my chute with me. I asked the pilot afterwards why he did it. He replied that it was the first time that he had dropped troops and thought that it would help!

Shortly after I joined the Sqn, a decree arrived stating, as from 1 July 1946 that all Officers who held a British Army Commission had to go on British rates of pay and conditions of service, which included having to pay British income tax. All the RE Officers serving in the Indian S & M were on Indian rates of pay and conditions and paid Indian Income tax - I lost a quarter of my pay under this new edict!

In the summer of 1946, we had a change of ORE. Lt Col Eric Kyte returned to the UK on repatriation, and his replacement was Lt Col "Honker" Henniker, a pre-war Bengal Spr and the first CRE of 1 AB Div. He inspected 36 Sqn first, and we heard that he had checked all the boots of the Sprs on parade to see if they had the regulation 13 studs in their soles. Our shoemaker worked all night to ensure that every boot had its 13 studs. Next day he inspected 411. On parade, I acted as 2 Tp Comd. We opened order for his inspection. Honker turned to me and said "Pat I know that all your sappers have 13 studs in each of their boots, please port arms for inspection". Honker expected three items from his officers: Punctuality, a smart appearance and results. His theme on results was that good methods would, on average, produce good results; whilst short cuts, which may produce the occasional good results, will, on average, fail to do so.

In late 1946, 411 had to reduce down to its peacetime establishment (it already had done so for officers). It was a heart breaking exercise to choose around 70 junior NCOs and sappers to be returned to the depot for possible discharge (the Indian Army was entirely a volunteer one). A short while afterwards I visited the Depot to check any queries over our soldiers' pay accounts (as already mentioned above). Having checked the queries that existed and the errors rectified, I met some of the Sprs that had been returned to the Depot under the War/Peace establishment reduction. They told me that the CO of the Depot Bn had told them to

remove not only their Red Berets (which was correct), but also their parachute wings (which was not). As a humble Lt, I had to tell a dogmatic Lt Col of his error. He was somewhat reluctant to do so, but probably guessed that what I said was correct, so, luckily, conceded without too much fuss.

I was then posted to HQRE as the IO (and also acting Adjt for some of the time). Honker probably arranged this as, at that time, I was the only subaltern with a regular commission. It was very interesting job. Among the jobs that I had to do was a recce of the docks at Karachi, primarily to evaluate the effects of civil disturbances. Without any doubt, they were very vulnerable to sabotage, as all the cranes were hydraulically operated, the power coming from a central pump house - A few sticks of PE would have caused havoc. After four months, I was posted back to 411 to be its 2IC.

On what was called "Partition" on 15 August 1947, 411 provided part of the parade that lined the streets in Karachi along which the Viceroy (Lord Mountbatten) and the first President of Pakistan (Mr Jinnah) would be driven, followed by their entourage. Our orders were to follow the movements of the detachment to our left. This unit came to attention and presented arms, so we followed suite. A Rolls Royce with the Viceroy and President drove past, followed by some cars. The unit to our left returned to the order position and started to form three ranks prior to marching off to their transport. Suddenly the rest of the cavalcade swept past. All that I could do was to salute as we were in the middle of reforming into threes. I found out later that the whole route had not been lined by troops, and a bullock had wandered across an unlined street, and divided the cavalcade into two separate parts.

Shortly after this, as part of the division of the Indian Army among the two new Nations, our PM contingent was posted to join 33 (Bengal) Para Sqn, which was an all Muslim sqn. It was a very very sad occasion, and the Muslim Jemadar was almost in tears when he said good-bye to me (and he was not the only one). Many years later I did hear that 411 met 33 in Kashmir during the first Kashmir war when there was virtually a repetition of the 1914 Christmas Day truce on the Western front between the two units. This war started in earnest on 22 October 1947, only three months after partition, having been preceded by a series of incursions of tribesman into the territory.

During this period, Karachi was very quiet as two British bns were stationed in the city (2 Black Watch and 1 Royal Scots). It was very different in the Punjab, where there was wholesale inter religious slaughter - Estimates vary, but the total number who died seems to lie between 500,000 and 1 million people. 411 had to build the rudiments of a transit camp just outside Karachi city for refugees from the Punjab. It consisted of a series of concrete hard standings for cooking purposes. The intention was that refugees would stay there for some 2 weeks before being moved on. I know as a fact, the site was still inhabited by many seven years later and may well still be almost sixty years on.

Having written the only serious operation order in my life to cover 411's move back by train to India (I was the acting OC), I handed over to an Indian 2/Lt and left on 29 October 1947 to return to the UK to go on a supplementary degree course. On its completion, in August 1950, I resumed my AB service in 9 Sqn as its 1 Tp Comd. For the record, the Indian Parachute Regiment has been re-raised with six bns-Three serve, on rotation, in the Para Bde, the other three in other formations; 411 still goes on, and were in tremendous heart in 1999, when I visited Kirkee.

Canopy Tours

Tony (Geordie) Ridgway

Having read in the journal of old men (and women) jumping from planes, running marathons, abseiling bridges, climbing mountains, and even pruning roses, I thought you might be interested in my preferred method of climbing and descending mountains.

A couple of years ago, Lynne and I were holidaying in South Africa, and while doing a bit of exploring in a 4wd jeep, came across a signpost with the words Canopy Tours, and an arrow pointing up a lane. Being a nosy bugger and neither of us having a clue what a canopy tour was, we decided to follow the arrows and soon found ourselves winding along a narrow forest track at the base of what I call a mountain, but what X9 would call a big molehill. Eventually we arrived at a clearing with log cabins and a few people milling around and made enquiries. We were sitting having a drink and looking at leaflets, when a party of 6-8 people emerged from the forest wearing what looked like parachute harnesses and helmets. That was our introduction to the Karkloof Canopy Tour. After booking a tour, we left and returned a couple of days later, eager but a bit apprehensive.

First we went into an office with another half dozen would-be tourists, where we signed forms absolving the company of any blame in the event of accidents. Good start. Then we were given a brief introduction, general safety regulations, and instructions on the use of the brake, which also acted as steering control. We then moved into another room where we were all kitted up individually with our tour equipment, harness, helmet and last, but by no means least, the brake mechanism, an ingenious piece of equipment which in my youthful ignorant days, I would have called a pair of big gloves. They were actually a pair of thick leather

padded gauntlets. Our party of eight with tour guides then trooped off to the launch pad, sorry I'm getting carried away, I meant to the land rover which was to take us up to the start of the tour. Once there, after a short trek we found ourselves on a platform about 2 metres square attached to the side of a cliff, and from it, a steel cable disappearing into the foliage below.



So, I have described the best way to climb a mountain, and that is in the back of a Land Rover with an experienced driver, and the best way to get down is, if you haven't already guessed, by a tried and trusted method experienced by all ex paras in pre-para training, the good old death slide, as described by Fred Gray in a recent journal, albeit with a couple of differences, the first difference being the length. The slide, which I remember in Maida, was about 40 - 50mtrs long and I vaguely remember having to use a toggle rope. (I am sure Fred can put me right here) The second was in the use of a brake, I seem to remember levelling off and hitting the deck at a run - but then the booze has probably addled my brain.

Anyway back to the story, here the slide is in eight stages, and apart from the first one are all about 150-175mtrs in length. The gauntlet or brake is also used to keep you pointed in the right direction, i.e. feet pointing forward. Without this, as your speed increases you will find your feet being forced to one side through wind resistance, and trying to approach the platforms sideways is not recommended.

The first stage is a fairly short and gentle one, i.e. shallow descent, where everyone goes individually and masters the art of braking and steering. Also during this stage you can decide whether you want to continue the descent solo or with an instructor. Lynne and another girl in the party continued with instructors riding tandem. The second stage is much longer and much steeper, and you really have to test your braking abilities. If you leave it too late, you will probably splatter yourself across the cliff wall, if too soon, you may find yourself hauling yourself to the platform hand over hand. Also at the end of this stage you have to make the decision whether you want to continue the descent by slide or take the easy option and get the Land rover down, as there are no vehicle access points to the rest of the platforms. Needless to say everyone continued.



The other six stages took us to the bottom of the mountain to a spot about 400yds from the base camp where we all had a complementary meal. While having the meal, the official photographer who accompanied us was making computer discs for everyone.

Snapshots of the whole parties progress down the slides plus 20 second videos of one of our individual descents.

For anyone who wishes to go there, if you book up for the canopy tour in the morning, followed by abseiling down the cliff faces and waterfalls in the afternoon (or vice versa) the cost, if you are already in S.A. is very cheap (I think it was approx. 50£p.p including meal & computer disc. It is situated about 40-50kms west of Pietermaritzburg in Natal province.

I think there are another couple of tour sites in S. Africa and another in S. America. If anyone is interested, visit their website: www.whattodo.co.za or search for Karkloof Canopy Tour.

Yorkshire Branch Normandy Pilgrimage

Baz Henderson

Day 1 Saturday 2nd June 07 - The Party consisted of three cars, one from Tyneside with the Geordie lads NCO i/c LCpl John McCarthy, one from Ripon with Bill Rudd, John Parker (standard bearer) and Mick Ramsay Ex 59 to keep us on the straight and narrow, the third car was driven by Dave Grimbley leaving Oldham to pick up Boff Harrap, Yorkie Davies in South Yorks, a further two passengers would RV with us, Peter Kershaw and Gurney Fisher in the Cannon Hotel Brompton High St at 1600hrs that afternoon.

Bills party had no problems on the journey down, including the M25, except they arrived late and found they were two rounds behind on sampling the local beer. Bills excuse was that we did keep within the speed limit/. It was late afternoon and after a few warmers in the bank we proceeded to Kitchener Barracks to take over our accommodation, our friend Lt Col Chris Gosling MBE had kindly arranged this, many thanks Chris if you're reading this.

After a quick wash and brush up we returned to the Cannon to meet Pete K, Keith King, Gurney Fisher failed to turn out and picked 5 extra duties. At this stage we continued to enjoy the hospitality and a few more beers Rudd/ Ramsay challenged all comers to pool, including a party of Officers who were on their Sqn Commanders course in Brompton Bks, Ramsey and Rudd never left the table, free beers you must be joking. All had a good night.

Day 2 Sunday 3rd June 07 - After a quick S.S.S. we set off to pick Peter and Mick up from their posh houses and proceeded to Dover to connect with the 1005hrs ferry to Calais, an excellent breakfast was had by all on board the ferry, a little pricey compared with Yorkshire! We docked at Calais at 1230hrs (Euro Time) and met up with our dear friend Ed- Van- Der Laan who had travelled down from Arnhem, incidentally he is now an honorary member of the Yorkshire Branch. Ed was traveling by himself so Bill, Boff and John Me moved across, a little more legroom! The journey was uneventful and with Ed's state of art Satellite Navigation System they were no wrong turns. And we arrived at the Hotel La Rossiere in Tracy-Sur Mer in Normandy, 2.5 Km outside Arromanches. I might add that the only hold ups on the journey were the numerous tollgates (more than last year I am told) and very expensive, this answered our question as to why the motorways were devoid of cars? After booking in the Hotel at 1700hrs our mine hosts (the owners) very kindly laid on an excellent evening meal, which we had not booked. The evening finished off with a few more beers and a drop of the local brew of Calvados. Might add that our mine hosts worked very hard to provide us with early breakfasts, late dinners and running the bar, it is such a busy period in Normandy that staff were difficult to find.

Day 3 Monday 4th June 07 - An early start travelled in convoy to Cherbourg Peninsular to visit a heavy battery overlooking the approaches to the UTAH Beach, this was part of the Atlantic Wall and we would be seeing much of this in the following days ahead. We then moved to the town of Sainte-Mere-Église where the American 82nd Airborne landed, they missed the DZ and landed in the market square, many were shot as they landed. Many pictures were taken of the famous church steeple where one can see the parachute of American parachutist hanging from the top of the spire. A visit to the museum which has just been upgraded was not to be missed, it contained Dakota and Horsa Glider and many other interesting items. We then took a liquid lunch in the sunshine of the market square.



Off again to visit the US cemetery overlooking the OMAHA BEACH it contains 9387 graves all marked with a cross, this is a very impressive memorial. New visitors centre has been built underground and was to be officially opened on the 6th June 07, this was also very impressive. We then visited the beach itself and the fitter element of the party walked up the sad tunes and cliffs to a monument to the US 1ST Infantry Div known as the Big Red One, the older and infirm went by car! Won't mention any names!

We visited many other memorials and emplacements. In all a very tiring day, this was relieved back at the hotel by the intake of more amber liquid.

Matt Newall, John Parker & John Mason 'prove' the AEA bench

Day 4 Tuesday 5th June 07 - Up and off to Pegasus Bridge and the museum to attend the dedication of our Association Bench meeting up with John Mason and Mat Newall. The dedication service was well attended by many cap badges and local civilians. Padre Paul Abrams carried out the dedication officiating along with John Mason and our President Bill Rudd MBE. The bench was draped with the Union Jack, which Gurney Fisher and Yorkie Davies folded very professionally during the dedication ceremony. As normal John Parker did sterling work parading the Association Standard with other standard bearers also present.

Lunch and then on to visit Le Grand Bunker at Ouistreham which was captured by one sapper officer and four sappers, a big surprise for the Germans when they blew the door in to gain entry and capturing at least 10 prisoners. We then paid brief visits to, Sword, Juna and Gold beaches and a tour of the Canadian Cemetery, which was, again very impressive. We finished the day off by visiting Crepon and the monument Stan Hollis (Green Howard's) the only soldier to receive a VC on D Day, (my late father-in law was with this Battalion).

To finish off the day we spent the evening in Arromanches wining and dining and meeting many Normandy Veterans. Returned to the hotel bar to keep the other residents awake with a few clean songs (they should be so lucky).

Day 5 Wednesday 6th June 07 - Another early start and onto Renville and we arrived in time to take part in the Remembrance Ceremony at the x roads, this was in Honour to the 13th (Lancashire) Para Battalion. This was followed by a service at the church and then onto the British Cemetery for a full remembrance and dedication ceremony. John Parker paraded the standard at all three ceremonies. This deserved a beer and lunch at Renville with Mat Newall and many old and bold, (including me). After freshening up we all went to Arromanches to watch the evening parade and service and visit the museum. The museum and cinema shows are not to be missed, along with the Mulberry Harbor - and the sappers get the top billing. After so much walking about and standing around, the only remedy for aching joints was more of the Amber Liquid!!

Day 6 Thursday 7th June 07 - Our visit to Gangues was one of the most memorable occasions of our visit.



John Parker, John Mason, Bill Rudd MBE & the Para Regt Standard Bearer

We took part in the ceremony of remembrance to the six British paratroopers that were shot (on the orders of Hitler) one was the brother of Gary Copson, a member of our Branch who was in attendance with his wife Margaret. Gary laid a wreath in remembrance of his brother. John Parker paraded the standard once again.

After the parade we were invited to view the church, which was being refurbished. It had once been in the family of William the first in the 11th century. The outer stone had been plastered over for protection, on removing the plaster revealed a picture incised in stone of Williams invasion fleet of 1066. The villagers are very proud of this.

After the parade and church visit we were invited to the mayor's parlour for many glasses of wine and nibbles. On returning to Arromanches we visited the cinema on the Round, which is another must for anyone visiting the area, it shows the actual footage of the landing and battle scenes interspersed with identical places of today. To Whom It May Concern, the Royal Engineer Memorial on the hill by the cinema on the Round has had its large cap badge removed (expertly) we then returned to La Rossere for lemonade!

Day 7 Friday 8th June 07 - Bags packed and say good-bye to our hosts with whom we had made firm friends. I don't think they will miss us, but they did admit that they never sold so much amber liquid (from only one pump) and made so much profit in such a short time. To be serious, Bill Rudd informs me that they would dearly like us to come back next year for more reasons than one!

The idea was to travel to Calais and stay overnight for a 'knees up', but everyone was a little tired and so decided to make it home in one go. John Parker our standard bearer was due on parade in Blackpool on the Saturday afternoon for the presentation of 200 Malaysia/Borneo medals. We arrived home some 14 hours later.

A VERY MEMORABLE TRIP

Ex Bellerophon Ride

Sgt D Jones - 9 Para Sqn RE

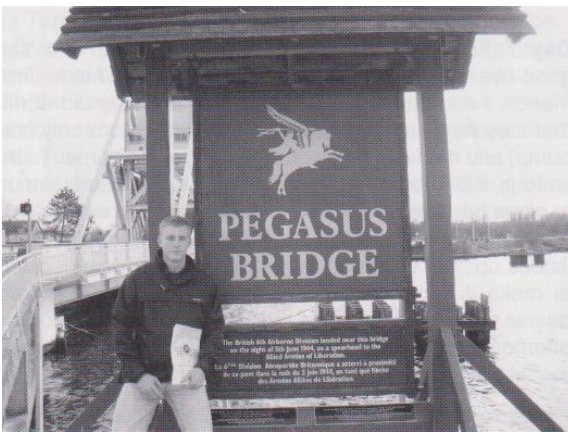
Over the 1-4 Mar 07 thirty-eight members of 9 Parachute Squadron RE partook in a Battlefield Tour to Normandy, in order to educate all those taking part in some of the key operations during Operation Overlord of World War Two in June 1944.

The trip began with the OC; Maj Copsey giving an overview presentation of Operation Overload, and then it was on the coach and off to Portsmouth to catch an overnight ferry crossing to Ouistreham. This of course gave all ranks the ideal opportunity for a little down time and a few quiet socials before the hectic schedule began the following morning!



Arriving seven hours later in Ouistreham, it was straight off to Merville Battery. This German artillery emplacement was a key objective on D-Day - 6 Jun 1944. Well mined and strongly defended it was heavily bombed but still remained intact prior to D-Day and was considered a major hazard to the landings if not silenced. However, despite all these apposing factors the men of 9 Para Battalion landed by glider and successfully attacked the emplacements allowing a safer passage for the main invasion force later on D-Day.

Members of Sp Tp at Merville Battery



Spr Robinson at Pegasus Bridge

The next site on the itinerary was the legendary Pegasus Bridge and Cafe Gondree, perhaps the most eagerly awaited venue by all those on the trip. Pegasus Bridge was probably one of the most successful airborne raids during D-Day and involved glider borne troops landing and taking the bridge crossing the canal. They did this landing a mere thirty meters away and managed to take the bridge in just ten minutes with only two fatalities - A true inspiration to Para Trained Troops today!

Throughout the remainder of the day we visited Sword, Juno, and Gold Beaches the key objectives of the British Forces on D-Day. We also got to see the remains of the Mulberry harbours which were constructed by engineers in UK and towed over to allow the logistics to be unloaded on to the beaches at low tide - a truly awesome success for the Sappers at the time. The day finished with an overnight stopover in Caen and was again an ideal opportunity to sample the local culture and have a little down time to reflect on the day's events.



The final day we concentrated on the American Sectors and began by visiting Juno and Utah Beaches, Pointe du Hoc, St Mere Église and the Airborne Forces Museum. Then we moved on to Omaha Beach and the American Cemetery. This for me perhaps being the most sobering site of the entire trip - some 9386 American men are laid to rest here, another 14000 were repatriated back to USA. The Cemetery lies on the ground above Omaha Beach which in itself was a natural fortress and extremely well defended all the way along its front. It is inconceivable to even imagine the events here on D-Day.

An effigy of Pte Steele still hangs from the Church spire

In summary the Battlefield Tour was extremely worthwhile and very informative. Most importantly I think it made all those there some 62 years later realised just how much the soldiers of yesteryear sacrificed for us so that we can live in freedom today. Their memory will live on for evermore.

Goal Celebrations

Stephen (Lofty) Ainley - Legendary Goal Scorer and Raconteur

Anyone who has watched a game of soccer will have noticed that whenever a goal has been scored, there has always been a bit of hugging and kissing amongst the players. Over the years, the after game celebrations have increased a bit and now include such things as, dancing, blowing kisses to the crowd and my own personal favourite, where the goal scorer throws himself prostate onto the ground and his team-mates pile on top of him until he almost suffocates. It's as if he is being punished for scoring the goal.

I had not watched a game for a while, but recently I tuned in to World Soccer on SBS and was amazed to see the progress that has been made in the goal celebrating, in fact the events after the goal have now become so sophisticated, that I do not know why they bother with the actual game, it is just distracting from the celebrating. The Botswana team especially impressed me. Early in the game, centre forward Ubangy Myeddy, tapped the ball into the net from about two centimetres and all hell broke loose, you would have thought it was the goal of the decade. He immediately commenced several laps of the pitch, accompanied by much dancing and somersaulting. At one point, he leapt into air, landed on his head and started spinning around in circles. Meanwhile his ecstatic team-mates had run to the centre of the pitch, several players linked arms to form a base, then the others climbed onto their shoulders to form a pyramid. Eventually Ubangy joined them and was lifted onto the top of the pyramid by a 'cherry picker' that had been driven onto the pitch. After a fanfare of trumpets, a scantily clad Miss Botswana land 1978, walked onto the arena carrying a silver tray on which were three solid gold, replica soccer balls. These were passed up to Ubangy, who commenced juggling them whilst singing the national anthem. Whilst this was taking place, a team of white horses dragged a grand piano on wheels towards the centre circle. It was breathtaking stuff; Ubangy was lifted from the top of the pyramid and placed behind the piano. A hush fell over the crowd as he began playing Bach's "Air" from Suite No3 in D Major. Now, whilst this is a very moving piece and especially appropriate for funerals, it seemed that Ubangy had completely misjudged the mood of the boisterous crowd, and soon a small riot had broken out and the main stand had been burned down. Reluctantly, after a thirty-minute discussion with his manager Ubangy started to play something a bit more upbeat, I think it may have been "Great Balls of Fire"

Anyway, by this time many of the crowd had been forced to leave in order to catch the last bus home, which in Botswana is just after lunch. This was most unfortunate, as they missed Ubangy's second goal celebrations, which amongst other things included building an exact replica of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon in the centre of the pitch.

Now you may call me old fashioned, though obviously in a boyishly, good looking sort of way, but I cannot help thinking that things have gone a bit far. It was very different, when I was a young, legendary goal scorer. I would volley the ball into the back of the net from about fifty metres and just acknowledge the rapturous crowd applause with a slight nod of my head and get on with it. Occasionally, one of my more extrovert team-mates might shake my hand in a manly fashion, but even this was frowned upon.

Another thing you notice now, is when a player gets a slight tap on the leg, the game is held up for about ten minutes whilst a team of surgeons and physios tend to him. I will never forget when George Watkins, our central defender, broke his back in fourteen places and was paralysed from the neck down after an unfortunate tackle. George insisted upon us laying him down in the penalty area, so as he could help out in defence, in fact it was George's headed clearance in the last minute, which won us the cup.

One more thing I would like to touch upon is the amount of scandals that players get themselves involved in nowadays. A top sportsman needs to be very careful. I recall Mavis Ramsbottom, pestering me for several weeks to go out with her and eventually I agreed, but it was certainly not followed by a "tell all expose" in the daily newspapers. There were no lurid headlines in the "News of the World".... "Legendary Goal scorer in Night of Debauchery".. "he tried to seduce me with a glass of stout and a fish supper." reveals Miss Ramsbottom.

No, there was none of that, and despite the rumours, I can state quite categorically, that my behaviour that night was absolutely impeccable. I just wish I could say the same for Miss Ramsbottom's.

Thanks Tommo

(Putting The Records Straight (April 2007 edition)

Eric Blenkinsop

It was a most interesting and timely statement of events, which highlighted the endeavour and effort that had to be put in to get an association like this off the ground.

I am aware of the aggravation and opposition that had to be overcome in order to become established as Joe Houlston and Peter Kershaw enlightened us of this when they put out the call to form the Chatham branch.

But that is behind us now and the subsequent achievement speaks for itself in forming a national association from an initial membership of 17 to creating 5 branches and a membership of 1200 over 17 years, truly remarkable.

The timing of the formation was just right as many of the Airborne unit and Divisional reunions were shrinking quite quickly and here was an association to pull us all together.

My first AGM was shortly after Para 90, which I did not attend but that first attendance was just unforgettable.

I seem to recall the lunch being served in the Brigade WOs & Sgts mess a curry and a pint.

Being new to the game I did not attend the meeting but went back to the Hotel in North Camp to prepare for the Gala dinner, we were all dispersed in those days.

Then come the evening it was into the old Officers Club, which was quite nostalgic for me, as my last experience of the Officers Club proper was along with Bert Stevenson being wheeled out of there in laundry baskets.

The Club being the final venue of the evening having been taken on a massive pub-crawl round the local countryside by several of the Squadron Officers, John Hooper and Mike Mathews to mention just two. All of this prior to us moving on to 131 as PSIs (Permanent Staff Instructors).

So into the Club and WOW! There they were Mike Mathews, Bill Powell, Ned Parker, Bertie Fordham, Arthur Cheesman and so many others and that was only the bar. Into the lounge/dining room and there were the Canal Zone 3 Troop trio Ken Roberts, Brian Gibson, and Don Lay with their ladies, John Smith & Glenda - we thought that they had emigrated. Still more to come, Dennis (Brummy) Parks & Dot, George Barrett and Norman (Timber) Wood & Doris.

It was an overwhelming experience and unfortunately Beccy was not well at the time and we were accompanied by Harry & Barbara Mosley and with Harry being a hostilities only Airborne Engineer he did not know all these guys that I was meeting again which left them out on a bit of a limb. What a tremendous introduction. and more bodies came out of the woodwork.

For me the big turning point came with the holiday camp at Great Yarmouth where for the first time we were all under one roof for the meals and festivities thanks to Tom Ormiston and Dave Rutter, which set the benchmark for years to come. Mind you it was not all a bed of roses, Bob & Pauline Woolley were almost out of the gate having been given what can best be described as a garden shed as opposed to a chalet but that was soon resolved while John and Marie Waite had to fly into town for a quick shop as John had forgotten to put Marie's case in the car.

Again memorable for me as I was able to meet up with Sid Burrell and meet Celia for the first time. They introduced me to Jack Daniels, which inevitably led to a couple of choruses of Bungay Roger.

Which now brings me up to date.

My youngsters recently organised a superb 80th birthday party for me and I was able to invite 14 members all of whom were in the Canal Zone with me 55 years ago, 10 of them were all 3 troop with me and there were 4 branch Presidents among them.

Yes Tommo I know that the constitution does not include for Branch Presidents but of course the Airborne Engineer has always been a Non-Conformist when necessary!

With the best will in the world this would not have been possible without the Airborne Engineers Association. So thank you. It is most important that we do not forget our roots and it is equally important to appreciate what we have today and that we make every endeavour to maintain it.

AEA Sports Club Running Section

August update - Billy Morris

This year's events have got off to a bit of a slow start due to the fact that 50% of the club has been injured. I say 50% what I mean is Bob Chatterton my running buddy. So it has been down to me to enter a couple of runs to keep ticking over and not to put on too much excess around the middle if you know what I mean" Fitzy". What I was able to do in April was to enter a race in Germany and compete in an Ultra marathon over the Harz Mountains called the Harzquerung. It starts in a small town called Wernigerode and then finishes 31 miles down the road, well over the Harz Mountains in the town of Nordhausen, the mountain at the back of the town was the secret war time underground bunker that Hitler had built to manufacture the V2 rockets.

The trip started for me on the Thursday night, after work driving to Stanstead to catch the flight to Hannover, and then to be met by Bob Thorburn my ex 43 Plant Sqn mate who lives in Neinburg. Bob Thorburn had the idea last year after the Hamburg marathon we ran together. I had been doing a fair amount of training around the Aldershot area in preparation for the event, and I was really looking forward to it. This was going to be Bob Thorburns first ultra marathon and he too had done the prep. After a hearty German breakfast we loaded up the car and set off for Wernigerode a small town in what was the old East Germany. The map that the race organisers had issued to everyone was a bit vague to say the least, was it a test to see how good our navigation was? All we wanted to do was to collect our race numbers etc. from the control point and then go and visit the V2 rocket museum in Nordhausen. After going round the stupid one way system that lead us now where that the map related to, we finally made it to this small gymnasium and collected all our stuff.

The afternoon drive down to Nordhausen was cracking the temperature was 28 degrees and not a cloud in the sky. When we got down to the museum we missed out on the full tour due to a slight misunderstanding but managed to see the outbuildings and read all the info etc. Friday night's B&B was in Benneckenstein a small village about 30 minutes from the start. After a massive bowl of pasta in this local restaurant an early night ready for the big day. Saturday morning and back up to Wernigerode and the start. We set off straight up this hill out of the town and through the woods, all the Germans kept saying that this time last year people were on their hands and knees at this stage of the race due to all the water that was flooding down this track they couldn't keep their feet. This was bliss for them but too hot.



Steadily climbing and gaining height we arrived at our first of six admin points, this is where you can take on water, energy food, tea, coffee, bread, the Germans had thought of everything and it was perfect. The rest of the run went without much of a hick up, but there was a bit of a sting in its tail. At 39 km you are faced with the climb over the Poppenburg a climb and height gain of 600m over 2Km it took us 50 minutes of leg pumping just to cover that mountain, thank god there was a food station on the top. From the top of the Poppenburg it was a run downhill for the remaining 11km to the finish line that was in the local sports stadium. Tea and medals in, a time of 6 hours 40 minutes.

A nice cold shower and then on the bus back to the start, Jump in Bobs car and then back to Neinburg for the carbo loading session on the local ale. Sunday was a meal out with Bob and his family and a leisurely walk around Neinburg Town centre. Monday I flew home after a brilliant long weekend.

News from Australia

Don Newman

Congratulations to the Editor for a very interesting journal and thanks also to the many contributors for their submissions, but a small request please, to help the uninitiated. We oldies understand abbreviations of our time, but some of the current ones are a little puzzling!

Comments

Memories are stirred, by the stories, ref. April issue 2007. Fergie and me and a Few Others by Brigadier J H Hooper OBE DC. Sounded like a good Swan to me! However posted to MELF (Middle East Land Forces) in 1950 and on Ex. Sand Grouse the following year for six weeks or so in the Sinai desert. I was serving as a member of 16 Field Sqn RE, part of 35 Corps Engr Regt RE, (a Brigade Exercise of Centurion Tanks, Infantry Dust Devils and us. We were fully equipped, live ammo, explosives mines etc. covering much the same ground as the aforesaid. We practised route denial, blowing massive craters using 30/50 Beehives, the old time tested cratering equipment and compressor gear in the process, mine laying and foot patrols

A couple of weeks or so out, we found ourselves dug in along the Cairo/Suez railway facing the Egyptian Army, said to be likewise further along the line. As i/c PIAT with a No2 in a sanger, we remained in position for maybe a week. 50% were kept on alert at all times and frequent checks from superiors after darkness, and we not really knowing what was going on and never did. Eventually we moved on resuming more realistic training making our way towards Acquba travelling in 3-ton trucks with camel tanks full of spare fuel and 2 days compo. It required a lot of compass work often with a featureless view ahead.

On the last day but one we finished up on a beach at Al-Aquba having had an open air service and a visit to St Catherine's Monastery enroute, the latter for a selected few.

Back in Fayid 10-12 months later the 9th Independent Parachute Squadron RE arrived in Suez and were accommodated by 35 Regiment RE at Minden Camp, weeks later having found more civilised living in Moascar. Around August 1952, I met up with some NCO's from 9 Sqn on a BII Field Engr Course at Gable Maryam, Elliot and Bones Lazenby come to mind.

Further Comments - Putting the Records straight by Tommo - On taking up the appointment of SSM about April 1967 as Wally Linham's relief, I was asked to follow up on forming a 'Parasites' Association (Paras in the Engineers). Ties had already been produced and were on sale. A couple of Diehards (Ex 9) still serving in 131 Para Engr Regt RE thought it better to come from the regular unit. I openly rejected the idea on two counts, the title and membership status. I did not consider the squadron parasitic, (although modern history may suggest otherwise, with the squadrons unfortunate entry into the Gulf War Zone). However, correspondence/discussion at the time with interested parties was difficult, the squadron very busy away from "base, the idea died, though many proudly wore the Tie for many years.

Back to now time here in Western Australia - Former 9 Sqn members have played hosts to Ex 9 visitors. George and Rene Jones showed some of the sights to Ken Roberts and Lady Reverend Sylvia Roberts. I'm told the Rev. Sylvia does the honours at some AEA functions. Bob Waddell had a visit from Terry Airnes who appeared on our ANZAC day parade on 25th April.

Jim Crozier is said to be in UK at the time of writing. Apparently two former Sqn guys arrived here sometime in 2006 and then moved on to Adelaide in the Eastern states, and two more came out and joined the Australian Engrs (names unknown to me and nothing further heard to my knowledge.

Pastimes - Positive Ageing. - Initiated by the Royal Marines Assn, with invites to Pegasus members, the idea being to attend weekend outdoor activities, it appears to be successful with long walks/shooting/canoeing.

We have the famous public walkway here in Western Australia. 'The Bibbulmun Track' that runs from north of Perth to Albany on the south coast, 1000 Kms. and said to be well used by the public.

The friendly rivalry has produced some good results. The 30-mile march best results rest with Pegasus achieved by 9 Sqn rep Andrew Dye in 6hrs 45mins & Mick Hale, with a former Ex 9 Sqn guy 15 minutes behind, in Marine standards 8% hours is the accepted time, apparently. A young man's game, but there are two Pegasus members 70+ gents enjoying the events, interestingly Andrew & Mick, their wives Lisa & Glair walked 12 miles to pass the time whilst in support of the men folk!

A Recent function (we have several during the year) - The United Kingdom Combined Ex Services Federation, Annual Luncheon Commemorating the 25th Anniversary of Battle for the Falkland Islands.

Dinner of the Year held midday 12th May at Royal Australian Air Force Association Club. An excellent venue, I think we have two veterans in Pegasus, with the Marines and Guardsmen, and Royal Navy - there is bound to be more. Ten of our association turned up with partners plus our Rev Tim Harrison - Ex 23 SAS TA. The event produced some excellent food, refreshments and comradeship.

Remember When - Prince Charles was made Colonel Commandant of Airborne Forces? T shirts appeared printed: "repent all ye craphats for the next King Is Airborne" - Mohican haircuts were fashionable - we had civilian dress identity parades - a morning run on the beach on the Isle of Silt - a staging post for a NATO Ex at Schleswig Holstein BAOR - a Tp Comdr came on parade with his bed roll on top of his small pack and the brasses would not clip onto his ammo pouches, it was upside down! Or a certain SNCO who when stencilling his name on his kit bag had the letter M upside down resulting his name converting to 'Wogg!"

**IF YOUR MOVING HOUSE OR ABOUT TO BE POSTED PLEASE PASS ON YOUR NEW ADDRESS TO THE EDITOR.
FULL CONTACT DETAILS ARE SHOWN ON PAGE 1 OF EVERY PUBLICATION.**

Selly Oak Hospital

Roger Howles

Concerned over recent reports on the treatment of injured military personnel at Selly Oak Hospital, Roger wrote to his local MP receiving the following reply:

Mrs Caroline Spelman, M.P.
HOUSE OF COMMONS
15th March 2007.

Dear Mr., Howles,

Thank you for contacting my office earlier this week following news reports about the treatment of members of the armed forces in Selly Oak Hospital.

Selly Oak Hospital has several wards managed by the military and is the Headquarters of the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine. However, the Government has no plans to re-establish military hospitals. I agree it is not acceptable when individual cases standards fall short. Some NHS treatment has fallen well below the levels our armed forces have the right to expect. The Government has failed to deliver on its promise of separate treatment within hospitals for servicemen and women. David Cameron raised this at Prime Minister's Questions this week. Enclosed is a copy of the transcript for your information.

Yours sincerely,
Caroline Spelman MP

Hansard - Prime Minister's Questions Wednesday 14th March 2007

Q2. [127215] **Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley) (Lab):** Does the Prime Minister share my shock and horror at the stories in the Sunday newspapers about the treatment of injured soldiers? Will he ensure that these hospitals will be fit for purpose, and guarantee that those heroes who come back injured will have the correct treatment and the aftercare that they deserve?

The Prime Minister: I totally agree with what my hon. Friend says. Many of the stories in the Sunday newspapers were from cases of some months ago, all of which have been investigated and looked into. I want to say this on behalf of the staff of the medical defence services-at Selly Oak hospital and those who work elsewhere in our armed forces. They do a superb job for our armed forces, and it is simply not true that the National Health Service staff who work alongside them do not give excellent care to those who are injured. They do give excellent care, and I can tell my hon. Friend, based on the discussions that I have had with people working at that hospital and on the visits that I have paid to that and other facilities that handle injured soldiers, that there is an immense amount of praise, which never gets any publicity, for the staff who work there and the care that they give. When these stories appear, we should at least balance them with a fairer and I think truer picture of what is actually happening.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney) (Con): May I press the Prime Minister a little further on the point raised by the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle)? As the Prime Minister says, anyone who has been to the Birmingham Selly Oak hospital is hugely impressed by the work that the doctors and nurses do. I have seen it for myself and it is impressive, but surely what matters is not just the quality of care but the environment in which our soldiers are cared for. Is it not the case that when soldiers are injured in battle one day and in a British hospital the next, it is easier for them if they are surrounded by soldiers who have been through what they went through? I know that the Prime Minister has made progress in getting a military managed ward, but when does he expect to have a dedicated military facility in the hospital?

The Prime Minister: The commitment is precisely to have a military managed ward, and there is such a ward and has been since December of last year. Let me explain why it is important to express the situation in that way. Hospitals such as Selly Oak, to which very serious cases are brought, need the advantage of having the full range of NHS facilities and experts. It is precisely for that reason that the last Conservative Government rightly took the decision to phase out the military hospitals and to replace them with facilities for the armed forces within the NHS. But I totally agree with the right hon. Gentleman that it is important that those who are injured in war are then surrounded by their own comrades, and that they have a sense of their own feeling and sentiment among them. That is precisely what is happening now. I got the latest report from that hospital just a couple of days ago, and if either he or I were to visit it, we would find that the facilities offered to people are very good.

Mr. Cameron: There is a difference between a military managed ward and a dedicated military ward — that is the important point. General Sir Richard Dannatt said yesterday that he has “every confidence that in three years’ time” — when the hospital is rebuilt — “we will not just have a military managed ward, but effectively a dedicated military ward where our people will be exclusively” — exclusively — “attended to”. If it is right for three years’ time, why cannot we do more quickly?

The Prime Minister: As I understand it, the point is that there may be beds in some of these wards where the level of care is intensive and high, and where anything between six and eight consultants may be looking after a particular person. But if, for example, there are spare beds within such a ward and the staff are required to look after a civilian patient, it would be wrong to say that such a bed could not be used for a civilian patient. It would also be a very inefficient use of resources. But the whole point is to create the circumstances in which our armed forces who are injured are given the best and highest possible care, and in which they receive that care surrounded by other soldiers and members of the armed forces.

General Sir Richard Dannatt said the other day that, having visited those facilities, he was satisfied that they were doing the very best for our armed forces.

Woodbridge Veterans Weekend

(29-30 June 2007)



It was an invitation one could hardly refuse - the very first Veterans Weekend at Rock Barracks, Woodbridge that was held on 29-30 June 2007. 23 Engr Regt (Air Asslt) combined the Freedom of Woodbridge parade, marching with band playing and bayonets fixed, with a Beat the Retreat ceremony, a Regimental Open Day and two social evening functions.

Speaking on the behalf of the veterans, it was without doubt an extremely entertaining weekend. Not only did it give us the opportunity to view Rock Barracks with all its modern structures and sporting facilities, but also to meet up with friends old and new. Many of us listened with envy as the 'living in' members described their new accommodation facilities - (single man flats with en-suite and microwave ovens!) We were also intrigued to witness the new system of 'pay as you dine'. The only criticism voiced to me during the weekend was of the poor mobile phone reception and the cost of a taxi back from Ipswich after a night out!

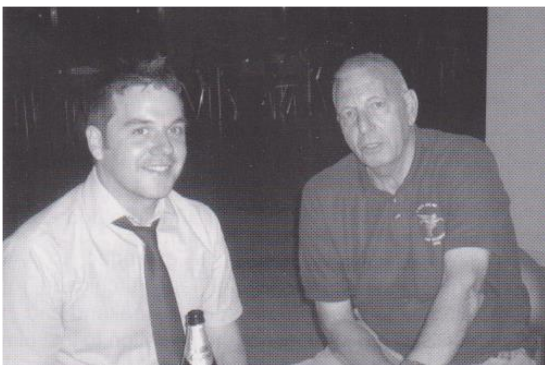
Veterans on Parade through the town centre of Woodbridge



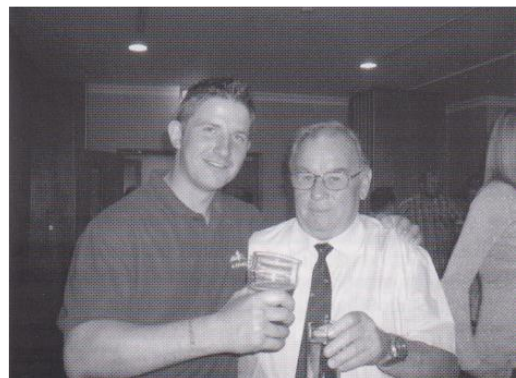
Harold Padfield, Sgt Eddie Edgar (TQMS REME Wksp) & Eric (In Pensioner) Borlace



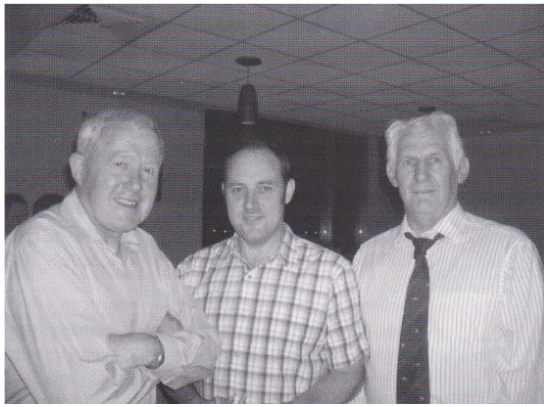
Willy Wiltshire, Eric Blenkinsop, Jim Rogers, Bob Prosser, Baz Henderson, Frank Menzies-Hearn, Col Jock Brazier, Harold Padfield & Bob Seaman



Serving member of the Regiment chats with Dave Lincoln



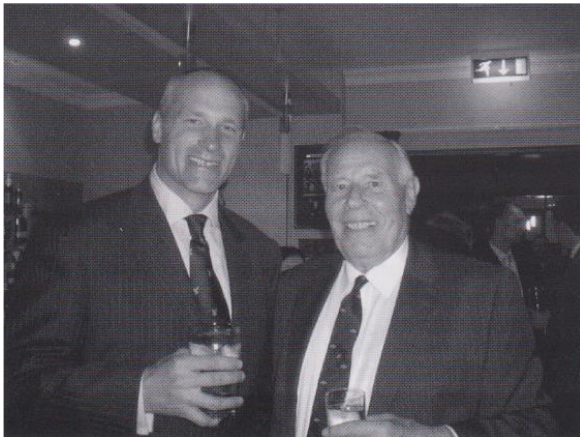
Youth of today meets Joe Stoddard of yesteryear



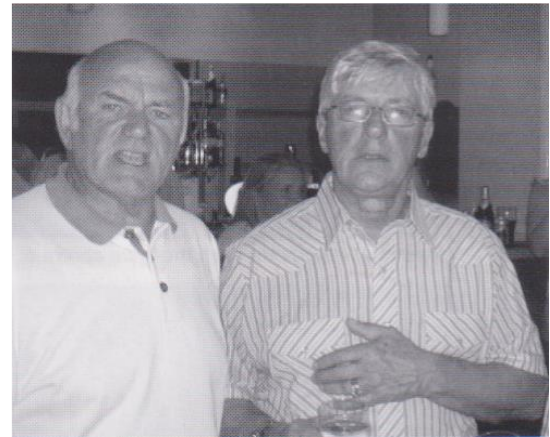
Brig. Ian McGill, Billy Morris & Maurice Metcalfe



Maj Kevin Copsey (OC 9 Para Sqn) with our Chairman, Mick Humphries



WOI (RSM) Ian Murison with Harold Padfield. The Mess bar was officially opened by Harold earlier in the year.



Tony Manley with Jim (Paddy) Crozier who was on a visit to the UK from Perth, Australia



SNCOs with the most handsome SSM in the Regt (3rd from left) WOII Mick Stewart, (well that's what he told me!)

The Friday night social function was held following the ceremony 'Beat the Retreat' when the Regimental Officers and official guests joined the SNCOs and veterans in the WOs & Sgts Mess. During the evening, two excellent lectures provided an insight to the work carried by 51 Para Sqn during their operational tour in Afghanistan.

Saturday's Regimental Open Day gave local residents the opportunity to visit Rock Barracks and see the men and equipment on display. Even the damp weather failed to deter the visitors.

Saturday evening was once again a return of Officers to the WOs & Sgts Mess for a more casual social evening

A sincere vote of thanks is extended to the Commanding Officer, Lt Col Ian Hutchinson for allowing us to share in this special weekend and to WOI (RSM) Ian Murison for the invitation to join him and his members in the WOs & Sgts Mess.

Falklands 25th Anniversary

Mick Humphries

On 17th June 2007 a ceremony took place on Horse Guards Parade in London to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Falklands Conflict. Around 40 members of 9Sqn from 1982 took part in the ceremony and marched onto Horse Guards behind serving sappers from The Sqn. All as can be seen from the photos most of which were taken outside a pub in Whitehall had a great time.



**Billy Morris, Charlie McColgan, Graham Nichol, Baz Bassett, Tony Fry, Tony Hogan
sitting: Brig. Robbie Burns & Steve Gabbittas**



Sgt Bill Skinner AAC with Capt Willie MacDonald



Jonah Jones 704 with Geoff Barlow



John Harratt, Derek Pudney, Taff Sweeney, Dave Hume, ?, Mario



Tom Austin, Derek Pudney, Mick Humphries & John Harratt



Derek Pudney & Jim Doubtfire



Sammy Lane Samsan & Bob Chatterton



Tom Armstrong, ?, Billy Morris & Mick Leather



Jon Stubbs, WO1 (GSM) John Ferry & Mick Humphries

The general consensus of opinion is that the reunion was worth waiting 25 years for, but let's not wait a further 25 years for the next occasion!

Snowdonia Venture

Peter Kershaw

Despite the risk of blisters and aching limbs, the hardy or should that be the foolhardy adventurers descended on the Joint Mountain Training Centre on Anglesey to once again pit their stamina, map reading, compass and map orientation skills on the gentle slopes and not so gentle slopes of the Snowdonia National Park. It should be quickly pointed out that three of the 'racing snakes' were found lacking in their skills during the Saturday excursion resulting in a rather long detour and the need to do an extra 5-mile speed march along the highway (no names no pack drill).

In the absence of Barney ("Follow me I know the Way") Rooney, Mick Fisher took up the baton and organised the not so gruelling coastal walks, while Mike Ellery selected some rather testing hikes over the mountains. The weekend proved totally different to any that we'd attended over the past 6 years - the sun shone throughout our entire stay! Views from the mountain climbs were spectacular offering some form of reward for our efforts.

For the uninitiated, the JMTC financed by the Nuffield Trust offers excellent facilities at exceptionally low costs. The charge for accommodation (in 4 or 6 man double bunked rooms) is a mere £2.50 per night. Families accommodation is also available and once again at a very competitive price. The centre is ideally located for easy access to the Snowdonia National Park. Sailing lessons can also be arranged with the centre providing all the necessary safety equipment and instructors



The group photo was taken just before boarding the coach to be dropped off to start our various activities. Some members failed to make the photo shoot as they were still scrambling to gather together their personal equipment.

Brigette Robertson, Bof Harrop, Ty Harrop, Mike Robertson, Barney Rooney, Louie Gallagher, Jim Harrower & Keith King. Partially obscured Bob Watts & Dave Rutter. Seated: Tony Manley, Denis Healey & Mick Fisher

To replace our energy levels following the Saturday activities; our Master Chef, Tony Manley, produced an excellent BBQ. The food was supplemented with suitable quantities of wine and cans of Lager and Bitter. Never one to short measure, Tony produced sufficient quantities to more than satisfy our personal needs and also that of the resident security staff.



Cabaret time following the BBQ with Nina Grimbley and Keith King “strutting their stuff” providing excellent entertainment throughout the evening



The coastal walkers ready to depart from Red Wharf Bay: Tony Manley, Bof Harrop, Christine Grimbley, Marilyn O’Donovan and Barney Rooney

Publication Amendment

An article headed “The Sad Passing of Common Sense” published in the April 2007 edition was incorrectly credited to Steve Stephenson. Steve has stated that this was in fact incorrect and he was simply passing the subject matter on. The actual author of the article is unknown.

Fergie Semple Golf Competition

The annual competition for the Fergie Semple Golf Trophy will be held on Friday 2 November at the Ripon City Golf Club teeing off from 1100 hours. The event is being organised by John Hughes who needs to know how many tee times are required.

Would all potential Tiger Woods who are keen to enter this competition please forward a deposit of £10-00 to John at the following address:

8, Oak Avenue, Elloughton, Brough, East Yorkshire HU15 1LA or contact him on 01482 666140

The full cost for the golf which includes coffee and bacon roll on arrival is £20-00.

So come on Tony Hogan, Mick Leather, Billy Morris (defending champion) and a host of others, let’s get the ball rolling!

Double Hill Memorial Service

Peter Yeates

**Kindly note the date of this year's pilgrimage -
Sunday 9th September 2007**

Double Hills is the Annual Memorial to remember the brave lives lost when Glider RJ113 crashed into a meadow called Double Hills in the village of Paulton Somerset Near Bath. They all died on a beautiful Sunday morning 17th September 1944. The men who died were the first casualties of the Battle For the Arnhem "Bridge Too Far " -Operation Market Garden, the plan to land an Allied Airborne Army behind German lines and end the war in 1944 and bring the boys home.

21 Airborne Sappers from the 9th Field Company Airborne Royal Engineers and 2 Pilots from the Glider Pilot Regiment all died in a meadow called Double Hills when their Glider broke up in the skies over Paulton and crashed to earth. All the soldiers who died were buried with honour at Weston Super Mare. With their towing Bomber a Stirling they had taken off from RAF Keevil airfield, Trowbridge, Wilts.

This year will be the 29th such annual commemoration and the 28th year since the fine stone Memorial which was built by Royal Monmouth Regt. Sappers and established in 1979. The General commanding the famous British 1st Airborne Division General Roy Urquhart unveiled it then. As the years go on the numbers change. Except those of 21 Sappers and 2 Glider Pilots they remain in memory. However many years have passed these lives are remembered.

It is hoped 9 Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers- and the Army Air Corps will be in attendance as every year since inception. This year's reviewing officer will be **Brigadier John J. Hooper OBE DL**. We may also be honoured with an Army Air Corp and Royal Air Force flypast. The Memorial service will commence sharp at 2:30pm in the Memorial field.

This year will be the earliest it has been held, in consideration for the 50th anniversary of the Army Air Corps and 2007 Arnhem pilgrimage. As we began in 2004 Double Hills will again include the remembrance of those who are engaged in the current conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan. We shall again pay tribute to those who have been injured and made the final sacrifice there.

We particularly associate Double Hills with RAF Lyneham, RAF Keevil was and is a sister satellite site of RAF Lyneham.

Dedication of the AEA Bench Seat

Peter Kershaw



Army Chaplain, The Rev Paul Abram, officially dedicated the wooden Bench Seat recently presented by the Association to the Pegasus Museum during a short on site ceremony on Tuesday the 5th June 2007.

Also officiating, on behalf of the AEA were John Mason and Bill Rudd MBE, with several local dignitaries invited to the ceremony as official guests. Others in attendance included 14 members of the Yorkshire Branch, numerous members of the Parachute Regiment Association, along with their Standards and many overseas visitors.

The commemorative brass plate reads:

"TO HONOUR THE MEMORY OF THE ROYAL ENGINEERS WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR LIBERTY"



The Yorkshire branch members and guests “on parade” following the dedication service.

Standing: Frank Cullen, John Robinson, Mick Fisher, John Parker (with the AEA standard), Yorkie Davies, Bof Harrop, Baz Henderson, John McCarthy, Dave Grimbley, AN other & Bill Gibbons. Seated: Matt Newall, Bill Rudd & John Mason

For future visitors to the museum the bench can be found at the far end of the external exhibits, positioned between the Horsa Glider and the Bailey Bridge

News from the Branches

Aldershot

Betty Gray

The second quarter of the year has been exceptionally quiet with very little activity at branch level.

Our Annual General Meeting was held in June this year and clashed with a number of our members being away on early holidays resulting in a lower attendance than previous years. Even so, twenty managed to make the journey to Aldershot. Dave and Jeannette Rutter ventured as far away as China and others were in France, Spain and Scotland and Australia. The branch committee remains the same as the previous year with Betty Gray attending her second meeting as the new Secretary.

In addition to branch activities, eight other members are involved at committee level with the AEA and Billy Morris has been chasing both past and present members of Airborne Engineers to join our association. He has been doing this with a considerable amount of success. Other members have taken part in the two parades. One in Aldershot and the other in London, to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the ending of the Falklands War. Other branch members who served in the now disbanded 131 Para Engr Regt (TA) also attended a reunion in London for former members and enjoyed the usual activities of reminiscing, eating, drinking and sleeping (in tents) before making their way home on the Sunday.

Since the last publication of the journal we have been able to welcome three new members to our branch. Chris Sands served with 9 Para Squadron during 1953-56 and jumped with 3 Troop at Suez. Roger Mockford served with 9 Para Sqn during the period 1971—79). Roger had previously served in 7 RHA for three years. Eric Rundle (9 Sqn 1954—57) who formed the now disbanded SW.Branch also joined us in June of this year. We warmly welcome these three gentlemen to our branch.

Eleven members of the Aldershot Branch made the long journey to Woodbridge at the invitation of 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Assault) to take part in the Regimental Open Day and Freedom March during the weekend of 29th—30th June. Together with other members from the Association, thirty former members of Airborne Engineers, including Harold Padfield (1st Para Sqn) and Jack Wynne (12 Para Sqn) both WWII veterans, marched through the high Street of Woodbridge behind 23 Regiment and the Corps band. A very large crowd had turned out to watch the parade and the “Veterans” appreciated the excellent reception from those lining the streets. At least six of the veterans were over eighty years of age and the majority of the remainder was well over seventy. A great effort on their part.

The remainder of the weekend was spent in meeting the younger members of the regiment, seeing how they lived, worked and played and practising that well-established tradition of drinking in the bars until closing time. It proved to be a wonderful occasion and a memory that will stay with those able to attend for many years to come.

The next event in our calendar is the annual BBQ held slightly earlier this year in August instead of the normal September. We are keeping our fingers crossed for good weather as we expect in the region of forty five to fifty members and guests attending.

Finally, Wally Clift our great raffle organiser is recovering well after his recent problems and we look forward to seeing both Kath and Wally at the BBQ.

Yorkshire

Bill Rudd MBE

The last four months have passed so quickly since our last article in the journal. It would be an understatement if I said, "it's been a hectic period" - yes a very busy time for many.

Our Annual Dinner as always was a resounding success and as normal we hosted the Mayor and Mayoress from South Tyneside, along with many others. Our military guests whom we invited were unable to attend due to operational reasons. My apologies to Dave Rutter and Tony Manley with regards the changing of accommodation, there is a story to tell on that?



Enjoying the occasion, Lorraine Dunk with Tom Thornton



Fennymoore Fleck and partner

The Yorkshire Branch pilgrimage to Normandy was a huge success story in every way and this is covered in previous pages of this journal by our illustrious scriptwriter Baz Henderson



Casual attire in the Black Swan prior to the dinner Froth Beer, landlord, Bill Rudd, Dave Grimbley & Yorkie Davies

Our most recent visit was to 23 Engineer Regt (Air Assault) in Woodbridge. This was a most enjoyable experience and was more than worth the long journey to Suffolk. We were most honoured to be part of our family Regt when members were asked to join the Freedom Parade through the town of Woodbridge; our Corps Band supported this parade. It was a day to remember by all who took part. The WO's/Sgt's Mess hosted two evenings in the mess including the Beating of the Retreat and we thank RSM Ian Murison for a most enjoyable time throughout our visit.

Lastly I would like to remind all Association members of our 2007 AGM/Reunion which will be held in Harrogate on the weekend of the 2/3/4 November. An update can be seen in these pages, please ensure that members who have yet to book and intend going to post their booking forms off now.

The Yorkshire Branch Arnhem pilgrimage is programmed for the period 20th - 24th September 07 anybody wishing to join this trip ring Bill Rudd on 01765 607898



Hopefully the accommodation arrangements in Arnhem won't necessitate opting for the "buddy, buddy" system as seen above. So who are these two? Answers on a postcard to the Association President.

Charity Donation

As is customary during the Snowdon Adventure weekend, a raffle is held on the Saturday evening and the proceeds donated to a worthy charity. The selected charity on this occasion was "Combat Stress". The following letter of appreciation has since been received:

I am writing to thank you for your kind donation of £140.00 received as a result of 34 members of the Airborne Engineers Association participation in the Adventure Training Weekend at JSMTTC on Anglesey.

As I know you are aware, Combat Stress is absolutely reliant on volunteer fund-raising in order to maintain the unique service we provide to ex-Servicemen and women who have been psychologically injured through active service.

Last year we saw a 26% increase in the number of new veterans seeking our help and this is due in part to new cases still being found from the 1982 Falklands War and from those who took part in Operation Desert Storm in Iraq in 1990. We are concerned about the level of future demand from those involved in the continuing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan - this potentially huge growth in demand is likely to swamp our already modest resources.

Thank you so much for helping to make our work possible. Your continued support really will make a difference to the help we can offer a particularly needful- but often overlooked - group of veterans as they rebuild their lives.

Kind regards,
Rosie Gibbons
Community & Volunteer Fund-raising Officer

P.S. This sounds like a great event - please pass our sincere thanks to the members who took part and kindly raised money on behalf of Combat Stress

MT Troop Group Photograph

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Eric E. Richards

I recognised myself as being in the centre of the 5th group outside the opened door of the 'LST "Empire Celtic" in Hamburg docks in Germany. Although I recognised many faces of the others in the group, I can only name LCpl McKelvey 5th left back row, also in the 2nd row far left centre is L/Cpl Baker ex SAS and 4th left centre row Sapper Alf Leicester.

During our stay in the Hamburg Transit camp, we toured the badly damaged Hamburg docks by a motor launch I believe piloted by an ex-U-boat Captain.

We left from Bindon Barracks in Hameln with all the squadron transport, except our issued Bren Gun Carriers we left behind. After arriving at Tilbury Docks in the River Thames with all the transport we had to leave aboard, for HM Customs inspections, during which time we were billeted in the Rifle Range Camp at Pitsea Nr Grays, Essex. We bought over with us the Dodge 3-ton truck from Germany which the squadron fitted out as a married families bus, but this not on the transport allocation, so was kept behind by the Customs.

Before we drove all our transport on to Waterloo Barracks, Aldershot, after the squadron moved to Malta Barracks, we then got our 'Dodge' Family Bus back, but all the seats had been slashed open by the custom people. Once we repaired the 'Dodge' was use once more for the squadron married families to use. Does any know what happened to that bus?

Now where have all those young men in that that photo gone? I am now nearly 82 years of age, so they must be in their late 70's or 80's now, so I would appreciate having a copy of that photo for my album or many of the rest of their names if possible. Also how many of them are in the AEA? I assume whoever took that photo and sent it to the journal is an AEA member?

I must say seeing myself in that photo for a moment made me feel younger, so again where are those other then young squadron members gone. Hoping that many are still surviving to date.

After arriving back in the UK from Germany I became then Capt 'Johnny' Goddard's 2 Troop driver, heard he retired as a Brigadier. Hoping you can publish this article, only there doesn't appear to be published about the 1948 -51 of the squadron to-date.

Sincerely yours (Airborne All The Way)

Eric Richards 24, Woodquest Avenue, Herne Hill, London, SE24 OHD Tel: 0207 274 0969

Journal Subscriptions- Renewal Time

For many of our subscribers the time is fast approaching to renew the Journal annual subscription. Please note, that if you do not receive a 'reminder' in this current issue, then your personal account is still in credit or you have thankfully opted to pay by Standing Order.

The annual fee is currently £6 for UK subscribers and slightly more for our overseas members. Unfortunately, due to the dramatic increase in postage introduced by Royal Mail and the increase in print and delivery services a recommendation will be raised at the AGM in November to increase the annual subscription commencing **October 2008**. No it's not a misprint - any increase in the subscription will not take effect until **October 2008**.

Journal Input

Our publication thrives on input from all corners of the world and from former and serving members of Airborne Engineers. Each and every subscriber has a story to relate and you don't have to be a gifted author to put pen to paper or send an e-mail for your personal account to be published. And where are all your photographs? There must be thousands tucked away in draws and cupboards. Many of you own a digital camera - so at your next social event or branch meeting take a few shots; then send me the results. The computer literate members can simply download the results and send the direct to the editor.

Improvised Bridges Built by the Royal Engineers

Mike Ellery

During my wanderings around the Scottish countryside in search of mountains over 3000ft high to climb, I quite often have to cross the odd burn (river, to all you Sassenachs). If I'm lucky someone will have built a bridge across it, which saves me getting my feet wet. The estate workers or contractors may have built these bridges, but quite often I come across one that has been built by the Royal Engineers



The Junior Leaders Regt RE built this footbridge. It is located on the West Highland Way, which is a long distance footpath between Milngavie near Glasgow and Fort William. The path is 95 miles long and usually takes around 6 days to complete. Unfortunately there is no date as to when the bridge was built, but the path was officially opened in October 1980 so the bridge must have been completed before it's opening. It is a well-constructed bridge that has seen many muddy walking boots cross its wooden deck- a credit to those who built it.



Just recently I moved to Rhynie, a small village west of Huntly, which is north of Aberdeen. Whilst on my dog walking duties my route takes me through a private estate with right of way access. I came across this footbridge built by 236 Field Sqn RE in 1964, a TA unit previously disbanded and now in the process of reforming, based in Elgin. The bridge is in constant use and is used daily. It has been well maintained and has certainly stood the test of time.

Perhaps some of our readers know of the existence of other structures?

Re Formation of 236 Fd Sqn (V).

Background

The restructuring of the Territorial Army as part of the Future Army Structure (FAS) has resulted in the increase of TA Royal Engineers in Scotland with the reforming of 236 and 124 Fd Fd Sqn. 236 Fd Sqn was based at RAF Kinloss and was part of 76 Engineer Regiment (V), which following the Strategic Defence Review was amalgamated with 71 (Scottish) Engineer Regt and restructured to form the current 71 Engineer Regiment.

Current Situation

The Squadron is in the early stages of re-forming at the TA Centre in Elgin with key staff now in place. Recruiting for the new squadron has started and a number of TA soldiers who were with 117 (HQ & Sp) Sqn based at RAF Leuchars have relocated to Elgin providing the capability to train the new recruits.

Jasa Pingat Malaysia Medal Presentation



Pete Guerin accepting his Jasa Pingat Malaysia Medal

A representative from the Malaysian High Commission presented about 100 Jasa Pingat Malaysia medals in Stamford (Lincs) on Thursday 19th April . Recipients were also awarded a miniature medal and citation.

Notification of the qualification and method of application for the above mentioned medal were published on page 21 of the April 2007 issue of the Journal.

Congratulations Peter

Membership Report

Steve “Billy” Morris MSM-Membership Secretary

It has been another good period for new members joining our ranks, but this is no time to rest on our laurels as there are hundreds of former airborne sappers who still have not heard of our existence - spread the word and assist in my quest for yet more new members.

We welcome to the “Airborne Engineers Association” the following new members:

Stephen Ainley (Lofty)	9 Indep Para Sqn RE	1972-1976
Roger Mockford	7RHA/9Para Sqn RE	1967-1979
William Ridland	300 Para Fd Sqn /131 Para Engr Regt	1957-1961
Peter Marlow	HQ 5 AB Bde / 9 Para Sqn RE	1990-1996
Russell (Gilly) Poulter	9 Para Sqn RE	1980-1983
Paul Skivington	9 Para Sqn RE	1996-2003
Ian Kitching	9 Para Sqn RE	1984-1990
Arthur Burdaky	9 Para Sqn RE	1959-1968
Richard McIntyre	131 Indep Para Sqn RE	1969-1980
Anthony (Max) Clews	9 Para Sqn RE	1978-1982
Col (retd) Charles Pagan MBE, TD	131 Para Engr Regt	1965-1975
Capt Kevin Lillicrap	9 Para Sqn RE / 23 Engr Regt (Air Asslt)	1981 - still serving
Phil Adams	9 Para Sqn RE	1983-1985
Andrew Cooper	9 Indep Para Sqn RE	1973-1979

**Congratulations on your 80th Birthday
Charles Keith Barker**



Jim Harrower joins Charles (aka) Keith at the party



**Bob Jones & Ray Coleman (watched over by Pam)
Portsmouth & Southsea Para Spectacular - 7 July 2007**

Association Shop

Ray Coleman

Description	Price	P&P (UK Post Rate)
<u>Ties</u>		
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
<u>Badges</u>		
Association Blazer Badges	£14.00	£1.00
Lapel Wings - Blue Enamel S/C	£3-.50	£1.00
<u>Clothing</u>		
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/lg or Xlg	£16.50	£3.10
Association Polo Shirts - Fred Perry style - Maroon or blue with Pegasus logo - small/med/lg or Xlg	£15.50	£2.50
Association 'T' Shirts - Maroon with logo - small/med/lg/Xlg	£9.00	£1.80
Association Shower proof Maroon Fleece -with embroidered 'Airborne Engineers' logo - Med/Lg/Xlg	£28.00	£3.00
Baseball Cap (in blue or maroon) - with combined Pegasus & Wings crest	£7.00	£1.00
<u>Miscellaneous</u>		
Association Shield	£18.00	£2.00
"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
Association Directory	£5.00	£2.50

Last Post

Gordon Spicer a former member of 1st Parachute Squadron RE passed away on 3rd June 2007.

Obituaries

19054148 Spr. Freddie Crooks died on 25 June 2007 aged 76 in his hometown Billingham, Cleveland. Freddie joined the Army in September 1946 and was at the Army Apprentices School in Chepstow, Mon. training as a Vehicle Mechanic. He went to 1 Training Regt. R.E. in Great Malvern in Aug 1949 and was posted to 9 Ind. Airborne Sqn. R.E. in December 1949. He completed his parachute course in May 1950 and was with 1 Troop when the Sqn moved to Famagusta in June 1951. After 6 months in Cyprus the Sqn went to Egypt and it was from there that Freddie left the Sqn. to go on a course. Whilst on the course Freddie played rugby with the unit and unfortunately perforated his ear drum and was medically downgraded and did not return to the Sqn. After completing his 8 years Freddie left the army and took up employment with the local bus company as a maintenance fitter and then worked for chemical firms such as LC.I, finally ending up working for British Steel. During his period of employment he was also with the T. A. He retired in 1992 and for the remainder of his retirement was not in good health.

His wife Jean, son Stephen and daughter Gail together with the rest of the family and friends will sadly miss him

Colonel M J Payne RE

Col Mike Payne was OC of 9 Indep Para Sqn for 2 years during k 1974-76 and passed away on the 29th of November 2006, as recorded in the previous issue of the Journal.

Having never previously served in airborne forces Mike faced many challenges when he took over command from his predecessor, Mike Addison. The main one being the disbandment of 16 Para Bde in 1976/77 and the potential threat that this posed for the future of the Sqn.. His astute mind and effective lobbying whilst OC ensured that the unit retained a viable parachute capability upon which to rebuild some years later on the formation of 5 Airborne Bde and later, 16 Air Assault Bde. Very few people at the time were aware or fully appreciated his legacy and 9 Sqn is still the only unit to have continuously retained an airborne role since the 2nd World War. Additionally a notable PR coup of his was the Sqn's return from operations in N Ireland in 1975 by parachuting onto Hankley Common on Valentines Day; it was reported on TV and made all the national newspapers, including the rare honour of a Giles cartoon in the Sunday Express!

On a humorous note Mike once described his time in command as "like driving a very fast racing car with no steering wheel or brakes - it was fine as long as the Sqn was pointed in the right direction but it became a hell of a challenge if it ever started to veer of course."

MAJOR-GENERAL Peter Shapland, who has died aged 83, was responsible for some highly exacting engineering assignments in the course of a distinguished career in the Army.

In 1965, then a Lieutenant Colonel, Shapland was appointed Commander Royal Engineers (Operations) and posted to Aden. There he was given the task of building a new "black top" road linking the port area with the garrison town of Dhala, on the border with the Yemen some 40 miles to the north.

Mountains and deserts intersected by deep wadis, scorching temperatures and flash floods presented great technical difficulties. Security, too, was a major problem. The ancient caravan route was used by the National Liberation Front to smuggle arms into Aden, and the warlike Radfani tribes regarded anything that moved along it as a potential target.

If Shapland had any misgivings about the dangers he faced, they were quickly confirmed when he had to leap from his Land Rover to escape incoming fire from an ambush. A few days later, flying over the area, he heard a loud clunk and saw bullet holes in the wing of his plane. On another occasion, clambering down into a culvert to inspect the damage caused by an explosive device, he narrowly escaped detonating a concealed antipersonnel mine.

In September 1966, a group of dissidents overpowered the night watchmen at the bitumen plant and placed charges on the pump. The explosion blew the equipment 100 yards away and delayed construction work for six weeks.

In other attacks the Sappers' encampments were raided, the road was mined and vehicles blown up, a rock crusher was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade and an excavator destroyed by explosives laid overnight.

Mortar, artillery and air support sometimes had to be called in as counter measures. Twelve lives were lost and 58 were wounded as a result of dissident activities during the construction work.

Shapland was called up in August 1943 and, after gaining his commission, was cycling around Brighton between outlying detachments when he found himself being pursued by a deflected VI rocket. Fortunately, the missile passed him and went on to explode harmlessly in a field. Shapland was subsequently posted to Queen Victoria's Own Madras Sappers and Miners in Bangalore but returned to England after independence. A staff appointment was followed by a move to 32 Engineer Regiment as adjutant. One evening in the mess, he was summoned by the divisional commander who demanded to know whether they were besieged. Replying in the negative, Shapland learned that, even in the United Kingdom, flags must be hauled down at sunset unless the regiment was under siege. Staff College and a spell in the Canal Zone preceded a posting to 35 Engineer Regiment as a squadron commander in Cyprus and BAOR. During the Suez crisis, Shapland's squadron was re-rolled at short notice to provide port operations at Limassol and Port Said. After leaving Aden in 1967, a staff job at the MoD led to the twin appointments of Commander 30 Engineer Brigade and Chief Engineer, Western Command. Shapland became Deputy Commander and Chief of Staff Southeast District in 1972.

He was promoted Major General two years later on being made Director, Volunteers, Territorials and Cadets. He retired from the Army in 1978.
