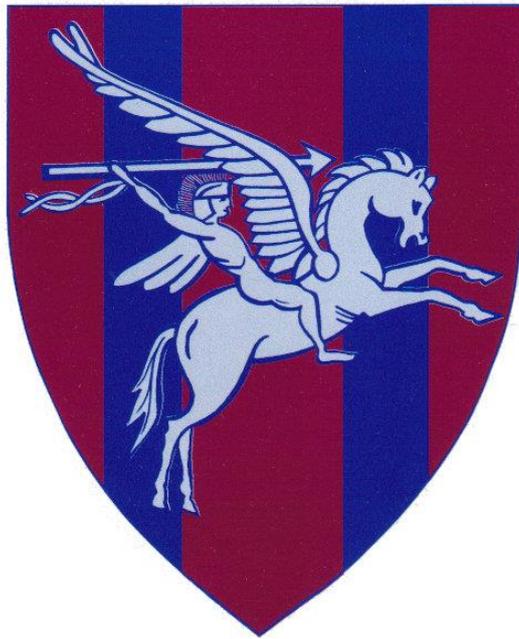




# THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS JOURNAL



**Airborne Engineers Association  
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# The Airborne Engineer

April 2008 Issue No. 24

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**Publication Deadline - AUGUST 2008 Edition**

Members submitting material for publication in the AUGUST 2008 edition of the Journal are advised that the closing date will be **FRIDAY 11th JULY** Kindly ensure that you forward your articles direct to the editor - address as shown above.

**Please - don't leave it until the last minute.**

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## Chairman's Address

**Mick Humphries**

Well, spring is with us again, and this means that the Regiment is now on active service in Afghanistan. I am sure that you will all join me in wishing them a successful tour and pray that they all return safe and well in the autumn. We hope to keep you updated with their progress and some pictures in the next journal.

I have heard from The RSM that the unveiling ceremony for The John Rock Bust will be held at John Rock Barracks on 21 st November, please put the date in your diary, so we have a good attendance. On the subject of RSM's, Iain will be handing over to a new RSM during July. I would like to thank Iain for all of the help and support that he has given the AEA and myself during his tenure. A big airborne welcome is extended to his successor Glen Walton, who we will no doubt share a few beers with during his 2-year tenure.

We have now finalised the details for this year's reunion and the details are set out in this journal. The committee have decided that on the Saturday we will have a trip to The National Memorial Arboretum. The names of many Airborne Sappers are inscribed on this memorial and I would encourage you all to make the trip. Please ensure that you help Bunny and his committee by booking early so they can start to organise.

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## Letter from WO1 (RSM) Iain Murison

*Ed: The following transcript is copied from a letter received by the Association chairman from the RSM 23 Engr Regt (AirAssit)*

As the Regimental Sergeant Major, I will be writing to you over the coming months to ensure that you receive all the current news of what is happening during our tour of Afghanistan by way of a newsletter.

There is a tangible sense of pride and purpose amongst our soldiers, our training has prepared us well and it's now time to go and demonstrate our skill, ability and influence within the Afghan people. Morale is excellent and welfare of the families taken care of, with that in mind we can get on with the job at hand. The tour will undoubtedly challenge and test our patience and nerve, however, mental robustness, a real sense of unity and the strong resolve not to quit, I know will prevail. Optimism is the truest form of courage.

I feel it is important that the regiment engages at every level with our wider family especially with the support we have received from you since moving to Rock Barracks.

You are part of what is now 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Assault) and form the basis of our regimental family, without your efforts our unique ethos would not be as it is today.

The unveiling ceremony for the bust of Lt Col John Rock will be held at Rock Bks on Friday 21st November. Please put the date in your diaries as it is important for you all to be there, I will ensure that all the relevant details are published in the Journal. In outline the Regiment will be on

parade supported by The Corps Band and the day will conclude with a series of lectures on Afghanistan, practical demonstrations and a cocktail evening in each of the respective messes.

I will be handing over responsibility of RSM in July to WO1 (RSM) Glen Walton. Glen is a fantastic soldier and friend to whom I owe my life. He is a thinking man with huge presence and I know he is the right man to take this regiment forward while maintaining the interests of the unique ethos of our soldiers. Thank you for all the support I have received during my tenure, I have learnt much about Airborne Sappers and can now take that into the corps, it has been a refreshing and inspiring insight.

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## AEA AGM & REUNION

### The Royal Court Hotel, Coventry 17th-19th October 2008

The Chatham Branch have bravely accepted the challenge to run this year's AGM and Reunion, which will be held at the Royal Court Hotel, Keresley, Coventry.

The Reunion will be from Friday the 17th until Sunday the 19th October 2008, provision can be made for those wishing to stay over until Monday, numbers permitting.

In this Journal you will find a booking form for the hotel and a booking form for the coach trips to Birmingham and the National Memorial Arboretum, please return these to the address on the booking form as soon as possible.

In previous years it has been the case where individuals have made their own booking, this causes untold problems with the Gala Dinner seating plan on Saturday Night, if you don't book through the system you are not on the Seating Plan. In past years these have been "squeezed in" this will not be the case this year, if there is any doubt about bookings you will be excluded.

The last time we held the reunion at the Royal Court we were graced with a "happy hour" that lasted all weekend, we cannot promise that this will happen on this occasion but we will do our best, there will be a "happy hour" to welcome guests on Friday afternoon.

The Fergie Semple Golf Tournament will be held on Friday 17th October, full details will be published in the August edition.

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## X9- His Identity Revealed

### Ed:

For the many members who served with 9 Indep Para Sqn during the early and mid 1960's, the sad news of the death of one of the true characters during that period is that of Fred Robson. With Fred's passing I can now reveal that he was author of numerous inputs to the Journal under the disguise of "X9". So for the many who sort his identity the secret is no more. Fred's deteriorating health during the past 12-18 months caused him to lose that typical squaddie sense of humour, hence the lack of input to the journal from him. Fred, (via e-mail) informed me that he had a pocket watch, amongst one or two other items, that he wished donate to the Association for auction at the next reunion; with instructions that the proceeds be donated to the central funds of the Association. His wishes will be carried out to the letter at the AGM/Reunion weekend in October.

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## Rogues Gallery



Mark Jones with the pike that didn't get away!



Jim Brierley, recorded as the oldest freefaller (80+) in Western Australia completes his 3,000th descent over Melbourne



Mick Fisher & Dave Ruddock November 2008



Mick Porter, Fred Matterface, Baz Henderson, Cliff Higgins, John Hughes, 'Dusty' De Ste Croix, Seated in front: Robin Taylor & Jack Braithwaite - several years ago!



Remnants of 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Squadron leaving 'C' Camp, Barton Stacey for Hemeln – October 1948



Tom O'Brien & Alan Morrison Northern Ireland - in the 70s

# Ex Grand Prix

## Lt Ben Howorth

On 15 September 2007, 9 Parachute Squadron deployed to Kenya as part of Ex GRAND PRIX with the 1 R IRISH BG.

After a long flight we arrived in Nairobi International Airport before travelling by road to Nanuyki Show Ground (NSG), effectively the centre of mass for British Army training in Kenya. In order to support the BG the Sqn had to split into various groupings: close support engineering to the exercising troops, range construction and batsims (battle simulations), water points and the obligatory community project.



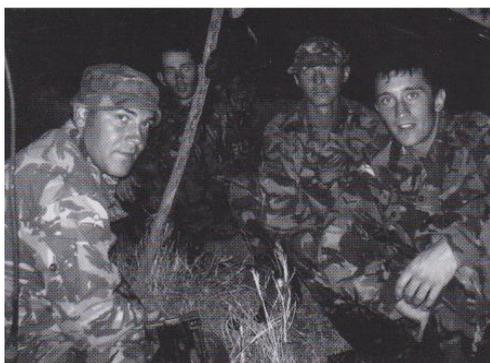
### Close Support Troop

The first phase of the exercise consisted of company level training and saw the troop split into three sections under the command of Cpl's Woollier, Baillie and Leeming, who took a company each. They then moved through a rotation of a week each of patrol skills and SOPs, and live firing, from individual DQB lanes up to company attacks. In addition, the sections' each had a week of well earned R&R. During the live firing package the sapper section had a chance to take the Rangers through confidence charges, and an explosive entry demonstration using live bar mines.

Following the company training the BG moved into a CALFEX Combined Arms Live Firing) over a 20-hour period. The Sappers were tasked with breaching a minefield to allow the occupation of a FUP, for which we came together as a troop.

Once the attack went noisy we returned to the mines that had been previously marked, and detonated them using the Christmas tree method. Once this had been completed the sections returned to their companies and rejoined the assault. A demanding phase for the troop, but certainly a rewarding one highlighting the versatility of the Sappers- a deliberate engineering op at one end and fixing bayonets at the other!

After a day's recovery the FTX began under the watchful eye of the Brigade staff. For this phase a water point was set up and manned throughout, relocating every couple of days under the co-ordination of A1 Echelon. This left 2 sections between the rifle companies as engineering support, with SSGT Dorkings and myself moving between company HQs. The FTX began in the region of Kamwaki Farm- an area full of wildlife as Cpl Baillie's section soon found out after being harassed by distressed lions on the first night! One of the first serials was a large-scale search and cordon op, which involved the whole troop. During the search two weapons caches were located, and the Sappers were tasked with their destruction.



As the exercises progressed the emphasis moved onto deliberate attacks culminating in two BG attacks. The first was a blank dawn attack on the rather mountainous feature of Kamwaki before relocating to the arid desert land of Archers Post for a live attack. For both the troop was providing intimate support to the companies, as by this stage the water point had been collapsed. The live attack began with a 20km night insertion for a dawn H-Hr, with the main Sapper activity being the reinstating of a road, which had

been denied to us through the use of RCKs (Rapid Cratering Kits).

Throughout the attack the engineers were employed as infantry sections and certainly earned their money during the 8 hours of fighting in the intense African sun.



## Community Project

### Lt Stu Bennett

As part of EX Grand Prix I had the fortunate and rewarding job of organising and managing community related construction projects within the areas of Nanyuki and Archers Post. So armed with a small band of determined Airborne Sappers we began the recce phase and this is where we hit our first stumbling block. We hadn't accounted for the African factor. After 2 days of tireless recces and fighting through the crowds of hawkers we came out the other end with two projects to construct and a plethora of dubious 'ebony' carvings.



The first project entailed the deconstruction and subsequent construction of an existing makeshift kitchen situated in Likii School in Nanyuki. The department caters for disabled children from the slums and strives to educate and ultimately reintegrate them back into mainstream schooling. The initial phase of the deconstruction was conducted with extreme excitement, with Lt Ben Howorth employing his vast health and safety knowledge to ensure a smooth running albeit strict site. The kitchen was built within 4 days from the demolition phase and started to gather keen interest from certain characters by the name of 'Baby face Jungle Master' and 'SirTerry Wogan' himself, who as it happens is quite a handy carver as well as a well known radio DJ. Once complete we took the 'Team Charity Road show' up north to Archers Post in order to start the second project, which included an adventure playground

within an orphanage. The playground had an existing slide structure however one of the legs had been removed to be used as fire wood, not ideal when the children continually aimed to break the world record for how many of them could fit on the slide. The structure was adventurous both physically and conceptually with the main task of construction falling in the hands of Spr Brown who when he dragged himself away from the Ulster TV news crew was a valuable asset to the team, being the only carpenter.

Both projects were a success and this is solely down to the hard working nature of the sappers within the team. The austere environment and lack of appropriate resources only encouraged the airborne initiative inherent within the soldiers of 9 Squadron.

### Lt Bennett, Sprs Wood & Brown with the children from the AIC orphanage



## "Proud to be Airborne"

What manner of men are these who wear the maroon Beret?

They are firstly, all volunteers and are then toughened by hard physical training. As a result they have that infectious optimism and that offensive eagerness which comes from physical well-being.

They have jumped from the air and by doing so have conquered fear.

Their duty lies in the van of battles; they are proud of their honour and have never failed in any task.

They have the highest standards in all things whether it be skill in battle or smartness in execution of all peacetime duties.

They have shown themselves to be tenacious and determined in defence as they are courageous in attack They are in fact, men apart. "Every man an Emperor"

**Field Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein**

# My Recollections

Harold (Paddy) Padfield

## Preparing For The Invasion Of Europe



We arrived at Donington, a small village in Lincolnshire, with Grantham twenty miles to the north and Spalding and Boston ten miles in the opposite direction. The camp was of Nissen huts at the back of Komani House, which was to be the HQ Office. The cookhouse was a mile away, we had to walk to the village then turn down a long lane with shrubbery on either side. We had a hot meal and went to bed. We spent the few days before going home on leave for Christmas and the New Year, sorting out stores, generally getting the camp in some sort of order, and making ourselves known in the village. The village square was our parade ground.

Life was hectic during our stay in Donington, as we worked hard in training and we played hard during our time off, long route marches, exercises and night drops were the main themes. The local tea shop became our NAAFI until NAAFI itself could provide a place for us, but the tea and buns at the shop were our favourite. It was always crowded at break time but the service was second to none.

We had some very good moments and the camaraderie amongst the Squadron was of the finest to be had anywhere, and yet the rivalry between troops was always competitive. Mondays always stood for twenty-mile route marches in full battle order, just to knock the weekend cobwebs away. We used to march out of the village at attention, which is with rifles in the sloped arms position, and again when we arrived back late afternoon.

On some of these occasions, a young officer in "A" Troop would take his bagpipes and play us back into the village, and naturally we would get onlookers. On one of these days Dave Thomas, a corporal in the troop gave a little boy sixpence to "give to the man playing the bagpipes", his neck went so red you could have lit a cigarette from the glow. On another occasion, Joe Malley, who was a friend of mine, had gone home to Glasgow for the weekend. He missed the "passion wagon", at Grantham Station at 3 am to bring him back to Donington. He still hadn't arrived by the time we went to breakfast, so we cleaned his webbing etc., and took it with us, because we went straight to the parade ground from breakfast. Still no sign of Joe, but just as we were about to form up for parade he appeared, so we got him dressed and had put bread and sausages in his pack. He had walked the 20 miles from Grantham, and was now about to start a 20-mile route march. At the end of each 10-minute break, Joe would be arriving; he didn't forget that march in a hurry.

At this time parachute training took on a different tack.

Previously we would jump with a Sten gun fixed between our harness, and the magazine in our pouch ready for instant action if need be on landing. Our rifles and Bren guns were packed in containers and were dropped from the bomb racks of the plane. When we landed we would rendezvous on the containers and get our mainly for hot towels and a shave, and a haircut if it was needed, we felt really refreshed after it.

We would then decide on a cafe for a few drinks and something to eat. There wasn't a lot to see in the town, as it was mainly rubble, but we enjoyed ourselves and would then wander back to camp. The route was quite interesting, as it was an area that we didn't cover in our advance from Taranto. Some of the places we went through were just heaps of rubble, as at this stage Bari had not had a cleaning-up operation, bodies were still buried amongst the rubble, so the odour was a bit choice in places, to say the least.

I had my 22nd birthday party at Altimura, and had a few mugs of Italian Vino. Not normally being a drinking man, it had quite an effect on the evening. On parade next morning, the OC on his inspection came to me and said "Pleased to see you on parade Corporal, I hear you had a hectic night". I found out after parade that I was singing "The Pale Moon Was Rising", outside his tent, and was told to go to bed. They couldn't get me to bed because I was saying it was too high, so I slept on the floor. I never drank Vino again.

We had a visit from a section of the Alpine Mountain Troop, and we were detailed to learn the loading and unloading of ammunition boxes on to mules, and sessions on riding them. Not an experience I relished, but we had a pleasant few days. On the last evening I led my mule to water and whilst he was having his fill some clown drove by in a lorry and frightened the daylight out of him. I still had hold of his reins and was being dragged all over the field, with everyone shouting "Let Go", "Let Go". That was easier said than done, but it was eventually achieved with nothing more than a little bruised pride.

December saw us packing up stores, taking them to the docks, and home for Christmas.

## The Battle for the Bridge at Arnhem

We had stood by to drop the week before, which would have been very adventurous, using the three Brigades to take the three bridges, Maas, Waal and Neder Rijn. This was cancelled owing to the 2nd Army meeting fierce resistance at the Albert Canal, so the mission would have been suicidal. General Montgomery, decided that more planes and more parachute troops were needed. Hence the 82nd and 101st paras took the lower bridges, and 1st Airborne, were to take the bridge at Arnhem, on Sunday 17th September 1944.

We had loaded the containers on the Friday and set off in the early hours of Sunday morning to Barkstone Heath Airfield.

My stick commander and myself checked straps and hooks on the plane, that the door opening was taped and that the bomb rack switches worked, before getting the stick to fit up the containers. It was a lovely sunny day and we laid around until we were told to enplane at around eleven o'clock. The plane eventually taxied into position at the head of the runway lining up for take off, which *in* our case was around midday. The flight was quite smooth and we had plenty of fighter escort. When we had crossed the North Sea we heard some gunfire, but nothing to worry about. When we saw the dykes and windmills of Holland, we knew that time was getting close, and the butterflies had risen from their slumbers and were playing havoc with my stomach. Lt. Simpson, told us to hook up and it was then, Red on "Action Stations", Green on "GO", Time 1407 hours, or to the uninitiated, seven minutes past two.

A good exit, no twists, not a lot of oscillation, but there was a tree in my way, I could see that I wasn't going to miss it, so I took evasive action to cover my face. The chute was caught in the trees and I just hung there, I hit my release box, pulled out the leg straps, and lowered myself on to a branch and climbed down. The scene was bewildering, Gliders were coming in thick and fast, many with a horrible "crunch", and there were hundreds of parachutists, at any other time it would have been a sight to behold. I spotted the blue smoke for my rendezvous, and ran over to join the rest of the stick. We collected our weapons and stores and moved off in the direction of Wolfheze. In battle we carried our explosives and grenades on our person, so you made sure that the detonators were stored where you wouldn't fall on them.

As we moved off the dropping zone, we came across a German vehicle and a German General and his driver who had been killed, which brought you to the reality of the situation we were in. We marched in single file with rifles at the alert, but all was quiet. Then the Dutch people like conquering heroes welcomed us. As we left Wolfheze, and came to the outskirts of Oosterbeek, we saw a lot of men dressed in white, they were quite strange looking and eerie, they were apparently from an asylum down the lane.

In Oosterbeek, we were once again greeted by hundreds of Dutch, with flags and bunting, it was like a Victory Parade, when all of a sudden the action came to life. We quickly dispersed, went into back gardens, took up defensive positions and local skirmishes developed. The railway bridge was across the fields from these back gardens, and we knew that 9 Field Company, who had come in by glider, were to take the bridge and demolish it.

As we were having our little battles they were making their way across the field to the bridge. As they arrived on the bridge, about 20 in number, the Germans blew it up. These were the first casualties that we saw.

As the afternoon wore on the battles were beginning to rage around Oosterbeek and we had to get to the bridge at Arnhem, which was quite a few miles ahead. It was I suppose about 9pm when we got into Arnhem, and things were pretty lively, with fires lighting up the place. I had to get down to the river, find the pontoon bridge and check it's suitability for use at a later stage; I took Danny Neville and Frank Navin with me. We found it about a mile down stream, minus its centre section. We carried on for a further half mile and found the centre section. On inspection, we found that it had explosive charges fixed to it, so we cut them away and dumped them in the river. We then made our way back to the main section, which also had explosive charges fixed, so we did the same with those. As we were coming away a German soldier must have mistook us for one of his own, poor chap.

We made our way back to the bridge area and hoped to find the rest of them there. As luck would have it they weren't far from where we had left them. They had just finished being briefed on the situation. Our stick was detailed to go under the bridge and take up a position on its north end. There seemed to be all hell being let loose at

the bridge itself, apparently a shed at the side of the bridge containing ammunition and explosives had been hit and this was causing the extra fireworks.

We managed to get under and round the back with no bother, we came to a building, which Lt. Simpson told me to break into and search. It didn't need a lot to break in, I just broke the glass in the door and turned the handle from the inside. I asked Joe Malley and Arthur Henty to give me covering fire as I searched around. I went upstairs and realised it was a school, there were desks and chairs and a blackboard and blasted great picture windows on one side of the main classroom and porthole windows on the opposite side, but other rooms weren't too bad. There was a good view of the bridge from the room at the end of the passage. I went out and reported back and we then took over the building, this must have been around 10.30pm.

Everyone was told to be as quiet as possible whilst we used the desks to make barricades etc. We had the advantage of fires around the place to see what we were doing, and then we settled down to watch. I positioned myself on the stairway, so that I was available for any occurrence. I sent Arthur Hendy to have a scout around the basement to see if there was anything of use in the way of clothing that we could use to muffle the sound of our boots, and just as important to see if there was any food.

Our luck was in as he came up with pullovers, slips and skirts, obviously a girls' school. We passed them round and he cleared off again as he said, "there were some vegetables down there". After a while, he came back with some hot soup, which went down well.

Sometime later we heard movement down below and it was some of A Troop, how they came to be in the area I don't know. Anyway we could do with some extra hands up top to cover the area properly. Daylight came and I went around and sorted out the arcs of fire I wanted each man to cover.

I went to Sid Gueran and set him up on a desk so that he could comfortably sit and cover a vital area to the west through his porthole window. I was telling him the area I wanted him to cover and couldn't understand why I wasn't getting a response, when I turned towards him he was sat upright, and my first loss. He had been shot through the mouth; it must have been a stray bullet because I certainly didn't hear anything. I got hold of Joe Malley, whom I had put in charge of this particular area, and we laid him out on the floor, and made sure that his identity tag was round his neck. I then continued round the other areas, but they were well engaged and our defence of this vital bridge had begun.

Among the A Troop contingent, who came in during the night, was a signaller from 3rd Battalion. He was trying to get information locally and further afield from 30 Corps, who were pushing through to take over from 1st Airborne Division, but he wasn't having a great deal of success.

Three lorries approached the bridge from the south, we waited until they were well inside the net of troops around the bridge and opened fire. Grenade and Piat guns opened up from other areas and those who got out were mown down. Later that day a convoy of tanks and half-tracks came from the same direction and met the same fate. There must have been a dozen or more, three went over the embankment, others were burnt out and four came towards the school all guns blazing. They were successfully put out of action and laid to rest at the side of the building.

We had a lull of almost an hour except for the odd sniper and Tommy Gray was our next to be killed. The Germans then opened up with mortar and artillery, and life was getting difficult. Twiggy Hazelwood was badly wounded and Ginger Partridge had the sights shot off his Bren Gun, but miraculously he wasn't touched. Houses round about were set on fire from the constant barrage of shells, and we just waited. You could hear battles going on all around, but at this particular time shelling was our main worry.

Night time came and with it an attack from grenades and spasmodic raids from outside, which were always successfully beaten off, but this meant that you couldn't have a well-earned doze. At midnight I decided it was time to take one of my Benzadrine tablets, as I hadn't had any sleep since Saturday, and we were now entering the early hours of Tuesday. We had a watchful period from midnight till dawn, when all of a sudden a grenade came through a window; Sapper Butterworth immediately picked it up and threw it back out. I don't know what damage it caused outside, but he certainly saved us from disaster inside. In one of the rooms off the landing, were about a dozen mattresses, which we had stacked up to give a decent protection from splintered glass. During the afternoon there was an explosion and one of these mattresses was on fire. I went in to pull it off the pile and put it out and was hurled back to the doorway by another explosion." What the hell was that?" I asked, and someone thought it might have been a rifle grenade from a sniper across the road. I crawled back and there was another explosion with the same result. The third time was lucky and the fire extinguished. I got a couple of Sappers, Charlie Grier and Billy Marr with their Bren Gun, and we watched for any movement in the houses opposite. After a nerve racking 30 minutes the Bren gunner said, "Got him Sarge", and let go a burst followed by two more, which silenced our menace from that quarter.

The shelling was continuing and our own ammunition was getting dangerously low. In fact my own was spent except for a few rounds in my 9mm Browning Pistol. During the afternoon the signaller had got through to 30 Corps, they were held up with fierce fighting 30 odd miles away and prospects of our being relieved in the foreseeable future, were fading fast. Two RAF supply planes came over and were met with a hail of fire from the German tanks commanding the bridge. One managed to drop his containers and get away, the other dropped his but was a mass of flames and crashed into the church spire. The containers were too far away to be of any use to us, it was also a sickener for morale. Someone decided to give the old war cry "Whoa Mohammed", and it was echoed all around the perimeter, which had an amazing effect in restoring confidence.

Wednesday the 20th September. Two German Tanks were brought up on to the bridge and started to blast away with their 88mm guns. They had a direct hit on the front of the school and the roof was set alight. Joe Simpson and Paddy Neville were killed, the rest of us were OK and we went into the basement. It was becoming obvious that we should have to move out. Twiggy Hazelwood was getting worse by the hour, and sure enough another direct hit, and

the school was well alight. We got the wounded downstairs and I went round all the rooms to be sure everyone was out. Joe and Paddy were limbless bodies, otherwise everyone was out. We tore down doors to put the wounded on, and went out the way we came in. As we made our way across to a wall we came under fire, John Bretherton was killed as he was getting over it. Twiggy got a machine gun burst up the side of his body as we were lifting him over the wall, but he was still clinging on to life, we were all eventually over and the bank gave a little protection. One of the wounded was a Major Lewis; he must have come into the school with the signaller on the first night. When he got wounded I don't know but he was the Company Commander of 'C' Company 3rd Battalion.

The next 20 minutes were phenomenal, we were caught in an enfilade of fire, and air bursts. A stray bullet hit Charlie Grier, it made a hole in his helmet but didn't mark his head, and Billy Marr had his pack severed from his back but with no injury.

Major Lewis told us that we should surrender, and that we should all take pride in our performance. We took the bolts out of our weapons and threw them away; we left the weapons where we were. Sapper Butterworth put a white handkerchief on the end of his rifle and went forward waving it. As he was walking forward, a machine gunner opened up and hit him in the legs, his German Officer drew his pistol and shot the machine gunner. He then told us to come forward, saying "you are very brave, but very foolish". We considered we were unfortunate.

We were then led off, with our hands up, through the streets of Arnhem and held in the basement of some house; we were prisoners of war. Our wounded had been taken away from us when we were captured. That night we had a few snatches of sleep, I say snatches because just as you were nicely off, they wanted you moved to another room or another house, just to be bloody-minded.

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## Prisoner of War



The next morning all prisoners were formed up, I was surprised and pleased to see Norman Swift, so we fell in together. We marched off singing all the old songs, Tipperary, Pack up your troubles, etc. until about a mile up the road we came to a halt at a memorial. To our amazement it had 17th September 1944, emblazoned in beautiful flowers, it was really something. The reason for the halt wasn't to admire the memorial, but to be loaded on to lorries and transported to Appledoor. Here we were herded into a big railway shed, told to take our boots off, tie them together and mark them. We were then given one black loaf of bread between five of us, the date indentation on it was 16th Sept. / got my knife out of my haversack and commenced trying to cut it into equal portions, but the blade snapped. Anyway we did eventually get it cut and that was all we were getting. As time went on more and more were arriving, including familiar faces from the Squadron who had their own stories to tell. It appeared that it had been gruesome everywhere.

As dusk fell we were marched for about a mile up the railway line in our stocking feet. The first cattle truck we came to we had to throw in our boots. We were then herded fifty to a cattle truck, the door closed to within three inches and the gap was intertwined with barbed wire. Fifty men to a cattle truck meant that you sat shoulder to shoulder, it was most uncomfortable.

We moved off during the night and were shunted about all over the Ruhr, for about 5 days. Relieving oneself was degrading because you had to use one half of your mess tin for bowel movements, and nothing to clean yourself or the tin with. On the third day a loaf was handed in to be cut into fifty slices. Poor old Les Ellis was the unfortunate who had to do it, because he was the most senior rank in the party. The only luck we had during this miserable period was that it rained continuously the whole journey. We took advantage of this by taking it in turns to hold the other half of our mess tins outside the gap to catch the raindrops from the roof of the train. So eventually we all had a drink of water.

When we were at last ordered to "get out", we then had to find our boots. That would have been hilarious if we watching it on film, but we weren't in that frame of mind. I suppose it took about an hour before we were all ready for our next episode. They formed us up in ranks of five and we marched off, we found that the place was Limburg. We marched and marched and with no real food inside us for over a week it felt as though we had gone about 20 miles, later we discovered that it was only 4.

The camp we arrived at was Stalag 12A. We were taken to the shower rooms, where we had to strip off and hand over our clothing, go under the shower, come out the other side, pick up our clothing and get dressed. We were then put into a compound with thousands of other troops. The water for drinking was from a standpipe, which was on for one hour, three times a day, so you queued for ever more.

The new arrivals had to report to a hut where we were given a postcard to send home. What you had to put on the postcard was written on a blackboard, ending Yours faithfully. I put "Lots of Love" and my card was torn up, but I was given another with a ticking off to write what was on the blackboard.

Next day we were marched back to Limburg, and put to work clearing up bomb wreckage in the town. At midday we were marched out of town and a skilly (soup) wagon came up, we had something, which at home we would have given to the pigs, but when you are ravenous you eat anything. I found some apples in someone's back garden and stuffed some in my shirt. I had a couple of days like this and then had to go for interrogation. They fire questions at you, - what is your job in your unit? Where have you been? Anything to build up a picture of your unit I suppose and always with the threat of the pistol on the table. The stock answer was always, 1873564 L/Sgt Harold Padfield, it gets boring after an hour, but they let me go. The next day I was in the queue for water when I suddenly went down with dysentery, I was ill for 4 days.

The trouble with getting ill in these circumstances is that you don't get fully fit again.

It was during this period at Stalag 12A, that members of my stick got together, and with the poetic rhythm of Billy Marr, made up the poem "Arnhem Bridge", which Billy had printed, but not published, on his return to England.

After 10 days at this camp we were all on the move again.

As L/Sgt. I was given the option of going to a non-working camp, which I took, so I was sent to Stalag 18C. We were marched to the station and I was put in a cattle truck with 25 others. This time barbed wire was stretched across the carriage, we had one third and the German guards had the other two thirds. The journey was of 4 days duration and once again all we had to eat was a fifth of a loaf for the whole journey. To get ourselves sorted out thirteen a side, we lined up one behind the other, and you then lay down on your side. If you wanted to turn you stood up and lay down on the other side. If your hips were too sore you just stood up.

One of the party was a Lcpl of my own troop, Wally Hirst, he was badly wounded in his left arm and he was finding things very difficult. I asked if it would be possible to give him extra room so that his arm would be out of the perimeter of the barbed wire. This they reluctantly accepted, but only if we sang "Lilly Marlene", no problem we would sing "Lilly Marlene". What I hadn't bargained for was that we had to sing it anytime they wanted it sung, and I got quite resentful about it. Today I cannot stay in the same room if it comes on the radio or TV, the whole episode wells up inside me, and it takes a little while for me to calm down.

We arrived at Stalag 18C, which was at Markt Pongau, between Innsbruck and Salzburg. The nearest railway station was at Bishopshofen. The camp itself was large, but it was split up into nationalities, British, Poles, Indians, Russians, our enclave was quite small. The perimeter fence was electrified and there were two searchlight towers, which covered our exercise yard. The hut was about 75yds by 10yds and contained two tier beds to house 200 prisoners. Water was drawn from a well for drinking and washing purposes. The outside exercise yard had an area for the toilets, which was a deep trench about 15yds long with a pole, supported at intervals, to sit on and another pole slightly higher to support the back and to stop you falling in. The whole was covered with a corrugated roof and sides. The remainder of the yard provided a walking area with a circumference of about 100yds. We used to walk round in twos or threes for probably an hour, some 3 or 4 times a day.

Tuesdays we were given a quarter of a loaf of bread, a handful of mint tea and a dessertspoon of sugar.

Thursdays we had a quarter of a loaf, a dessertspoon of coffee and a dessertspoon of jam.

Skilly was at 11.30 daily.

We had a roster for collecting the skilly. This entailed taking the containers up to the cookhouse, which was in a different compound, at 7.30 in the morning. By then all the boilers were boiling potatoes. During the morning either sauerkraut, or some other veg was put in and sometimes you detected a piece of meat.

Whenever I ate a slice of bread the crumbs were always scraped into a tin, when the tin was full I used to make a bread pudding, but not the type Mother made.

Friday afternoons we all paraded for a march to the showers, after a month you could see yourself getting thinner each week.

Every night at 8 o'clock, when the lights went down, one of the prisoners, who had a crystal set hidden away, would come out with news of the battlefronts and diagrams on a blackboard to explain it all. This event was very much looked forward to and whilst it was going on some of the prisoners would position themselves around the doors; on any sign of guards approaching a cry of "Bandits" would go up, everything would disappear and we would go back to what we were doing previously. It became a habit.

Saturday nights were entertainment nights, and it was always amazing what talent you found among your fellow prisoners. Cornet players, comedians, some would get together and perform a short play, all very much appreciated. One chap was a Police Sergeant in London before the war, and he would sometimes give us a talk on his experiences. He knew London like the back of his hand.

With the lack of food and the absence of Red Cross Food Parcels, about 20 of us volunteered to go out on a commando, in other words to work. The idea was that we were never going to be fit enough to make a break, unless we got more food and working camps got more food than we did and also got regular parcels. No sooner had we done this than a Red Cross delegation arrived, I thought they were Gestapo.

It was during January 1945, when the parcels arrived, our first and last, and with them a real visit from the Gestapo, for a search of our belongings, even our food. I still had my army issue watch, so I dug a hole in my piece of bread, put the the watch in, pushed the rest of the bread down on it and then cut a very thin slice so that it looked normal. We all knew that they were after bigger things and they literally pulled the place to pieces, but they didn't find the wireless.

In a fit of pique they had all the tins in the parcels pierced.

We eventually went out as a working commando and were around Linz. At first we were put to unloading rubble from railway carriages. One night the RAF had a raid and bombed the area. Next morning we found that the station and sidings had taken a pasting. In the area were a lot of political prisoners, doing various work and we, and them, were detailed to get this railway line working again. This was very much against our principles and we started chiding the political prisoners about doing the Germans' dirty work. As this was going on, some of our chaps were distracting the guards whilst we filled a crater. We put the buffers and points in the bottom of this crater and hastily filled it in. When it came to relaying the rails, of course some were missing. The political prisoners were getting the blame, but after a few days it apparently came to light that it was us who were responsible. No one would own up, so we were eventually returned to Stalag to be charged by the Commandant. We all got 7 days solitary confinement with just bread and water.

In March we had to dig a new trench for our loo and fill in the other. No sooner was it finished than I went down with another bout of dysentery.

At the beginning of April, we had an influx of prisoners from another Stalag because the British were advancing towards their area, so Jerry moved them out. Among these prisoners was Ted Oliver, our Squadron Chief Clerk. As the days passed we knew that the Germans were on the run by the relaxed attitudes of the guards.

On 28th of April it was a lovely morning and Ted and

myself decided to take our kit, go to the gate and ask if we could go for a shower and to our amazement we were allowed out. We walked and walked in the direction of Salzburg, to get distance from the Stalag. There was still a lot of snow on the hills and much too deep to try getting into Switzerland. We had some rough nights, but it was lovely to be free even for a few days.

One afternoon we came across a building and on investigation we found it to be empty. We decided to move on a bit and come back later for a really good rest. At the top of this building there were three double bunks, so we decided to lie on the top bunks. Around midnight the warmth of our bodies started up the bugs in the bed and we were in trouble. Then about two o'clock footsteps on the stairs and people talking in German. It was obviously German soldiers, we held our breath and daren't move to scratch, but they seemed convinced no one was in, so we were safe once again. That was to be our last night "under cover".

Next morning we moved towards Salzburg, we eventually found ourselves at a place called Wem Wem. About a mile further on we seemed to have run out of road. Ahead of us we saw a road block with the road and hills going up on the left and no room on the right, so we moved back and in amongst some houses. We were moving fast now, and then we heard some shouts and some shooting. There was obviously no further follow up because we then got to Wem Wem Station, with no more trouble. We mingled with passengers and at this time decided we should try the other way and go down through the Brenner Pass into Italy.

We found a train going to Innsbruck at 4.30pm, so we duly boarded. All was well until the train stopped at Bishopshofen, which was next to the Stalag we had left a week or so before, guards boarded, so we got under the seats. The guards disappeared and the train moved on.

The next stop was at Zell-am-Zee, and we noticed that every one was getting off. We lingered for a while before getting off the train ourselves and then noticed a Frenchman driving a train up and down. Ted could speak French so we went over to him and asked if he knew when a train was going to Innsbruck. Apparently one was due out about midnight and as the time was now only 7.30pm, we decided to chance going through the town to the hills beyond. As we were making our way through the town I had a tap on my shoulder and I went cold. The interceptor was not who I expected it to be and he was explaining that Americans were in the Hotel at the bottom of the hill, to which we replied, "Danki-shun".

We went down to the Hotel and told the Americans whom we were and what we had been doing to be there. We were introduced to the General, who was waiting to take the surrender from Kesselring. It was arranged for us to be escorted in three Jeeps through the German lines to Salzburg, where we arrived at about six o'clock in the morning of 8th May 1945. After breakfast in the American Camp, it was announced that the War in Europe was over.

We were moved from Salzburg to Ulm, by plane to Belgium and eventually finished up at Great Missenden.

Here we were given some kit and money and sent on leave. I arrived at New Milton Station quite bewildered. I arrived home and there was "Welcome Home Harold", over the front door, tears welled up, and more tears when I got indoors, but I was home, and four and a half stones lighter.

### Repatriation Leave, Repatriation Training and Posting to 20 Bomb Disposal Squadron

I was on extended leave which, I was told would be no less than six weeks and I would be informed later as to my date of return and where to report.

It was a time of pulling myself together and building myself up. Mum worried about me because I didn't eat very much and had got into the habit of cleaning my dinner plate with my finger, or I would lick my fingertip to pick up bread crumbs.

Everything had to be wiped clean; it took a few weeks to get out of the habit.

During this period my hair was coming out in chunks.

Peggy, my sister who was a hairdresser, made an appointment for me to go to the shop where she worked to have special treatment. Whilst under the drier I caused a panic because I flaked out, not for long, but it made me realise that I had a long way to go in getting myself fit again. I completed this course and it was very successful, there were no more panic attacks.

I started getting around after a while and made a number of friends. We would go off on outings to Bournemouth or Christchurch. I spent more time in pubs than I had ever spent in my life before, not that I drank a lot, but it was where you met people and started to live again.

When I felt confidence in myself again I went over to the Isle of Wight and stayed with Bill Warren and his wife Peggy. This was a very pleasant break and I was made very welcome to go at anytime. Bill didn't go to Arnhem with me as he had left us at Donington to join the Special Air Service, so with our different roles we had lost contact.

I would go down to the pay office at Sandbanks every so often to get some money and they would extend my leave for an extra couple of weeks. In the end I had ten weeks before receiving instructions to report to Horsham for repatriation training.

On arrival at Horsham, I met up with a lot of my Squadron, among them Norman Swift, and we had to revert to Corporals again. We were to have a month of Physical Training and the Instructors were absolutely terrific, they must have been specially selected for the task. We found exercise after a few minutes quite exhausting and our limbs the next day were like tree trunks. Our legs were stiff and we could hardly raise our arms. The instructors coaxed and cajoled us to carry on and break through this "pain barrier" with all the skills they possessed; they earned the respect of everyone.

At the end of the second week we were sent out on a five-mile timed walk of one hour. This was sheer murder, but Norman and myself kept together and encouraged each other with the result that we completed the walk in fifty minutes. This pleased us, but next day we could hardly walk, neither could any of the others. With everyone massaging one another's legs and the gentle exercises set by the instructors, life began to get back into a semblance of fitness. By the end of the month we were different

people and were posted to Halifax.

Halifax was the Regimental Holding Depot, where all Engineers reported whenever they were on the move from one unit to another and it wasn't a good place to be at all.

We were seasoned soldiers and didn't take kindly to what we considered 'petty discipline'. Discipline is a necessity of life, but discipline, which is abused just to mess people about, was not taken too kindly. Luckily for me I was sent to Southowram, which is just outside Halifax, and the Officer Commanding there was someone you could respect. On my interview with him he asked me to take over as mail corporal and the parades, until my posting came through. This suited me fine, because Norman was kept at Halifax, and I had to go there twice a day to collect mail. As the days moved into weeks Norman was getting fed up and applied for a Clerk of Works Course to get away from Halifax, which happened quite quickly. It was late November, before I had notice to go to Sevenoaks, and join 20 Bomb Disposal.

I was posted to a Troop who were on detachment at Sandwich Bay, clearing beach mines. This was to me quite ironic, as in my childhood I had spent some pleasant days at this particular seaside resort and secondly having been with a Company laying mines round the Sussex Coast, here was I picking up mines someone else had laid, probably at the same time.

The weather was diabolical and we used to have a massive fire, from the junk swept in off the sea, just to keep us warm. We took hourly turns at minesweeping and marking the mines spotted. Defusing them was quite a problem as they were rusted in. British mines are laid to a pattern so once you find one you know where the rest should be. That was the theory, but with the movement of the tides over the years they were anywhere but where they should have been, so it became a long and tedious operation.

The job closed down while the Squadron went on leave for Christmas. As my sister Peg and George Willicott, were getting married on 15th January 1946 and I was to be best man, I asked for, and was given, an extra 14 days leave.

This allowed me time to get around and arrange everything for the reception. I was lucky enough to get a band and the use of the summer house at the back of the Milton Hotel, which had a stage for the band, ample room for tables and chairs for the guests, whilst still leaving plenty of room for dancing, I couldn't have wished for better. They had a lovely wedding; the only tragedy was that the photos didn't come out.

When I returned from leave, another Troop had taken over the task at Sandwich, and my Troop stayed in camp doing menial jobs and weapon training.

Late February I was told that the OC wanted to see me in his office. I was asked if I wanted to go back to 1st Parachute Squadron, my answer being "yes" put him in a spot of bother. Apparently he had received orders to send me back to the Squadron a month previously, as I had not appeared questions were asked and Royal Engineers Record Office reprimanded him. He said he had wanted to keep me to take over as Sergeant Major in June.

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## The Aviary

**(A building or large cage for keeping birds).**

**Ginge Goodfellow - of 9 Indep Para Sqn RE**

The following account is of facts, faces and stories as I remember them, or how they were related to me. Which is therefore absolutely no guarantee of their accuracy due to copious amounts of alcohol consumed either at the time or since.

I recently spotted a notice on the AEA web site a request from Geordie Ridgeway asking for info on Geordie Richardson. In my reply I became aware of just how closely linked "Geordie Rich" was to the first permanent Sqn Bar, later to be known as "**The Aviary**" and that there was a story just waiting to be told.

I believe that the story starts in Haig Lines in 1965 when each troop had returned from various far flung corners of the Empire to be re united as 9 Indep Para Sqn. We were housed in a condemned wooden camp of Haig Lines, out of harms way on the edge of some woods, convenient only for access to the tank training area. I suppose if the ground is bad enough for tank training then it is ideal to keep 9 Sqn fit.

Where most Units had at least a NAAFI or a "WRVS" or a "Sally Anne" - we had nothing. Aidershot was about 5 miles away and buses were few and far between. There was a pub called "North Horns" run by a nice guy called Alf but despite his best efforts the place did not have much appeal to us.

The powers that be; decided to give "The Sqn" a Corporals Mess. Well I suppose it was a nice gesture. In other Units of the Corps the idea of a Corporals Mess is a place where the ambitious JNCOs could be groomed for the ultimate aim of the Sgts Mess. It was also a place where the JNCOs could drink and socialise without fraternising with the "rabble". Get a decent distance between themselves and "the rest".

The building itself was a good start. It was an old derelict NAAFI, very big, very old and very very cold. But it had a bar run by us. The rest of the theoretical plan never really took off. For a start, most of the guys at the time hadn't got enough ambition to fill a pint pot between them. Many were ex National Service who had signed on for the extra few years mainly for the extra couple of quid a week and their time was running out. Not much ambition there.

Many others were in "The Sqn" simply for the fun. Being a Para sounded pretty good to a Spr in BAOR who spent seven days of a ten-day exercise laying huge minefields or simply touring Guest Houses. Being a Para implied that you got to go places, blow things up, use guns, be a soldier. Have fun!

In BAOR after signing for your weapon prior to going on exercise the first thing you did with it was to lock it in a big steel box welded on to the roof of a "Pig" (APC) for safe keeping. At the end of the exercise if it hadn't rained too much it wouldn't even need a clean! The Sqn HQ "Pig" usually carried the silver for the Officers Mess Tent.

Many members of the Sqn had fulfilled their only ambition which was to get as far away from the Corps-and BAOR- as possible and get into the 9 Sqn, in some cases it even meant reverting to Spr. Getting in was a tremendous achievement leaving nothing else to aim for except to just be a good soldier, have fun, finish your time then get out and get a proper job.

As for the JNCOs keeping apart from "the rest" and not fraternising, other Units maybe, but not the Sqn. These guys had lived together and in a lot of cases fought together in some very hostile environments for years. They weren't going to finish work and go in separate directions for their social life. Consequently, although it was officially a Corporals Mess, just about anyone could be found in there. However, there was one distinct difference in the bar between the JNCOs and "the rest". The JNCOs had a "tick book". How novel. It meant there was no need for money. Pay day was a thing of the past, all the beer you could drink and all you had to do was to sign a book.

Money was in danger of becoming obsolete. Remember, this was in the days before bank accounts, cheque books and plastic.

Why hadn't anyone thought of this wonderful idea years ago? The philosophically minded members of the Sqn thought it was quite innovative. Refreshing even - the envy of the Army. However, the rest just sat back with mixed feelings of bemusement and a sense of impending doom and waited as the book filled up.

As mentioned earlier, the building was very old and very very cold. The Sqn is and always has been the envy of the world for its' "ABI" (Airborne Initiative). What do other Units do when they get cold? They shiver. What do Para's do?

They light a fire. No one really knows, or will admit to who first spotted the smouldering ashes of the now useless old NAAFI building. Some say it was the milkman who saw it first. Some the paperboy, but eventually the orderly officer was awake and sober enough to inspect the blackened shell. Strange how no one even noticed it burning right through the night.

The few who understood what a tick book really was; heaved a huge sigh of relief and counted their blessings.

Those who didn't counted how much money they had saved and wondered when and where the next one would start. Somewhere along the way the SIB (Military Police Special Investigation Branch) got involved. A totally pointless exercise! As everyone knows, the SIB has a well-earned reputation for bungling incompetence.

Despite reading the map upside down the SIB eventually found the Sqn Lines. Even the smell of charred wood had gone by then and anything that was left that had not been burned was immediately nicked by the "Pads" for fuel for their fires in the married quarters. After a while of head scratching the SIB heard a rumour about the tick book.

Quickly consulting the latest Sherlock Holmes book and various field manuals they assumed that they had found a motive. Obviously this was a serious case of arson and who ever was last to use the tick book was the guilty party.

Promotion beckoned. However, they did have a certain reputation to live up to. The promotion went out of the window when the barman produced the tick book in excellent condition - he had taken it home with him for safekeeping after he had locked up for the night.

The SIB did keep hold of the book and eventually found someone in their ranks that understood numbers. After careful scrutiny it was discovered that the accounting was wrong. Promotion beckoning again! Not really, because it was only out by one shilling and three pence. It wasn't the fact it was only 1s/3d that upset them, it was the principal of the thing, so they hounded the barman for weeks with threats of painting stones white and long marches wearing boots with no laces wanting to know what he had done with the 1s/3d.

In the meantime Plant Tp came in, helpful as ever and removed the evidence, sorry the debris. The SIB lived up to their well-earned reputation and gave up on the 1s/3d having by now forgotten that there had been a fire which was why they were there in the first place.

It says a lot for the calibre of the OC and the SSM at the time that despite a somewhat shady start the project of supplying a venue for the Sqn and run by the Sqn still went ahead. It was around this time that Geordie Richardson had returned to the Sqn from the SAS to finish off his time in the Army. He was excused all forms of soldiering and "given" a spare hut in Haig Lines with orders from the OC to establish an all ranks Sqn bar. The first step down a long slippery slope some said at the time but it was the start of something that has become as much part of the Sqn as the Red Beret and Wings.

I believe his only orders were on the lines of "set it up, run it how you like, open it when you like, we don't ever want to hear about it and we will supply you with nothing". Sounds like most tasks that the Sqn was given.

The Sqn tradesmen decorated the hut and rigged up running water for a sink behind the bar and suitable lighting and electric for his disco and bunk. Cliff Joy produced some excellent life sized paintings of Roman Warriors and several of the "pads" wives produced curtains for the windows.

Geordie was planning well ahead for Civvy Street as a mobile DJ. (He was years ahead of his time). At that time people went to dances. Discos were just starting. He bought a van and had his logo "Rich Sounds" painted on the sides - no one had heard of such a thing as a mobile disco.

The bar was an overnight success. It was open when we needed it to be open. When the NAAFI club and pubs in Aidershot shut at 10.30 our bar was open. I don't remember a time when it was not open.

One Brigade Commander issued an order on the lines of that between major exercises, each unit would do at least one night exercise per week. A night jump classed as a night exercise, in return, on the last Friday of the month the Brigade could knock off early at midday. Consequently, returning from the many night jumps that we did, no matter what time we got back, the bar was open. It also meant that you could go in there on a Friday afternoon and not

see daylight again until Monday morning. To avoid malnutrition, Geordie started selling what became the famous "Desperate Dan cow pie".

The bar turned out to be a fantastic meeting place.

WRACs, QAs and invited civvies would flock there simply because it was open and it had music and booze when everywhere else was shut. And of course the gentlemen of the Sqn would never see anyone short of a bed for the night. The reputation for hospitality spread far and wide.

Due to the initiative of Geordie Richardson who offered little regard for the law, military or civil, the bar soon became one of the best-furnished bars for miles around.

He negotiated a good deal from a brewery (No NAAFI involvement). Glasses and furniture became currency or "beer tokens". I can't remember the exchange rate but I think for 6-pint pots you got 1 pint of bitter. I think 6 spirit glasses were the same. A pub table was worth nearly a free night, about 10 pints and a bar stool I think was 6 pints.

These things were all "money in the bank" for "the lads".

Everyone started his own collection of "tokens" so that by the end of the week before pay day when there was no money to be borrowed from anywhere, the "tokens" would appear and what otherwise would have been a "dry" and boring night a forward thinking soldier could end up with half a dozen pints or so.

I remember being on guard one night and standing beside the duty officer as one of the "lads" emerged from the 'spider' accommodation carrying a bar table. He nonchalantly said, "good evening sir" and carried the table up the road and into the bar. The look on the face of the duty officer was a picture. He was dying to ask what that was all about but I suspect the officers at the time had strict instructions to see nothing and hear nothing from the direction of the bar. I don't think it was a coincidence that out of all the empty huts in the camp the bar location we were given was about as close to the perimeter fence and as far away from SHQ as possible.

The Landlord of the "Rat Pit" in Aidershot was close to a nervous breakdown. He used to have a large pub full of tables, chairs, stools, pictures, and ornaments and of course pint pots. He blames the "Sqn" or one member in particular for turning his pub into an empty shell. He never attempted to ban the guy concerned because he was so keen to catch him in the act. When he was down to his last table catching the culprit had become an obsession causing many a sleepless night. One night he watched the suspect come in and for most of the evening had one eye on the suspect and the other on the remaining table. A bit of a crowd had gathered in one corner of the bar, obviously with no furniture remaining everyone was gathered around the only table to lean against or put their beer on. After calling "last orders" he felt almost disappointed as he watched his suspect leave the pub empty handed. He even followed him into the street, which turned out to be a big mistake as when he went back into the pub his last table had gone.

Story has it that the landlord was found later that night wandering the cold wet deserted streets of Aidershot mumbling something like "Sqn" to himself, so a couple of men in white coats took him to a place of safety with padded walls for a short time. On his release he reported the disappearing furniture to the Police. At the mention of "9 Sqn" the Police didn't want to know so to get rid of both the landlord and the incident from their files they called the SIB knowing that the case would then be lost forever.

To the SIB that phone call must have been a bit like a win on the pools. It was revenge time. This time they would be efficient and do the job properly. To be seen to be extra efficient they phoned the Sqn to tell the SSM that they were coming over to inspect the bed space and locker of the suspect. No ifs no buts, they were SIB and were important. No doubt after putting the phone down

they heaved a sigh of relief that there had not been much argument from the other end of the phone. Out came the Sherlock Holmes books and Field Manuals for a last minute bit of revision on procedure.

The only problem was, they had dialled the wrong number and instead of the SSM they had woken the Duty RP from his mid morning doze in the guardroom. Now even the combined intellect of the finest brains in the SIB is no match for a hung over half asleep L/Cpl in 9 Sqn. He listened in fascination to the rambling buffoon on the other end of the phone and managed to mutter the odd yes and no when he thought appropriate until the phone went down. Then he strolled across to the 'spiders' and told the lads to expect visitors. What had been a scene of peaceful tranquillity, soldiers dozing off the effects of mid morning snake and pigmy pie or bacon sandwich suddenly erupted into a scene of chaos. A bit of the message had been lost in the telling and every soldier thought the SIB was coming for him personally.

That shouldn't be a problem if you have nothing to hide but everyone had something to hide. PE, ammunition, det cord, primers, safety fuse, detonators, blanks, thunder flashes, flares and the most popular "switches" or booby traps and snouts. Bar furniture and pint pots were forgotten about. Anyone watching from a distance must have thought there was a fire practice in progress as people stampeded out of doors and windows carrying mysterious packages of various sizes. Most were also carrying their personal issue shovel and everyone headed towards the tank tracks. Sadly no one thought to tell the prime suspect who at the time was in the bowels of the earth peeling spuds and scrubbing dixies.

The SIB finally turned up to the surprise of the SSM and our hero was sent for and they all marched off to his bed space (middle room on right first spider). One of the SIB was heard to mention that the room seemed to remind him of a pub he used to frequent but he couldn't remember which one. The suspect was told to unlock and open his locker, which he did in the usual way by kicking it.

Unfortunately as the door swung open a strange metal tube fell out and smacked one of the SIB on the head.

Luckily it was his head or it could have done some serious damage.

Quite a lot of metal actually came out but even the SIB could recognise a shotgun and a rifle amongst it all. That was all they needed so they legged it quickly taking the suspect with them fearing a riot or losing the wheels from their Army issue Ford Escort.

Because they had piled all the bits of metal onto the only convenient tables and sat on the only chairs and stools they overlooked a few important items. However, they did have a reputation to maintain. Obviously none of them had ever spent any time making meccano models or doing puzzles or they may have realised that all the various bits of metal they ignored slotted neatly together to make improvised Sten guns.

We realised that our hero would not be needing his "beer tokens" for quite a while and when he returned they may not even be accepted tender any more so the lot went to the Sqn bar and we drank the profits whilst thinking what a lucky escape the rest of us had had.

Of course the SIB, in true SIB fashion had forgotten about the furniture so the landlord of the Rat Pit probably returned to his padded cell and the SIB maintained their reputation for bungling incompetence and laughable stupidity. The bar now well furnished continued to go from strength to strength.

The Sqn bar soon became a venue for special occasions, Bidy MacMillan held his stag night and wedding reception there and we all sobered up in time for Sid Grounsell's wedding the following week followed by Geordie Thompson the week after. A lot of stamina was needed in those days.

When Geordie Rich left the Army, he made a living with his mobile disco and like many others before him, continued to live on camp and eat in the cookhouse, but eventually the Sqn moved to the Rhine barracks and the concrete of Aidershot so he lost his bed space and we lost touch. No doubt he will turn up somewhere and it will be nice to see him again. The fine tradition of the "Sqn Bar" has a lot to thank him for.

The news of the Sqn move to Aidershot was real cause for concern. We were independent, hardly anyone knew we were there or who we were. There was only one law and that was Sqn law. Made by the OC and enforced by the SSM and that law was respected by all.

Amongst many other concerns about the move the biggest concern was the future of the bar. With the whole of the Para Brigade there, there was a fear that "Mr. NAAFI" may try to get his meddling fingers involved. Thankfully we were given our own rooms and bar within the NAAFI complex with our own door. With Aidershot within easy walking distance it meant that there was no problem when the pubs in town closed at 10.30 p.m. as we simply walked up the hill to carry on the movement bringing along invited guests.

The WRAC barracks was quite a long walk from town so the young ladies appreciated the facility of having somewhere to break their journey and rest their tired feet on their way home. On a good night they could even watch a floor show!

Our bar soon became not only an all ranks bar, but a drinking and gathering place for wives and girlfriends.

During one routine impromptu floor show the wife of someone quite senior was heard to comment that it was about time the Sqn got some new members as she had seen all the present ones naked and it was getting boring.

To be the barman of the Sqn bar, particular qualities were vital. He needed to be kind, patient, considerate, empathic, understanding and ever mindful of the needs of others. One such barman was so mindful of the needs of others that when the price of beer went up he took it on his own sturdy shoulders to do something about it. The NAAFI in their carelessness used to keep their beer supplies locked in a room causing a huge obstruction to anyone who happened to be stumbling about in the dark in the locked room. Anyone climbing up a ladder and getting through the skylight, crossing a roof, a gap and another roof, then opening the skylight and climbing down into the locked room could easily fall over one of the barrels.

Our caring barman-ever mindful of the needs of others, took it upon himself to remove the obstructions and once removed, having nothing else to do with the stuff get rid of it. I'm sure he meant to simply give it away to needy Paras but sadly we never found out. Although it was causing no obstruction to anyone in the safety of the Sqn bar the NAAFI having nothing left to fall over wanted it back.

Although he was a first rate barman he was somewhat lacking in Military Skills and Tactics so for his own benefit he was invited to attend a bit of a refresher course in an interesting place near the East coast. Many years ago the town itself was a Roman Garrison. The facility was manned by a team of dedicated volunteers who did all they could to retrain people in the limited time that they had together. There was plenty of keep fit and even detox all free of charge. These days they are called "health spas" and cost a fortune.

The next cause of concern for the well being of the bar was the Sqn move to Northern Ireland (NI). It seems that the then Prime Minister, (Daft Harold), was getting a bit concerned about his own well being as he was half expecting a coup. Of course if there were one the Para Brigade certainly wouldn't be on his side. Conveniently, at around the same time certain factions in NI were getting a bit stropky and being unkind and rude to the RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary).

The Sqn was invited to nip over and have a word in someone's ear and tell them to behave themselves. Not quite as exciting as Aden, Yemen, Borneo, Palestine and such like, and definitely no sun tan or even duty free but a bit of a change for only a month or so. The only thing the place had in common with Borneo was the never-ending rain.

Most of the Sqn deployed to an old bridging camp beside a river just outside Antrim. The camp comprised of an MT hanger, a small cookhouse, and three small Nissen huts and on the other side of the mud bath/swamp was an ablution block. Even by Sqn standards there was not enough accommodation so a hole was cut in the fence and tents were erected in the next field.

However, most importantly, there was a reasonably sized hut on the edge of the camp, which was to be the Sqn bar.

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief. Home sweet home.

Northern Ireland (NI) was a bit of a culture shock for the Sqn. The Sqn was also a culture shock to a lot of females

in NI. In England at that time pubs had jukeboxes, dance halls had bars and discos were becoming popular. Men actually bought drinks for women (although the lads wouldn't admit it) and even danced with them. In NI, jukeboxes had not arrived and music was limited to mainly folk and country & western songs in a few pubs. Beer was very expensive and dance halls were open after the pubs shut but were totally alcohol free. Men didn't dance with the girls. They would simply leech and wait till the place closed and offer to walk part way home with whoever could make out what they were mumbling about. Women were really not very welcome in pubs.

The Sqn bar was quickly gutted and decorated. The interior walls were painted matt black. Sounds grim but "interesting and thought provoking" figures and sketches were painted on the walls using luminous paint, which glowed in the dark under a blue light. Furniture was "acquired" and pride of place was the twin turntable disco (The legacy of Geordie Richardson). We even had our very own home grown DJ whose Canadian lisp confused many a young country girl. Booze was sold at sensible prices, music was good, the place was fun and girls came from all over the Province to enjoy themselves. Just because they had been screeching obscenities and stoning us during the day was no reason not to get the bus out to Antrim to the bar that night. It was interesting to exchange pleasantries before resuming hostilities the next day.

And so "**The Aviary**" was born. A safe haven for birds!

No doubt there have been name changes since. I know right now it is the "John Rock" room but no matter what you do to the name it is important to keep the spirit of the place alive.

It would be hard to pinpoint any one thing that made the bar the success and talking point that it was. We were vastly under strength as a Unit. At one time there were only four of us in my section so the whole Sqn knew each other very well. We were all Paras so we felt that we were special and had little or no time or respect for any other Unit except for other Airborne Units. Then, only Para trained soldiers served in Para Units.

What went on in the bar stayed in the bar. The most important man in the Sqn was the SSM. He didn't go out of his way to find out what was going on so if he hadn't heard about it "officially" then it had never happened. Even if he was there when it did!

No one monitored the opening and closing times and despite being surrounded by the rest of 16 Para Bde no one ever raised a query or complaint.

Now that the Sqn is surrounded by Regimental life, things may be slightly different. But I am absolutely convinced that the calibre of the men today, who have been tried and tested, are the best in the world.

So no doubt they can continue to enjoy themselves just as generations before them have done, because they deserve it.

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## Minutes of AGM

**Held at The Cairn Hotel, Harrogate 3rd November 2007**

Meeting opened at 1000 hours - Members Present 79 **The Chairman's Address** - Mick Humphries opened the meeting and welcomed 4 former Chairman, particularly Tom Ormiston. He also welcomed Ed van-der-lau and Tom Omiens from Holland and members of the newly formed 1 Troop of 299 Para Sqn (TA). He then gave his annual report, taking time to give special thanks to John Mason for his support and to Willy Wiltshire for parading the AEA Standard in front of HM the Queen.

**Silent Tributes** - The Chairman explained that for the sake of fairness a list of the fallen would not be read out as in past years as it had caused some consternation when for some unknown reason some names were omitted. The meeting stood for a minutes silence

**Apologies** - Again there was no list except for 3 unsavoury characters who put something else before the airborne brotherhood: Joe Stoddart - Who said he was going to Australia but watched Southampton FC instead!

Dick Brown - Who thought a tour in Iraq entitled him to a holiday cruising with his family Louis Gallagher - Made some excuse about a family wedding. (We thought we were his family) **Minutes of the previous Meeting** - There were no matters arising and the minutes were proposed by Chris Chambers and seconded by Paddy Boyce. Carried unanimously **Treasurers Report** - This has not been finalised yet as it is still to be audited. As Dick Brown was sunning himself on Holiday, The chairman ran through the draft, the end sum, still to be confirmed is that the Association has a working capital of £15,429.43 (not including the shop stock).

**Membership Secretary's Report** - The membership, as reported in the Chairman's Annual Report, now stands at 1321.

This is due to some sterling efforts from WOII (SSM) Mick Stewart. Billy Morris is going to add to the membership form where the applicant will get to chose which branch he wants to be affiliated to as too many are joining and just falling into an abyss where they then do not further their membership by being allowed to becoming more active. Billy then highlighted the need for a new laminator which at the cost of £20 was agreed by the Chairman **Journal Report** - Dave Rutter highlighted the problem of costs, stating that the contributions from the members was not enough as it cost £5 to produce the journal and about £2 to post. The shortfall was only kept manageable by donations and advertising revenue from some of the members. He therefore proposed that the subscriptions from the members increase to £8 to UK members and £10 for overseas. The increase was to take effect from 1st October 2008 and those members who have already got standing orders in place are to adjust them effective after that date. This was 1 of 2 options and the one chosen to be voted on by the members.

Proposed by Dave Rutter, seconded by Billy Morris. Carried unanimously.

**Election of Officers** - As written in the agenda's, there have been no retirements or new nominations from either Committee and all current members are willing to stay in post. The proposal therefore was to elect all current officers in post to remain so. Proposed by Eric Blenkinsop, seconded by Fennymore Fleck. Carried unanimously **Trustees** - As with the election of Officers, the Trustees were proposed to remain the same. Proposed by Mick Leather, seconded by Froth Beer. Carried unanimously.

**Constitution** - This dealt with the Duties of the IT member and Shop Manager under section 19, and a new section 21 which dealt with an Award of Merit. The full details were read out by the Chairman and are listed in Appendix C. The proposal was to accept these changes as read. Section 19 was proposed by Tom Ormiston, seconded by Fred Gray.

Carried unanimously Section 21 was proposed by Eric Blenkinsop, seconded by Chris Chambers. Carried unanimously The Chairman then indicated that this year he would look at the need for 2 committees manned predominantly by the same people and he would look at improvements to the membership constitution.

**A. O. B.** - Billy Morris stated that he was able to secure old parachute records and if any member as interested they could take them with a £1 donation for charity.

The Chairman also sombrely reminded the membership for the need to make a will as the widow of a recently departed member was caused further anguish to the passing of her husband in having to try and sort out numerous items of his estate and financial matters.

**The Meeting was closed at 1055 hours with the next AGM to be held at the Royal Court Hotel in Coventry on 18th October 2008**

## Minutes of OGM

**Held on 3rd November 2007**

**Held at the Cairns Hotel, Harrogate** - Meeting commenced at 1115 hours. Members present 48 **Chairman's Address** - This was waived as most of the content was covered at the previous meeting to which all the members had been present.

**Structured Reporting** - Michael Leather (Secretary) pointed out that he wished a more structured distribution of information so that the Association became more integrated at branch level. To that end, he requested that all branch minutes be sent to him and in turn he would distribute them to the other branches, hopefully to start members visiting other branches events. To assist this, he asked that all branches keep their committee's contact details up to date on the web site.

**Archivist's Report** - Fred Gray stated that he still had a large amount of photos in his garage, which will need sorting out since a Dutch Historian had visited him and it was left in chaos. There are some photo's that are in proper museums from the list that were on display when 9 Sqn was in Aidershot. Some of them are also in Chatham; of which copies are still due to be returned and some are on display at Elvington and the Airborne Museum. Furthermore there are a number of books that Fred has in his possession, which he is reluctant to loan out, as they do not get returned. Instead there should be a library where they can be accesses. Bob Prosser and Eric Blenkinsop then commented on a room being allocated for a library in Regiment. Fred Gray then highlighted the need for someone to come in and take on the mantle of Archivist for the period of 1982 - 2005 when 23 Engr Regt formed and this would have to happen in the next 5 years. Bob Prosser proposed that the Archivist be paid expenses now that he had to travel to Woodbridge; to which Mick Stewart concurred.

Nick Gibson noted that 23 Engr Regt would have to commit to maintaining any artefacts etc., not just storing them to which Mick Stewart (SSM 9 Para Sqn) confirmed all artefacts on loan were cared for but the Regt could not commit to taking it all. The Chairman noted the problems arising and promised to discuss it at the next meeting.

**Sports Secretary's Report** - Billy Morris pointed out that this arena was not just for running events that he attended but also for the introduction of new activities that give new avenues for the membership. To that end Billy announced the reintroduction of the 100 mile challenge in the 1st or 2nd weekend in August 2008 as a 'Men Only weekend. There will be badges and T shirts made available through the shop and the weekend would also include a games night in the Mess.

Further details to follow.

**Shop Manager's Report** - Due to the shop being open at the time of the meeting, The Chairman presented the report on behalf of Ray. The shop had about £2000 in hand of which about £1000 was profit. It held about £2000 of stock. The Chairman mentioned the robbery of the takings at the Para Weekend at Southsea where the loss of £400 was recovered with interest from some very benevolent donations from sympathetic locals due to a newspaper article.

**IT Members Report** - Again in the absence of Dave Pace, the Chairman obliged. Dave has done a good job over the last 18 months but feels that the site is under used. It is important that the members use the guest book AND the forum. The need for updated branch details was highlighted and a genuine offer from Dave to contact him with any IT problems members were encountering

**John Rock Bust** - Eric Blenkinsop informed the meeting that the Bust was in fact going to the John Rock Barracks on completion and acknowledged the previously agreed sum of £6000. He then pointed out that the costing was for a life sized bus t when if fact the requirement was now for one slightly larger which had increased the costs to £7,500 plus VAT.

His 2 National Lottery bids have been rejected. He wrote a letter to the Airborne Forces Security Fund and they have pledged £100 cheque and also a bid to Col Caufield of the Corps Fund is being considered on 13th Nov. 23 Engr Regt have agreed to provide the base and is constructing a Garden of Reflection and the Bust is earmarked to stand as a focal point in that garden. The upshot of the report is that with various donations and support from the Regt, it is strongly believed that there will be enough funds to cover all costs. It is proposed to start the commission when all the money is in place.

**AGM/Reunion 2008** - Whilst 2008 is the Chatham branch turn for hosting, the lack of suitable venues has resulted in Birmingham Branch agreeing to host it at the Royal Court Hotel, Coventry 17th -19th October. The benefiting charity from the 2008 grand raffle has yet to be decided.

**Annual Dinner 2009** - The Chairman reported that 2009 is the 20th anniversary of the founding of our Association and thought it might be prudent to investigate the possibility of holding the event in or near Woodbridge, perhaps Ipswich.

**A.O.B** - A proposal was made that the Association purchase a Guest Book for the visiting dignitaries to the Reunion Dinners at a cost of £120. Proposed by Ginge Goodfellow, seconded by Bill Rudd. Carried Unanimously.

**There being no other business the meeting was closed. The next OGM will be held on 13th January 2008 at Draycotts Hotel in Rugby**

## Financial Report

As at 14 October 2007

Auditor: WO1 (GSM) J.J. Ferry

<b>ASSETS</b>		
<b>Previous Period</b>		<b>Current Period</b>
689.73		442.30
	Capital Property	
	<b>Current Assets</b>	
264.54	Cash	nil
5270.51	Current A/C	4603.44
19518.27	Deposit A/C	20278.26
2244.23	Shop Stock	2551.57
27887.28	<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	27875.57
	<b>LIABILITIES</b>	
6369.58	Newsletter	6525.31
3463.85	Projects Fund	3630.17
9833.43	<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	10155.48
<b>£18053.85</b>	<b>TOTAL ASSETS MINUS LIABILITIES</b>	<b>£17720.09</b>
	<b>GENERAL PURPOSE FUND</b>	
16098.37	Balance as per last balance sheet	18053.85
1955.48	Add excess of income	
	Deduct excess of expenditure	333.76
<b>£18053.85</b>	<b>Accumulated General Purpose Fund</b>	<b>£17720.09</b>

### Auditors Comments:

The treasurer is to be congratulated on a well presented and well run account. My only observation is that PV21 of £600.00 was for the memorial bench at Normandy which was charged to GPF, I believe should have been charged to the Projects Fund. This would have then given an excess of income of £270.00 instead of a deficit of £333.00. If the committee confirm my findings they should direct the treasurer to move the funds accordingly.

## Statement of Financial Affairs as at 14 October 2007

<b>Expenditure</b>	<i>Current period</i>	<i>Previous period</i>	<b>Income</b>	<i>Current period</i>	<i>Previous period</i>
Stationary/postage	242.77	161.69	Interest	759.99	360.48
AGM 2006	252.65		Subscriptions	917.00	1095.00
Committee curry	249.40	25.00	Donations	400.00	302.00
Transfer newsletter	400.00	676.00	Shop profit	752.32	992.92
Sapper portrait	32.00	1220.00	Sales (B. Ferguson)		731.00
World cup expenses		1182.10	World cup draw		3552.50
Wreaths		80.00	Sapper portrait fund		220.00
Property depreciation	147.43	147.43	Reunion 2005		362.66
Standard bearer	254.40	63.00	Charities tax rebate		264.54
Transfer projects		2370.40	Auction donation	700.00	
Presentation	824.80		Refund	25.31	
AEA website	234.93		Auction	2105.00	
Refund	1200.00				
Charity Donation	2155.00				
Total Expenditure	5993.38	5925.62	Total Income	5659.62	7881.10
Excess of income		1955.48	Excess of expenditure	333.76	
<b>GRAND TOTALS</b>	<b>5993.38</b>	<b>7881.10</b>	<b>GRAND TOTALS</b>	<b>5993.38</b>	<b>7881.10</b>

## New Kid on the Block

### Mal Scott (Queensland, Australia)

After two years National Service as a Vehicle Mechanic in REME (1950 - 1952), I joined 299 Airborne Squadron RE (TA) in Hull as a four year Volunteer and re-badged into the Royal Engineers.

A few months later 299 was asked to provide a Sapper attachment to join with the 17th Para (DLI) Bn (TA) based in Newcastle in a weekend attack on the USAF airfield at Upper Hayford in Oxfordshire. The Sapper group assembled was SQMS Marriott, Sgt George Beil, Sgt Ernie Venus, Cpl Bill Shearer, L/cpl Morrison, L/cpl George Desforges, (all WW2 veterans), and a solitary Sapper, me! Sgt Venus insisted that as a section we had to have a Bren and that Scotty, you know the LMG valise drill, you are jumping with it The other six all carried Stens. What a section. We had two sticks of PE and a length of Det Cord each and Sgt Beil a tin of Detonators. Why we had them I don't know as I wasn't told what our tasks in the exercise were to be and as the lone Indian just did as ordered by any of the six Chiefs.

Looking nine months pregnant with our equipment covered by sleeveless jumping jackets we flew from a RAF airfield near Newcastle in USAF Fairchild C119s, did simultaneous twenty sticks at first light onto a DZ., and then did an approach march to Upper Hayford. My asking, "Who is the number two sharing the Bren?" fell on deaf ears and I carried it the complete weekend.

At that time I was 5 feet 5 inches small weighing 8 stone 8 pounds. When we finally arrived back in Hull very late Sunday night it seemed the Bren weighed more than me. Welcome into 299 Scotty!

As we neared the USAF base our Sapper group separated from the Geordie Paras, cut through the perimeter fence and worked our way into a small wood among the airfield buildings before it was surrounded by American defenders.

Before accepting capture Sgt Beil decided to defiantly give the Yanks a fright by cutting down a tree near the centre of the wood by ringing it with det cord. The tree landed nicely with nobody injured. After the panic we had caused died down we allowed ourselves to be escorted to the American mess hall for lunch.



There was no debrief and I never found out if the 17th Para had achieved their objectives or what the Sapper ones were meant to have been. The weekend scheme was really my initiation into 299 and although I did thirteen years in the Squadron, never again was I the NEW KID ON THE BLOCK.

The 299-group photograph was taken at Blackbushe Airfield the following year, 1953, before enplaning for an exercise on Salisbury Plain. From left to right Cpl Bill Shearer, Sappers Don Ball, Johnny Fox, Mal Scott, L/cpl ? L/cpl Stan Robinson, Sgt Ron Leake, Spr Bill Harvey, in front Spr Ron Stuart. Note the badly fitted parachute harness. Instead of adjusting the X type waist straps, the fashion was to just lengthen the

leg straps. Why were we never faulted by the PJIs who checked us?

The USAF Fairchild C119 photo was taken at Lakenheath, one of the many used for a Brigade drop onto the Stanford PTA near Thetford.



## A Sapper in Civvy Street

**Charles Keith Barker**



On leaving 9th Squadron on 18th October 1949 with a heavy f heart, I still acted as marker 2 Troop for the last time. Dear old Sergeant Fog, the Chief Clerk called me to his office the night before and informed me he had een hearing rumours. His exact ords were - 'Go through that door, sign the papers and your military career will be at an end. About turn now, go back to your room and I'll tear up the papers' Saying farewell to all my comrades, was heard and dear old Dennis Parks called me a B\*\*\*\*\* Fool and said 'We've been together for 4 years now, we only have 2 years left to do, after that it will be nice to go home, meet a nice woman and bring up a family of kids' This is actually what he did, but in fact we had

to stay on as we were on the reserves. I left at the request of my dear father, who had a very hard life, but a wonderful father he was to a very large family of 7.

Within a week, my old Building Firm T. Wilson & Son employed me. We were building council houses, up to our knees in mud half the time. I found it one hell of a job trying to settle down to a totally different way of life, especially when I had a letter from dear old Den Parks about parachuting and the then new Hastings Aircraft. Now to the whole point of the story, three years after leaving 9th Squadron I found myself building a very large bungalow, all alone of course, working single handed. It took a little time. There was a very keen businessman who simply oozed friendship and charm; he was responsible for getting in the finishing trades.

Once I built the shell of the bungalow, some months later, while still on subcontract work with the 2 other men who I employed, we were well into the winter when I received a call. There was a problem connecting a FWD foul water drain to the main sewer. On meeting him on site, we went to the nearest manhole cover in the busy main road, which was impossible to move on account of several lots of tar running in the joints, so I took myself off to the local council offices, to ascertain the depth of the drain in relation to road surface. Shock number 1, the invert level of the main sewer from the surface of the road was approx. 10 ft, which did not surprise me really as we were on a hill. A busy main road, with double decked buses frequently passing. Furthermore, the main drain was way across the main road, bear in mind this is in the days when a contractor required night watchmen, if the road was opened up.

After a long hard think I thought to myself, come on Barker, you're an ex Sapper and a Royal Engineer, after taking my cap off, why not dig a tunnel to save moving all that overburden. It so happened that a very cold spell set in so we were unable to lay bricks or do any building work. I met them on site, along with the owner. I stated my intention; they looked at me a little oddly. I assured them that I would do the digging with a short handled pick. I required them

behind me to remove the spoil to the entrance. I told them all with one proviso, we went down the pit which would become the manhole on the boundary of the site to test for soil. After pecking about a foot away, I found a consistency of the soil just like Cheddar cheese and perfect for the job in hand job I pointed out to reduce the height we would go in on our knees. This would reduce the possibility of any soft patches slipping in. After calculating the amount of fall from the new drain to the main drain I made myself a 5 ft straight edge, the amount of fall ascertained by a block of wood on the end of the straight edge. On the Monday morning with the severe frost around, I set to with a will, my confidence growing, with every foot of the tunnel dug out.

After digging for about 15 ft, I asked one of the chaps to let me know when a double-decked bus passed, while I remained at the face. They gave me a warning that one was approaching. When it passed overhead, not a single crumb fell from the ceiling. It also reassured the 2 men that were clearing the spoil behind me. Incidentally, in my 80 years of life, including my army service, I have never ever asked anyone to do anything I was afraid of doing myself.

After nearly 3 days of digging, my pick struck the main sewer pipe. It was just like striking gold. I was spot on with my calculations. I invited the local council drainage man and the owner down to look, but they declined the offer, with the words I trust you can make the opening in the main drain and put on what is known in the trade, as a saddle. In order to received a 4" earthenware drain from the new bungalow. With this in place after 24 hours, we started laying the pipes back to the new bungalow. Now we came to the hard part, the back filling that consisted of loads of broken concrete paving which were perfect for the job. On working my way out I merely stacked the concrete paving like dry stone walling to the ceiling of the tunnel.

Just as we'd finished the thaw set in and we were able to resume our normal building work. On completion naturally, I felt very proud of what we had achieved.

Sadly, the owner did not really appreciate the enormous amount of money it saved him. After a long career in the Building Industry, this is the bugbear because a man works with his hands he is supposed to be dead from the shoulders up without perception of scale, beauty and proportion. Today of course, health and safety would throw a fit to driving a tunnel under a main road. When one considers the great escape from Stalag Luft during the war, and my own dear father had seen Hill 60 blown up in the war. This was a piece of cake; some of my young friends hardly believe it today when I tell them. I did a similar job 12 months later which was a different kettle of fish entirely, but that is another story.

Strange to relate, 15 years later during the Asian Flu Epidemic, I went down with this dreadful flu on Christmas Eve, 1969. I had a nightmare, I woke up pushing all the clothes off me, I was trapped in the tunnel and all the soil had collapsed around me.

So ends my story of a Sapper in Civvy Street.

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## Op Banner Tour- The Ardoyne (Belfast)

### John Moorhouse

West Belfast in 1974 was well established into armed ghettos. These working class estates were always there, however as families had prospered and come into money they had moved elsewhere trying for a better life style.

When the troubles started they became the target of intimidation and threats and eventually moved out by themselves or were burnt out. They returned to their safe havens back to their roots. Today it's called ethnic cleansing. These enclaves were now 100% Catholic (Cat) and 100% Protestant (Prot). 'No go areas' had been set up, before being dismantled by the authorities during Operation MOTORMAN in 1972. They were still the main recruitment areas for both sides terrorist organisations.

Tribal markings adorned the kerbstones and banners flew informing the world what tribe was within. Green, white and gold for Cat: Red, white and blue for Prot.

Separating these tribes there was always an interface, a boundary, a frontier or a road. In West Belfast such roads like the Falls, Shankill, Springfield, and Crumlin, grew to notoriety. To keep both sides apart the army had moved in occupying existing RUC police stations and any other nearby sizeable and suitable buildings.

Ewarts or Flax Street Mill was such a location, on the Crumlin Road. As its name applies it was a very large mill and cobbled court yards within. Years before it employed hundreds of people from both sides of the community in the production of spinning the raw flax unto bobbins in the initial stage of the linen and rope production. Behind the Mill naturally there had sprung up rows and rows of houses for the workers. Street names like Herbert, Hooker, and Jamaica laid the way into a really rough working class area, known locally as the "Bone". Empty and burnt out the security forces had moved into the Mill in the early 70s Further up the Crumlin Road was the large housing estate called the Ardoyne. A line of shops, and the Forum picture house fronted the entrance

to the Ardoyne. Nothing of any great interest except for the bus depot that used to house dozens of City Corporation buses that used to service the local arterial thoroughfares. As usual during a past riot the depot had been set on fire and the buses destroyed. Once again the army had moved in and established a base.

So it was the main Battalion HQ element was stationed in Flax Street Mill and at least one reinforced Company in the Bus Depot. The remainder of the Battalion was spread about such locations like the Crumlin Road Prison, Townsend Street RUC Station, Berlin Street bakery of the Shankill Road, and Girdwood Park behind Carlisle Circus. Geographically all very close.

The problem with the Ardoyne, besides it being a PIRA stronghold, it was a snipers shooting gallery. The roads gave any marksman a clear straight field of fire. On the left was the Ardoyne Road, to the right Etna drive, and running up the middle was Berwick Road. Joining these three roads like the rungs of a ladder were a dozen streets. The main one was Alliance Avenue with a straight shot for a good thousand yards. On the corner of Berwick and Alliance an abandoned house had been taken over by the security forces and now housed a section of troops. This was heavily fortified with sandbags and armour plate and GPMGs visible at every opening.



This stronghold was a safe sanctuary for foot patrols and multiple mobiles to stop or even a bolt hole if they found themselves being in difficulty. The local army commander wanted some universal blocks (UBs) positioned on the pavement and road outside to act as a chicane for local traffic, but also to give some hard cover against any long-range sniper fire.

The UBs were already on the ground having been used in the past by different units, although they may need bringing together as they were spread out at various road functions.

**Universal concrete block (UB) with Alan Morrison on watch**



**The Scooby Doo**

So it was RV at the bus depot in our section transport. A light wheeled tractor with a 24 cwt armoured cab nicknamed a 'Scooby Doo' would already be there having been escorted from Girdwood Park.

On arriving we said hello to 3 PARA and got briefed on our task. Cam cream on the faces we transferred to armoured 'pigs'. Mounting up, the infantry escort cocked their weapons, one up the breech, we followed suit, an indication of what lay ahead.

Our little convoy set off: - a Makrolon Landrover CV leading, 3 armoured pigs, the Scooby Doo, and a forth 'pig' bringing up the rear.

Driving along Berwick Street the convoy had to manoeuvre to avoid the burnt out cars and piles of debris lying around.

Tribal markings adorned the curb stones, graffiti on every gable wall, over an old BRITS OUT was splashed PARA BASTARDS. We got the message. Passing kids gave us the V sign and shouted insults. Stopping at the task site it was out all round defence until Chopper Ashcroft (troop commander) got briefed on the requirements of the job.



**The 1 ton Humber armoured vehicle - 'The Pig'**

Looking around I thought Jesus what a place. Nothing had prepared us for what we now saw. It was like being back at riot village at NITAT (the Northern Ireland Training and Advisory Team) down at Lydd and Hythe. The atmosphere was electric. There were old and fresh scares of burnt tyres on the road. Rocks and broken paving stones were everywhere; there were even empty brass ammo cases in the gutter. Looking up Alliance Avenue the skeleton remains of burnt out homes looked like scraggy teeth in an old skull. Past evidence of Prots being burnt out at the start of the troubles, or rather when intimidation forced families out many turned the gas on and set fire to their own council homes. All the houses were fronted with quite sizeable gardens, but it was a very wide street, and although there

were no pavement trees, it had been given the name of an Avenue. Women came out and shouting hysterically told us what they would do to us if they ever got hold of our private parts, like wild cats that would have ripped our faces apart in an instance. I recall

one housewife being restrained by her husband; cleverly all this act of aggression never ventured passed the garden gate. But one neighbour playing the hard man reached over the hedge at a soldier. Retaliation was immediate; he got chinned in the face with the butt of an SLR. His wildcat missus got the muzzle of the SLR rammed into her neck; they retreated back up the garden path to continue the verbal abuse from their front door step.

The UBs came in a couple of designs. The square one or 3-foot cube weighed a ton. Sticking out the top were two metal lifting brackets, these were for the insertion of either forks or chains. Between these the neck of a steel pipe protruded, this was for the insertion of an upright scaffolding pole. The other smaller design was of a pyramid or triangular shape, with the same external lifting fixtures. Chains fitted to its bucket and under escort the Scooby Doo went rounding up the UBs.

Blackened Faces had appeared at the apertures of the corner stronghold. "Away the lads.... whey-hey 9 Squadron ya bastards"! Someone was glad to see us.

Passing the command Landrover the radio operator was talking back to HQ giving someone a sitrep "all quiet so far nothing happening yet." At Glenbryn Drive a couple of streets up, a crowd of people were gathering, a confrontation was gaining momentum.

The job was going well; the Scooby operated picking up and dropping the blocks three either side of the road, off set to form a chicane to slow down passing traffic. Three out of the four roads now complete.

The crowd had grown in numbers and courage. Stopping about 100 yards up Berwick Street, kids ran forward and threw an amazing array of missiles in our direction. It was bloody amazing how a child could hurl half a house brick so far.

And then it happened. We knew something was being planned but no one thought they'd be that stupid. The crowd parted and two idiots with automatic weapons fired a burst in our general direction. From the CV "Go, go, go!" could be heard being sent over the net. Followed by, "Contact wait out!" Minutes later a convoy debussed behind the crowd, Paras running into the assault. Plastic bullets were fired into those that failed to run away, and a volley of PVC rounds from some of our cordon helped chase up the stragglers.

No one had been injured in the PIRA gun attack; trembling fingers must have been on the triggers. No one likes to shoot at Paras, as retribution is inevitable and often swift.

The infantry CSM looked over the task site and gave us the all clear to thin out, "good job lads". So remounting into the pigs our convoy returned to the bus station.

When we got debriefed it transpired that although our UB task had been of importance, it was also hoped that our presence would draw out a gunman as the target and opportunity would be too good to miss. And so it was 3 PARA had planned and collated a second operation in the likely event of a contact.

Within half an hour of us starting the UB task, a convoy of 3 PARA had slipped out of Girdwood Park and gone to ground in the playing fields off Westland road, a mile away in a Prot area. When the go- go- go and contact message had been sent, they moved in, blocking any likely escape routes. Vehicle checkpoints (VCPs) had been set up and two known players had been arrested. The follow up immediately after the shooting had produced a couple of automatic weapons, which had been quickly hidden in a hedge.

Overall it had been a good days work, always good to work with our fellow airborne comrades. They certainly had the lid on the Bone. I remember remarking to one of the cover guards about the absence of loose dogs in the streets, gangs of kids always seemed to attract roaming dogs. His reply summed up the situation "Oh we've shot all those".

Going down the Crumlin Road and left up the Antrim Road we waved bye- bye to the Scooby Doo as it turned into Girdwood Park. Through Glengomery the drivers of the section vehicles now followed the road signs for Antrim.

That night in the Aviary, Don Reed, Tommy O'Brien, Porky Willis, Yorkie Strickleton, Keith King, and myself reflected on the day's task over a beer. We all agreed thank god we were sappers and not poor old infantry soldiers, definitely had joined the right mob. It would be many years before we would be used again to draw the PIRA out, but that would be a different part of Northern Ireland, a different tour and a different task.

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# Bindon Barracks Hameln- Poles Apart

**Eric Blenkinsop**

Someone was going to have to provide a write up on this bizarre episode in those early days of the reconstituted 9 Independent Airborne Squadron lest it be lost forever. As I was in at the beginning, so to speak, then it might as well be me.

I had volunteered to join Airborne Forces in 1947 and eventually arrived at the RE Airborne Increment at Barton Stacey in early 1948.

I remember several of the guys in the pre para squad, George Barrett, Joe Boyle, Eddie Edwards and many more of course whose names I just cannot recall except for one unforgettable Pole, Shumansky.

This guy was extremely fit, capable and handsome being blue eyed and blonde. He put all of this to good use and was a “ Canteen Cowboy “ extraordinary.

Anyway things moved on, ‘P’ Company Aidershot, Para Course at Upper Heyford and finally to 3 Airborne Sqn RE in Neumunster part of 2nd Airborne Brigade Group.

Then came the end of 6th Airborne Division and the formation of 16 Independent Airborne Brigade Group.

At this stage 3 Airborne Sqn moved down to Bindon Barracks Hameln to be joined by the regular elements of other RE Airborne Squadrons from Palestine, all to be reconstituted as 9 Independent Airborne Squadron RE.

And then another Pole arrived on the scene, quite where from I am not sure; in the form of Spr Sibinski.

So here we are with two Polish Sappers who appeared to get on well enough in the Sqn but I have no idea which troop either of them was serving in.

Anyway time passed by as it always does and then came the alarming news that Spr Sibinski had been hauled out of the river Weser quite dead.

Soon after Spr Shumansky was arrested and confined in the Sqn guardroom and rumours abounded thick and fast given his striking Aria appearance was he perhaps a German and not a Pole?

The rumours were all unfounded and then all speculation was blown asunder when upon being marched to the cookhouse to collect his dinner Shumansky ups and does a runner, never to be seen again in our time in Hameln.

The Sqn then headed for Malta Barracks Aidershot in 1949 so it was all forgotten.

Some years later, 1973 to be exact, I was in my office in the Old Barracks in Maidstone as a Clerk of Works with PSA having just returned from Hong Kong, and a chance glance out of the window showed Major QM Gordon (Geordie) Ramsay. So here we are meeting up for the first time since the Canal Zone in 1952.

Naturally we met up several times and eventually the subject of the two Polish sappers came up for discussion.

Now Geordie had spent several years in Germany and he assured me that Shumansky was eventually apprehended but was unaware of the outcome, so it remains a mystery.

So I pose the following questions.

Was Sibinski done to death or did he have a bevy too many and simply fall into the Weser?

Why was Shumansky remanded in the first place?

Was he guilty of something or simply a victim of circumstance?

Who was his escort when he did a runner? Perhaps the Provost Cpl at the time Paul (Boris) Ratcliffe can shed some light on this.

Are there any of our members who can provide the answers?

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## News from the Branches

### Aldershot

#### **Joe Stoddart MBE**

The branch is thriving very well and we have had new members, who are always good for the branch. We have also had an excellent social time during the festive season with many members joining in the activities. The ladies of the branch have played a large part in our success with many of them using "Sapper Initiative" to get things done.

One example was the presentation of a marvellous blue table runner showing Pegasus in the usual airborne colours, an ideal centrepiece for any event. We would like to thank Ralph Pedder's sister Vera for all the hard work and seamstress skills that went into its making and thanks to Ralph for presenting it to the branch.

Members of the branch were invited 'enbloc' to a "Ho Down" held in the Normandy Village hall on Hogmanay, and a great night it was. The hard work put in by Ruth and John Barry ably assisted by family members ensured that the evening was a great success. When we finally got round to the square dancing, it was heartening to see everyone up doing their bit. Although one member kept going clockwise instead of anti clockwise thus screwing up the whole set, but Rick Mogg will not be named. Those attending brought a sweet or savoury dish thus supplying the food for the buffet. At the end of the evening there was still plenty left over and no one went home hungry. So we all saw welcomed the New Year in traditional style and the format of the occasion gives us room for thought in the future.

Our next get together was our annual dinner held in Potters International Hotel. It was a great success and everyone attending thoroughly enjoyed the occasion. The food was hot and well presented and despite being short of hotel staff the members was well feted by those in attendance. It was extremely gratifying to have as our guest Major Peter Wade an Ex 00 of 9 Independent Para Sqn RE and a member of 'P' Coy Staff at Maida, who many will personally remember having been chased round the various tasks by him. He was a great leader and an inspiration to all potential "Sapper Paras".

Now is time to draw a breath and start thinking of this year's activities. I know that our entertainment's member John Smith is already ahead of us with a bunch of ideas for the year, starting with the Army v Navy rugby match. We also hope to catch up with old friends by attending other branch dinners.

Please remember that we meet bi-monthly on the Third Sunday of the month 11.00 for 11.30 but please phone our secretary Betty Gray or myself to confirm there are no changes. All AEA members are welcome to attend our meetings or to join in at any of our activities.

Finally, our commiseration's to Fred Robson's family for the loss of Fred who passed away following a stroke while undergoing treatment in a hospital in Manila, Philippines.

Members who knew Fred would recall his sense of humour, his escapades with Neil Westbrooke and Fred's wry smile. He will be greatly missed.

### Chatham

#### **Eric Blenkinsop**

After such an eventful year-John Rock / Falklands Dinner, Woodbridge Freedom Weekend, the AGM/Reunion weekend at Harrogate, it was a fitting way to end the year with a branch Christmas luncheon party.

This is the one occasion when so many of our members, mainly those who are still earning a crust, are able to join us with their families and it was a joy to see them. Several of our widow ladies were able to join us including Kay Collins with her parents-in-law, so young Steve was well represented.

Once again it is a big thank you to Bob & Pam Seaman who both work tirelessly to put the show on and produce another memorable party.

#### **The John Rock Bust**

This project is now well under way and a firm contract was made with the sculptor in January.

There has been a most significant development with the project as it has been linked with a Garden of Reflection project which is being undertaken by 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Assault). The stone pedestal for the bust is to be constructed by the Regiment. The bust on the pedestal will be the focal point in the garden.

This will without doubt be the "Ultimate Tribute" to our Founder John Rock and this Association can take great pride in this achievement over the years from the John Rock room Aldershot to this pedestal in Rock Barracks Woodbridge.

The next branch function is as follows.

AEA Chatham Branch - The Annual John Rock Dinner 2008 which will be held at the King Charles Hotel Gillingham on Saturday 21st June 19.00 for 20:00hrs the cost of the four course set dinner will be £21 .00.pp.

Please state if a vegetarian meal is required.

All applications accompanied by a cheque made payable to AEA Chatham should be submitted to the Chatham Branch Treasurer not later than the **7th June 2008**. The treasurer's address is: Mr R Seaman, 68 Rolvenden Road, Wainscott, Rochester Kent. ME2 4PG.

Dress: Men: Suits/Jackets & Tie - Ladies as appropriate.

Children are welcome if over 11 years of age.

Our Guest of Honour will be Lt Col Jock Brazier accompanied with his wife Helen.

A warm welcome is extended to all members of the Association and their ladies who wish to join us as a tribute to the Founder of Airborne Forces (Military) and of course the first Airborne Engineer Lt Col John Rock RE. Also to

hear a little about the Unique Kent Fortress RE those intrepid Sappers who carried out some of the earliest small raids of WW2 and their subsequent link with Air Troop RE.

The King Charles Hotel provides B&B accommodation at a reasonable price. Tel 01634 830303.

Book early to avoid disappointment as rooms are in great demand at that time of year.

### Other Branch Events

Saturday 2nd August 2008. A BBQ at the TA Centre Fort Clarence 12.00 for 13.00hrs further details will be circulated nearer the time.

Sunday 7th December 2008 The Christmas Luncheon Party at the King Charles Hotel 12.00 for 13.00hrs.

Well that's it for now as we wish all members a happy and successful year.

As you all sit down to read this, 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Assault) will have settled down to an arduous operational tour in Afghanistan and we wish them all a safe and successful mission and a safe return home to Woodbridge.

## Edinburgh

### John Donaldson

It has been some time since the Edinburgh Branch gave an update on how it was progressing. The reason for this was simple; no one wanted to do it.



Members of the branch have attended a number of events in 2007 including 131 60th Anniversary reunion at Kingsbury Barracks on 16th and 17th June, Airborne Forces Day Scotland, hosted by Central Scotland Branch PRA and held at Glasgow Green on 28th and 29th July, Lothian Branch PRA annual bowling tournament at Bilston on 2 September, when our members outnumbered the PRA and the dedication of the Lothian Branch PRA Standard on Sunday 7 October.

**Andy Paterson, Doug Archibald, John Donaldson, Kim Panton and their respective wives at the PRA Xmas function**

On 7th December members were invited to attend the Lothian Branch PRA Christmas Dance and Raffle and we were given a warm welcome by their new Chairman Peter Flynn. A most enjoyable time was had by all and especially by Liz Paterson and Rose Panton who won two prizes each in the raffle.



Four of us from the Edinburgh Branch and our respective wives attended at Harrogate, albeit none of us attended the dinner and dance on the Saturday evening. Reasons for non-attendance varied. However, after the AGM we did enjoy a few drinks at the hotel bar and a chat with other AEA members. In the evening we had a few more drinks at the hotel and were treated to a procession of beauties attending a fancy dress party in another part of the hotel.

**Kim Panton was not slow to get involved when he had his picture taken with Bo-Peep.**

It was good to see some of the young lads from 9 Para Sqn. RE in attendance and enjoying themselves. It was a thoroughly enjoyable weekend in Harrogate and with the weather being kind it allowed us to take in some of the sites...

Our return journey to Edinburgh was not so pleasant as GNER had cancelled our train from York to Edinburgh, which meant we had to take the later Aberdeen train to Edinburgh. The train was packed to the

gunwales with standing room only for over 4 hours, and the only consolation was we were standing in the buffet car. I must also say that some of the GNER staff were less than courteous. It's no wonder they lost their franchise.



The Edinburgh Branch photograph shows those who attended the branch's 9th AGM held on Sunday 18 November 2007 at the Royal British Legion, Rodney Street, Edinburgh and although we have 36 branch members, some of whom reside overseas, the most we can expect to attend meetings is between 10 and 14. Our November meeting was a good month for attendance when 14 members attended, including two new members, Tom Ormiston and David Brock and we welcome them both with open arms and hope they will continue to attend future meetings. We certainly require more new members but in our neck of the woods they seem to be keeping their heads down. We are aware of course that some are not

interested in joining us.

Ian Thomson and Jimmy Wilson are unable to attend our meetings because of illness and we wish them all the best.

As a branch we are finding it extremely difficult to get members to stand for election as office bearers, thus putting pressure on Jim Simpson to agree to remain Chairman for a further year in order to let the meeting proceed, and on Doug Archibald and Mick Walker agreeing to remain as office bearers, albeit in reversed roles, in order to let the branch function. I dread to think what will happen at our next AGM.



Alistair Burnett was a member of 131 Para. Sqn. from 1967 until 1969 when he immigrated to Australia. He presently resides in Hamilton Island, North Queensland.

The picture shows Alistair at the Isurava Monument Area on the Kokoda Trail. He went on to complete the trek. Well **done Alistair**. The 96-kilometre Kokoda Trail was the scene of bloody battles in 1942-43 between the Australians and Japanese Forces. The Kokoda track itself is single-file starting just outside Port Moresby on the Coral Sea and runs through the Owen Stanley ranges to Kokoda and the coastal lowlands beyond by the Solomon Sea.

The track crosses some of the most rugged and isolated terrain in the world. Further information on Alistair's trek can be seen on the following website link. [www.kokodatrail.com/au/forums/?showtopic=794](http://www.kokodatrail.com/au/forums/?showtopic=794) Alistair has not been in the best of health since his return and has contracted malaria; however, he is on the mend.

Other photographs of Alistair and his companions can also be viewed on the Edinburgh Branch Website: [www.airbornesappersscotland.co.uk](http://www.airbornesappersscotland.co.uk) The January 2008 branch meeting got off to a good start with 11 members in attendance. However, we also learned of the death of Edinburgh Branch member David Martin whose funeral took place on 21 January.

We continue to hold our meetings at The Royal British Legion, Central Branch, Rodney Street, Edinburgh and we are grateful to them for allowing us to use their premises as they have done since our inception in 1998 and hopefully they will continue to do so in the future. The Lothian Branch PRA also have their meetings at the same venue and on the same day as the Edinburgh Branch. We have excellent relations with the Lothian Branch PRA who continually invite the branch to join them on most of their ventures which makes life a lot easier, given we are a small unit.

The branch website continues to attract visitors and has been some help in locating lost comrades. We are always looking for new material and photographs which is a must if the website is to continue to be successful. A website that is not kept up to date is not worth having.

I recently had a communication from a former member of 24 Fd Sqn RE who served at Al-Milah when 300 Para Sqn. was there in 1965. He had been viewing our website and saw we had a picture of the comer 4x4 he had been driving when it had hit a mine. He also manned the 30-calibre machine gun in the Ferret the morning we were attacked. I have asked him to send me his version of events and hopefully he will, along with some pictures.

It makes all the difference in the world to know the website is being viewed other than by members.

## Birmingham

### Bunny Brown

Since the last time we were in the Journal the Committee has changed, Bunny Brown is back in the Chair, Steve Brown is the scribe, Tom Carpenter bravely volunteered to be President, and our lovely Treasurer is still Elsie Barratt.



I must thank the outgoing Committee for all the hard work that they have done over the last few years, I say few with tongue in cheek, Major Bernard Hooper, has been Branch President for over 15 years, Brian Care the ex Chairman five years, as with the Vice Chair Gordon Page. All at the Branch thank them for their good work in the past.

On the social side, the Branch, as everyone knows likes to party on the odd occasion, last years Annual Dinner went well, with almost 100 sitting down at the usual venue, which is the Holiday Inn at Birmingham Airport. The Hotel is under new ownership and have spent a great deal of money on improvements, they also have a new chef who prepared a very nice cordon blue type dinner, I believe it is the first year that no one complained about

anything, correction, the disc jockey complained that one of the guests was too noisy.

The Branch missed our usual sojourn to Ripon for their annual dinner last year, due to brother Steve Brown getting married on the same day, (we look forward to seeing you next year Bill). The Branch has also attended our annual SA 80 Shoot with the RRF, it was decided to award a shield as a trophy to go to the best score between RRF and AEA, we managed to win it back last year, and retain it this year. We have also had a very nice trophy given to us by Harry Mennie, this will stay with the Branch as the AEA Challenge Cup, everyone that attended fired for this trophy this year, on the first round there were 4 members with a maximum score, the second round led to 2 maximum scores i.e. Alan Brough and Mike Holdsworth.

It was decided that they shoot again, and again the scored Maximum points, so they will have to share the honours until next year.

## Yorkshire

### Bill Rudd MBE



It has been a rather very quiet period for the branch, with not a lot to report. As normal our Xmas Lunch was it's usual success with good food and many airborne friends, a warm welcome was given to Lou Gallagher and Froth Beer who thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

### Louie, Jackie & Mick Mathis & Froth Beer

We now look forward to another busy year ahead. Our next event will be our Annual Dinner which will be held on Sat 26th April 08, as normal this will be held in the WOs / Sgts 38 Engr Regt. Single barrack accommodation is available at a cost of ten pounds this includes breakfast.

Tickets for the dinner are available through me and charged at twenty-five pounds, this includes wines, 4-course meal and disco.

The good news is that the new RSM in Ripon is WO1 (RSM) Tony Pick ex 9 and has just completed his tour has SSM 51 Para Sqn. We look forward to meeting Tony as one of our main guests at our Annual Dinner.

Wales Weekend will be on the 16-19th May, and this year's event will be organised by Peter Kershaw. Many of our branch members will be attending. It really is a weekend not to be missed, providing one can fit it in!

Our membership remains quite healthy and we continue to hold our own with several members having a hundred mile turn round, even more in some cases.

A reminder for the many ex Airborne sappers who live within shooting distance who do not make the effort, it's your Airborne Family and it is not too much to ask you to attend a meeting once every two months, your smiling faces will be more than welcome. I might even buy you a beer!

I thank the Chatham Branch for their kind invitation to attend their Annual Dinner and look forward to meeting up with many dear friends in June.

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## Chance Encounter in our Small World

### **Don Spary (Queenstown, New Zealand)**

Last summer I was in London and taking my 6-year-old grandson to visit the Army War Museum and was telling him about Chelsea Pensioners. As he was approaching I stopped him and introduced myself so that my grandson could meet him. Hey presto it was Eric Borlace! (An association member). We had a long chat and it was great to catch up on all his news as he had just been to New Zealand on holiday!

Shortly afterwards I bought raffle tickets in a military fund raising raffle and put down Eric's name. Surprisingly he won and told me he had sent the money on to our welfare fund - a fine and generous action by a good Airborne Engineer!

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## Notices in Foreign Parts

Tokyo hotel: It is forbidden to steal towels. If you are not a person to do such a thing, please not read this notice.

Japanese hotel: cold and heat. If you want to condition the warm in your room, please control yourself.

Czech tourist agency: Take one of our horse drawn city tours. We guarantee no miscarriages.

Copenhagen airline: We take your bags and send them in all directions.

Rome laundry: Ladies please leave our clothes here and spend the afternoon having a good time.

Bangkok dry cleaners: Drop your trousers here for best results.

Norwegian lounge: Ladies are requested not to have children in the bar.

And finally, Quote from the late Eleanor Roosevelt: "I had a rose named after me and was flattered, but I was not pleased to read in the catalogue" - "No good in bed, but fine up against a wall!"

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## Calling all former 9 Fd Coy Members

**Michael Wilson**



Hi, I'm hoping you may be able to help in my quest. I am searching for more information on my great uncle who served with the 9th Fd Coy during WW2. I have several photos and have read the book "The Shiny 9th" and have visited his grave in Oosterbeek many times. I was hoping to maybe find someone who served along side him or may have even more info or photos.

His name is Spr Kenneth Clarke 199091 9th Airborne Company Royal Engineers KIA during Market Garden.

Perhaps someone could name the gentleman sitting next to Kenneth in the following photo.

Looking forward to hearing from you if you can help in any way.

Michael Wilson

1, Rogers Close, Frodsham, Cheshire WA6 7NN

Tel:01928 739092

Mobile: 07929710154

E-mail: [salhalpin@hotmail.com](mailto:salhalpin@hotmail.com)



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## Congratulations



Belated congratulations to Mr Michael & Mrs Bridgett Robertson on the occasion of their wedding.

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## Salute to the Engineers

Now the Lord of the Realm has glorified the Charge of the Light  
Brigade, And the Thin Red Line of the Infantry, when will their glory fade?  
There are robust rhymes of the British Tar and classics on Musketeers,  
But I shall sing 'til your eardrums ring, of the Muddy Old Engineers.

Now it's all very fair to fly through the air or to humour a heavy gun-  
Or to ride in tanks through the broken ranks of the crushed and shattered Hun,  
And it's nice to think when the U-Boats sink of the glory that outlives years  
But whoever heard one vaunting word for the Muddy Old Engineers?  
For the roaring, goring, fighting, smiling, Muddy Old Engineers

Now you mustn't feel when you read this spiel that the Sapper's a jealous knave  
That he joined the ranks for vote of thanks in search of a hero's grave,  
No, your mechanised cavalry's quite alright and your Tommy has darned few Peers,  
But where in hell would the lot of them be if it weren't for the Engineers?

For the slamming, damming, toiling, boiling, Muddy Old Engineers.

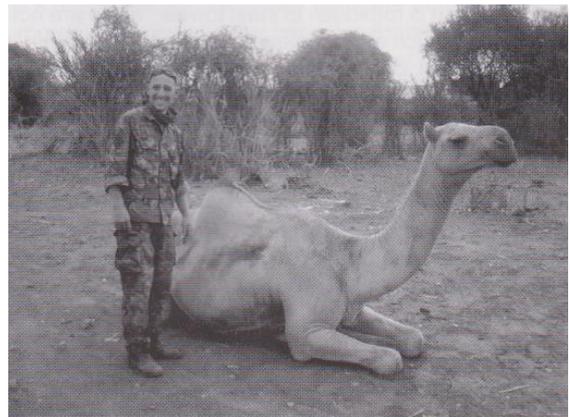
Oh they look like tramps but they build your camps, and they sometimes lead the advance,  
And they sweat red blood to bridge the flood to give you a fighting chance.  
Who stays behind when it gets too hot to blow up your roads in the rear?  
Just tell your wife that she owes your life to some Muddy Old Engineer.  
Some dusty, crusty, croaking, joking, Muddy Old Engineer.

No fancy crest is pinned to their chest, if you read what their hat badge says  
Why, "Honi Soit Qui Maly Pense" is a queersome sort of praise  
But their modest claim to immortal fame has probably reach your ears  
The first to arrive and the last to leave, the Muddy Old Engineers,  
The sweating, go-getting, uproarious, glorious Muddy Old Engineers.

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How come Ozzie is the only one in a 'hats' ridiculous?



Please Sir, can I take this home as part of my duty free allowance? - Kenya October 2007

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## AEA Sports Club- Running Section

### Tring 2 Town 40 Mile Canal Race Billy Morris

This race happened over the first weekend in February 08. This race started in London, at Kew Bridge and then follows the Grand Union Canal to Tring near Aylesbury. This race attracts around 300 runners some of them using it a pre training event for the Marathon De Sables. This race is run both ways, on the Sat from Kew to Tring and then on the Sunday from Tring 2 Town back to London.

Prior to this race Bob Chatterton and Bob Thorburn my conventional ground trooper mate from Germany who I ran the Hamburg marathon and the Harz mountain ultra marathon last year with had trained in there own time for this event. The weekend before the Tring Bob Chatterton and I ran from Bob's house in Basingstoke back to Aidershot along the Basingstoke Canal a 30-mile training run in 5 hours.

On the Friday afternoon before Tring 2 Town Bob Thorburn flew into Stanstead airport where I picked him up and then drove back to my house in Aidershot where we carried out last minute preparations, filling 2 litre bottles with pre mixed race drinks, packing our running back packs with high energy food, and mandatory safety equipment as specified in the race list. Bob Chatterton picked up both of us up from Aidershot and drove us to the Premier Inn Travel lodge Kew Bridge. So we could have a fresh start on Saturday morning.

We planned to meet Sandra, Bob Chatterton's wife, who had a business meeting that afternoon in London and then was going to act as our support team driver on the Saturday race.

Sandra arrived later on in a giggly and chatty mood, the business meeting finished early and being Friday and happy hour in London it would be rude not to have a couple of pints of wine!. We sat down to a meal and chatted and tried to brief our support team on tomorrow's plan.



The race started outside the Premier Inn Travel lodge, at 0815 about 150 runners started the Saturday event, we got off to a steady start in the crisp morning air, the sun was coming up and it was perfect running conditions.

We arrived at the first checkpoint near Uxbridge after 11 miles and there was Sandra on time and in the right place with top up drink and food, and feeling a lot better.

#### **Bob Chatterton, Bob Thorburn & Billy Morris**

The second check point was at Spring Well Lock at 19.4 miles just south of Rickmansworth. The rest of the runners coming up to the check points thought Sandra was the official check point, as she had all our drink top up refill bottles ready, food laid out perfect, runners where demoralised by getting moved on to the official check point with only water and a few sweets to hand out. The five P's.

Always works. Running along the Grand Union Canal was a superb setting, passing loads of canal side pubs and bars. Bob Thorburn was suffering slightly as we almost ran the first 20 miles non stop, this was not part of his training plan, but dug in and popped a couple of pain killers and was a new man, then it was Bob 'Chatts' turn to suffer slightly for the remaining 20 miles, but ABA always works. I managed not to suffer to badly during this event.

Checkpoints 3 came at 28.7 mile and then check point 4 at 34.8 miles; it was just the run in to the finish. We all crossed the line together and met up with Sandra who made our race easy with regard to transitions through the check points and giving us all a hard time. Crossing the line in 7 hours 30 minutes. We all finished relatively fresh, and ready for a carbo-loading session, beer and a good meal. This happened as well as watching Wales beat England in the Rugby. A cracking weekend of running, Rugby, beer and good company made this a memory to remember. We have planned our next ultra, London to Brighton 56 miles in October 2008 - any takers?

### **AEA-100 Mile Challenge 2008**

I report that this year's challenge will have to be postponed yet again due to logistical problems at Gibraltar Barracks during August. Thanks to all who volunteered for this event, I hope this can still happens and I have put it on the back burner for now. Apologies yet again. I hate to fail.

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## New Publication

### Niall Cherry

In December 2007 a small booklet was issued called "With Nothing Bigger than a Bren Gun". The booklet is on the defence of the schoolhouse at the Arnhem road bridge in which men of the 1st Parachute Squadron RE had a major part. It is a limited edition publication of around 500 copies and I have sold around 15% already. I'm willing to sell copies of my booklet at £5-00 plus 80p postage (UK only) to members of the AEA and would welcome any order to the address below. I suppose in theory it will be possible to order it via a book shop as it has an ISBN and perhaps may eventually appear on the Amazon website. But via this route they will be £6-00. Incidentally I only have about 20 copies left of "A Sapper at Arnhem" and once they are sold that will be it!

You may have heard of me before, but I like to put on my CV, UK representative for the Society of Friends of the Airborne Museum Oosterbeek, author of the book "Red Berets and Red Crosses" and have helped with around 20 other books on the airborne forces (including a 'Sapper at Arnhem') and two TV programmes. Finally I like to say I was a Combat Med Tech Class 1 in the RAMC and did time in a Parachute Field Ambulance.

Niall Cherry 3, Church Road, Warton, Lancs, PR4 1BD E-mail: [niall.cherry@baesystems.com](mailto:niall.cherry@baesystems.com)

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## Membership Report

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

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

Alan Lewis	3rd Airborne/ 9th Airborne	1947-1953
John Featherstone	9 Para Sqn RE	2005-still serving
Craig McQuade	131 Para Engr Regt	1965
Gilbert Nicol	131 Para Engr Regt	1965
George Hopkins	3rd Para Sqn / 3rd Airborne	1943-1945
Anthony Palin	9 Para Sqn RE / Pathfinder Platoon	2004-2007
Matthew Stokes	9 Para Sqn RE / 51 Para Sqn RE	1990-96/ 2005-06
Peter G Wade (Maj Retd)	9 Para Sqn RE (canal zone) (Suez) P Coy AFD 2 Para	1952-54/1956-57 1958-1960
Anthony Pick (WO2)	9 Para Sqn RE / 51 Para Sqn RE	1999-05 / 2006-still serving

**Total membership as at 07/03/08 Past and Present 1,330**

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## Obituaries

### Stuart (Fred) Robson- 24 February 2008

Fred sadly passed away in St Luke's Hospital in Manila in the Philippines after a long illness of deep vein thrombosis causing further complications. Fred served in the Squadron in the early sixties between 1 Troop and Plant Troop. His unusual sense of humour and long gangly legs made him a terrific asset to the troop. Fred served with 1 Troop in Bahrain and in the Radfan/Aden conflict. On leaving the squadron he took over the running of his in laws hotel in Birmingham. In his own words, "It was not at all successful!" Fred then moved out to Australia where he worked on plant until he applied for a job with Global Drilling, a part of the American Santa Fe Group. Starting off as an offshore crane driver he worked his way up to becoming offshore manager for three drilling rigs in the Far East. Which is no mean feat! Fred reckoned it was the incredible amount of flights he was on that might have caused the medical problem. He leaves his wife Ludina and two boys Brian and Carlos. The Association offer their sincerest condolences!

### **Steve McCardle - 24139066**

Steve passed away on Saturday 9th June 2007 in hospital from liver failure and extensive portal vein thrombosis. He was 55 years of age.

Steve joined 1 Para on the 9th January 1968 and served in Northern Ireland. In 1973 he joined the Royal Engineers and was stationed at Smuts Barracks in Berlin. In 1975 he spent time with the Engineers Squadron at RAF Laarbruck. In August 1978 he joined 9 Para Sqn and was

stationed in Aidershot and in January 1979 he had 6 months in Belize. In August 1981 he was posted to Nienburg with the Plant Troop. In 1985 he was posted to Chatham with Plant Troop where he was a driving instructor.

He finished his army career at the TA in Failsworth. After Steve left the army he went working as a coach driver for Robinsons Holidays and Wallace Arnold, mainly driving on the continent.

Steve will be sadly missed by his wife Judith and daughter Kelly.

### **David Martin 18 March 1924 -12 January 2008**

A packed Falkirk crematorium was testament to Davie Martin's lifetime of service to his fellows. The eldest of a family of seven, he was a red-haired gregarious man with an instinctive urge to organise those around him.

As a young shipwright at Grangemouth docks, he was inducted into the Royal Navy in 1943, serving with the Fleet Air Arm. Davie's interest in the airborne family was aroused when he met Maisie in Italy. She was in the Auxiliary Territorial Service and attached to the US 82nd Airborne Division. Davie was demobbed in 1946, joined the RNVR in London and married Maisie in 1947.

On return to Grangemouth docks, the call of the sea could not be resisted and between 1949 and 1968 he spent nine years on the Australian run as a shipwright in the Merchant Navy. During this period he joined the TA, serving with the 7th Battalion the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders in Stirling and 80 Port Regt RE at Grangemouth. In 1959 131 Indep Para Engr Regt held a recruiting drive in Falkirk.

Without hesitation Davie joined 300 Para Fd Sqn RE as a founder member of 1 Troop.

When the TA reorganised in 1967 Davie returned to 80 Port Regt where he attained the rank of S/Sgt. Some time was spent working on oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico, returning in 1968. His Merchant Navy service continued on cruise liners in the Caribbean with the Blue Star and Shaw Savill lines. The Central Scotland branch of the Parachute Regimental Association was formed in 1984.

Davie was a founder member. He served the branch as Treasurer from 1984 to 1991 and Chairman from 1991 to

1996. When the AEA was born in 1989 he joined us too, and the Edinburgh branch when that formed in 1998. He also joined the RE Association, the National Union of Seamen and several other trade unions, the Freemasons and most of the groups for which he was eligible, holding life membership in many cases. In total he supported about fifty organisations.

About ten years ago members of the Central Scotland branch of the PRA attended the annual dinner of the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where Davie proudly received a presentation in recognition of his work in the Association. During his travels, he enjoyed a pint with the lads, but always made time to explore the area, taking many photographs. He left a large collection.

A well-read affable man, he will be remembered by many.

Maisie died a few years ago after 56 years of marriage.

Their daughter Senga and two of his sisters survive and our thoughts are with them at this sad time. The funeral on 21st January was attended by four PRA standard bearers and a smart turnout of members to bid farewell to an old friend who, although his hair had turned to silver, still took a delight in winding people up.

## **Robert (Tam) Hepburn**

Sapper Robert (Tam) Hepburn died after a brief stay in hospital at his hometown Dundee on 7th January 2008, aged 86 years.

Tam, as he was generally known, was a long-term member of A Troop, 1st Para. Sqn. R.E. dating back to November 1941.

He served with the Sqn. In North Africa, Sicily, Italy and finally Arnhem.

He was a pleasure to serve with, a good Sapper and the type of man who could raise a laugh no matter how tricky the situation.

Many stories could be told of Tam's escapades, most of them hilarious. For example - after escaping from their POW camp Tam, Gus Woods and 'Poacher' Payne found themselves in a difficult situation. 'Poacher' was suffering badly from haemorrhoids and could hardly walk. So, what did they do? Scrounged a wheelbarrow, dumped 'Poacher' therein and continued on their way towards the British/American lines. AND they were shot up by enemy aircraft!

On return to the U.K. in December 1943, the Sqn. was based in the village of Donington, Lincs, where Tam met Doreen, his wife to be, who at that time was a serving member of the Women's Land Army.

After his discharge from the army the happy couple decided to try their luck in Canada but returned to the U.K. after a brief spell. In 1951 Tam joined his local Police Force where he served for twenty-five years, retiring with the rank of sergeant.

There is no doubt Tam was a much loved family man who will be sadly missed by his wife Doreen, son and daughter, grandchildren and great grandchildren and his Para comrades.

To them all - we offer our heartfelt condolences.

**Captain John (Jock) Hinshelwood** passed away on 5th August 2007. Jock was a former member of 591 (Antrim) Parachute Squadron, Royal Engineers and served with 6th Airborne Division during the period 1939 -1946.

Even at the age of 90 years he was a sharp, chipper individual who always had his morning walk around Pitlochry. He was a regular attendee at the Airborne Reunions in London. He will be sadly missed by his family, friends and former military colleagues.

## **Major Frank Guy 1924—2007**

Frank joined the newly formed AAS at Fort Darland Gillingham in March 1939.

After completing his boy service and basic sapper training he and twenty other Darland boys passed through Ringway and joined 3 Parachute Sqn in Bulford Camp.

Frank was posted into 2 Troop and dropped into Normandy with them.

After Normandy came Christmas in the Ardennes followed by the Rhine Crossing and the trek through to Wismar on the Baltic.

Home at last with 15 days leave and then the formation of 3rd Airborne Sqn and sailing off again to India and then to Malaya and Java. On the journey back a short stay in Palestine then finally home to Carter Barracks, Bulford.

Now Cpl Frank was off to Germany again with 3rd Airborne Sqn to Neumunster followed by a move to Hameln. At this stage RE records decided that the newly formed 9 Indep Airborne Sqn had too many regular long serving NCOs, so Frank's airborne days came to an end and he was posted as a Sgt to Paderborne.

Following this Frank carried out four tours in N. Ireland, followed by tours in Canada, Cyprus Canada.

After a spell as PSI with a TA unit in Dundee he was commissioned as an Lt Quartermaster. His final posting was as a Major QM with 15 Field Support Squadron in Ripon.

Frank with wife Betty and the family; settled in Selby where he was a departmental head with the Council.

A sad loss to all and our condolences go to Betty and family, friends and of course those remaining from that Band of Brothers - The Darland Boys, who made such an impact on the Airborne Engineers.

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# Association Shop

Ray Coleman

Description	Price	P&P (UK Post Rate)
<b>Ties</b>		
Association Ties (Pegasus logo)	£15.00	£1.00
Anniversary Ties (Wings & Pegasus logo)	£15.00	£1.00
9 Para Sqn Ties (Wings logo)	£15.00	£1.00
Bow Ties (Pegasus & Wings logo)	£9.50	£1.00
<b>Badges</b>		
Association Blazer Badges	£14.00	£1.00
9 Squadron Blazer Badges	£14.00	£1.00
Lapel Wings - Blue Enamel S/C	£3.50	£1.00
<b>Clothing</b>		
Association Jumpers (sizes 38 - 48) Maroon or Blue with Pegasus logo embroidered 'Airborne Engineers'	£25.00	£3.10
Association Sweatshirts - Maroon with blue logo - Small/med/lge or X large £16-50 £3-10	£15.50	£3.50
Association Polo Shirts - Fred Perry style - Maroon or blue with Pegasus logo - small/med/lge or Xlge		
Association 'T' Shirts - Maroon with logo - small/med/lge/Xlge £9-00 £1-80 Association Shower proof Fleece in Maroon or Blue -with embroidered 'Airborne Engineers' logo - Med/Lge/Xlge	£28.00	£3.00
Baseball Cap (in blue or maroon) - with combined Pegasus & Wings crest	£7.00	£1.00
<b>Miscellaneous</b>		
Association Shield	£18.00	£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 Cumberbunds (Wings & Pegasus logo)	£17.50	£1.00
Ladies Association long Polyester Scarves (Pegasus logo)	£15.00	£1.00
Association Directory	£5.00	£2.50
Association Key Ring (Pegasus Logo)	£2.00	£1.00
Association Fridge Magnet (Pegasus Logo)	£2.50	£1.00
Association Paperweight (Pegasus Logo)	£5.00	£2.00