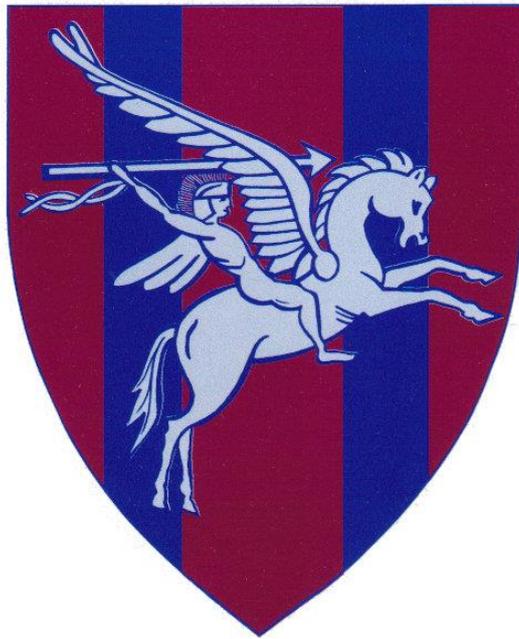




THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS JOURNAL



**Airborne Engineers Association
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The Airborne Engineer



August 2008 Issue No. 25

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Publication Deadline - DECEMBER 2008 Edition

Members submitting material for publication in the DECEMBER 2008 edition of the Journal are advised that the closing date will be **MONDAY 10th NOVEMBER** Kindly ensure that you forward your articles direct to the editor - address as shown above.

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Chairman's Address

Mick Humphries

In my last address to you all I wished 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Assault) good luck for their forthcoming tour of Afghanistan. They have now been in theatre for several months and there is an update in this issue from Iain Murison the outgoing RSM. Iain has now completed his hand over so may I take this opportunity to welcome the new RSM, WO1 Glen Walton, we very much look forward to working with you for the next 2 years.

You will find details later in the journal of the AGM in October. There are still many of you that have probably not booked in, so please help Bunny and his team by getting returns in ASAP. The guest of honour at the Gala Dinner will be Brigadier Robbie Burns, who commanded the mighty 2 troop during the Falklands campaign and was 9 Sqn OC a few years later. As the Regiment will still be on operations I have asked the RSM and CO to send a representative if they cannot make the event.

There are a few items on the AGM agenda that I need to bring to your attention. There is a proposal that Dave Rutter is made a Life Vice President of the association.

This is the 1st nomination we have had for this honour in 4 years, and although the details and the full proposal will not be heard until the AGM, I do wish to give this my full backing and would ask you all to do the same. You will also see the proposal that Joe Stoddart MBE be made National Chairman when my tenure finishes on 31st December. I am sure that you all know Joe and will support this proposition at the AGM. Lastly there is a constitution change that has been proposed by Col Dennis Eagan.

This change is designed to ensure the association has the power to deal with any member that is in breach of the constitution or who brings the association into disrepute.

Can I reassure everyone that (assuming it is passed) these rules are there as a last resort and it is not intended to use them for trivial issues.

By the time you read this, The John Rock Bust will have been delivered to Woodbridge ready for the grand unveiling on 21st November. As the Regiment is currently on operations we have no details as yet to give you on the day. As soon as we receive any more detailed info we will make sure that it is posted on the website **www.airbornesappers.org.uk**. If you do not have Internet access please speak to your branch secretaries or chairman who will be bomb bursting the information as it becomes available. Once again can I say a big thank you to Eric Blenkinsop for his unstinting enthusiasm without which this project would not have been completed.

Yorkshire branch have now handed over the sum of £550 to Combat Stress that they raised in Harrogate. This year's charity is Help for Heroes and I am now publicly challenging Eric and Chatham branch to beat the sum of £2,200 raised by Aidershot at the 2006 reunion. Can you all please help them by buying lots of tickets and most importantly donating prizes.

Chris and I look forward to seeing you all in Coventry in October.

Proposed Chairman Elect Joe Stoddart MBE enlisted in the Corps of Royal Engineers in July 1958 and after trade training as an A1 Electrician joined 9 Indep Para Sqn RE where he served until 1965.

During the time spent in 9 Indep Para Sqn he saw service in Aden, Norway, Bahrain, Cyprus, Libya, Singapore and Malaya.

In 1965 he went on a short attachment to the Diving School in Marchwood and was kept there for four years as a Diving Supervisor; leaving with the rank of Sergeant.

After a Combat Engineer A1 course he was posted to 4 Field Sqn RE in Neirburg, while there he served as Intelligence Sergeant with the Sqn in Northern Ireland.

Promoted in 1972 to Staff Sergeant he was posted as 2IC of 89 Army Youth team in Troon, Ayrshire. Soon on the move again he was posted to 59 Indep Cdo Sqn RE where after successfully completing the commando course

he was awarded the Commando Medal and draughted to the Malta troop attached to 41 Commando Royal Marines.

Whilst there he saw active service with the UN Force during the Turkish Invasion of Cyprus .

Following a further Northern Ireland tour he was promoted and posted to Berlin as WOII (QMSI) 38 Engineer Squadron RE. Following a successful tour in Berlin was posted on promotion as WOI (SMI) to the RE Diving Establishment in Marchwood where in 1980 he was awarded an MBE for services to diving.

Joe has served as chairman of the Aidershot Branch for the last three years, and has served on the Association Advisory committee. His endeavours are to promote the ethos of the Association, to forge closer ties with 23 Engr Regt (Air Asslt) and to look after the interests of our Members as laid down in the AEA Constitution (Para 2 a.b.c.d.e).

Annual General Meeting & Reunion

Royal Court Hotel Keresley, Coventry

17-19 OCTOBER 2008

Gentlemen, the reunion is almost upon us, many of you have not yet booked, please remember that the last date to get your booking in is six weeks before the event, that means the weekend of the 7th September is the last day.

Please get your booking forms off **NOW**.

Bookings are going well but a number of the regular attendees are missing. Don't miss out, it's going to be an excellent weekend. Bookings for the coach are going well, and it is very likely that we will have two coaches, one for the shopping trip and one for the arboretum, but remember, for the coaches you must book and pay in advance.

Booking forms were enclosed in your April journal , but if you've misplaced them you can either contact the editor (Dave Rutter) or download them from the Airborne Engineers Association web site:

www.airbornesappers.org.uk

Please help out the Chatham Branch by bringing along a raffle prize (wrapped if possible) I look forward to seeing you at Coventry . **Bunny Brown**

Rogues Gallery



Roger Mockford, 'Sandy' Sanderson, Phil Poulton & Dave Goodfellow - demolition training at Longmoor 1972



Lt Peter Wall (now General) & John Moorhouse during Operation Agila Rhodesia -1979



Don Newman, Bill Rudd & the late Benny Benson - Bahrain 1964



Party animal Mick Leather - June 2008

**Ken Maybee,
Martin (Bev) Camp,
Chris Chambers & the late
Fred Robson Sharjah 1962**



Wales Adventure- 2008

Dave Grimbley

I arrived at Manchester airport to pick up Mick Ellery who had just flew in from Aberdeen. Mick was our route organiser for our venture into the mountains of the Snowdonia national park. After arriving at the Indefatigable, which has been our base for the past eight years, we met up with the rest of the lads and lassies who were going to put their bodies through the pain barrier for the weekend.

The first night is always a social night, where we sit down to a meal, and a few drinks to welcome the new comers, which this year was Harry Lockwood and his wife Dorothy, Froth Beer and his partner Lindsey, Tom Downie and returning to the fold a couple of years absence, Mick (Porky) and Sheila Willis.

After a good night of humour and reminiscing it was time to get our heads down for the hard slog ahead of us.



This year we decided to travel a little bit further to bag another mountain approximately one and a half hours drive away; called "Arenig Fawk". Out of the personnel of twenty-two, eleven decided on the ascent of the mountain.

Lindsey, Mick Willis, Jim Harrower, Mike Ellery, Ty Harrop & Dave Grimbley Seated: Fennimore Fleck, Dennis Healey, Dave Rutter & Tony Manley

As usual the racing snakes; Dave Rutter and Fennimore set the pace. It wasn't long before there was a trail of bodies scattered over the mountain. The weather was kind to us, a little 01 rain with a blustery wind, but as we went further r* up the mountain the

cloud came in and the ^temperature dropped. This brought a problem ■■when we got to the top. Fennimore who was in _ front disappeared into the mist. Lindsey who was also a racing snake had a word with Dave | and they waited for the rest of the group to RV.

I When we all regrouped Fenny was still missing ft so we sent Jim Harrower and Mick Willis to look ■for him. After about five minutes looking we jHheard a whistle blow, it was Fenny about l 200yds away sat at the trig point having a nice cup of tea, so we all made our way to the top.

The descent was not too bad as most of it was shale so we dug our heels in and skied down, another mountain bagged.

On the way back to base camp Tony Hogan who owns a two-story department store with a restaurant in Porthmadog treated us all to tea and cakes. Quite posh, made a change from the pub. Although Lindsey had a laugh at us all slurping tea and eating 'stickies' instead of supping beer "What kind of Para's are these" she queried. No comment!

Saturday is always 'Barbecue' night, where we congregate in the yacht club for a superb BBQ banquet, plenty of beer and wine and singsong.



Tony Manley never fails to amaze us all with his cooking and organising the food for the whole of the weekend. Makes me wonder - would it work without Tony? I don't think it'd be quite the same. Just goes to show not all men are useless at cooking!

Before the Barbecue began Tony Hogan gave us another surprise when he rolled up with his motorboat; and eight of us jumped aboard and went for a trip down the Menai Straits. When we arrived back the evening's entertainment was well on its way. Mind you we did stop of for a few beers on the way back!

It was good to see Harry Lockwood in good form after his by pass operation. Also Tom Downie, 9 Squadron's very own Billy Connolly/Dean Martin. What a great character! And although Froth Beer could not take part in physical activities due to his Northern Ireland injuries, partner Lindsey did you proud Froth! , So after a few tales it was back to the good old tradition of "Big Rock Candy Mountain and "Little Old Wine Drinker plus numerous NAAFI Club songs with personal performances of Irish ballads by Barney Rooney. An excellent night which was much enjoyed by all.

I awoke Sunday morning to the sound of sheep. Well at least that's what I thought it was. It turned out to be Bof and Tye Harrop snoring! I looked around and saw Dennis Healey already dressed and who at seventy-two years of age being the oldest member of the party he tells me, still goes up those climbs like a mountain goat. Credit to you Dennis.



Time to get a hearty breakfast down us and find out who was going on the next mountain venture. Many thanks to Dave and Margaret Davies who volunteered to cook breakfast and give Tony a rest after the splendid barbecue.

Mike Ellery leads Tony Manley & Jim Narrower as they head upwards and onwards

The weather was looking good for the mountains unlike a few of the lads after the night's session. Unfortunately some of the party had to leave early because of work commitments.

The mountain we climbed was called Pen Yr Ole Wen. We have previously climbed this peak two years ago, not hard to forget as the weather on that occasion was horrendous!

Six of us opted for the ascent up the mountain. It was a hard climb but when reaching the top the view was magnificent, with superb views over the mountains that we had climbed over the years.

Time for the pub. A quick decent down the mountain.

After a few beers and a few more yarns the time had come to get cleaned up for the Chinese banquet which twelve of us sat down to. After weighing up all the exits and then looking at the state of the lads it was quite obvious there would be no 'runners' committed that evening! Those were the days.

Another Wales weekend over. When I look back over the weekends I've spent over the last eight years I would like to thank Chris O'Donovan the founder of the Wales weekend for staging such a great venue. He was truly missed this year due to commitments. Pete Kershaw and Mick Fisher did a great job organising this year.

So to all of you out there who would like a cheap weekend with a bit of hill walking, mountain hiking, and a great social occasion - why not join us in 15th - 17th May 2009. Details will be published on the AEA website and in the April 2009 journal.

To end the weekend Barney Rooney was seen in his civvy diving suit walking back from the boat jetty after missing judging the tide and the depth of the water while helping 'Scouse' Hogan to cast off.

Barney, "YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE!"

Coastal Walk Group Wales 2008

Mick (Gurney) Fisher

One of the Planning Objectives was to choose an enjoyable walk within the capabilities and enthusiasm levels of the Group. Two years earlier one of the Coastal Walks was for a distance of eighteen miles including several areas where we were in the puffing panting lung screaming Hill Walking Mode, with a drop of several hundred feet to



the left and the ground soaking wet under foot. It was quite a slog and en route we had to drop several people off at a convenient location to be collected by the coach.

Sheila Willis, Tom Downie, Barney Rooney, Bof Harrop, Mick Fisher, Harry Lockwood, Margaret Davies, Dorothy Lockwood, Dave Davies & Peter Kershaw

After that experience we all realised that the main lessons to be learned were first and foremost that everyone in the Group should be able to enjoy the walk and that they would want to come back the next year.

Considerations for this year 2008. Due to the high costs involved and restrictions that were being imposed on us by the Coach Company it was decided not to hire a Coach

Transport For the reasons given above we would use our own cars and the Drop Off Point and the Final RV would be one and the same. The Coastal Walk to be about six miles long and to finish at a Pub!

Coastal Walk Saturday 17th May The Coastal Walk Group consisting of ten intrepid and eager volunteers assembled in the cookhouse, every one of them wearing a smiley face despite still suffering the effects of the previous night's soiree.

The transport selected was Leather Personnel Carriers [Boots] plus our MT Section consisting of three cars. Collecting our packed lunches and drinks [non alcoholic] we set off for the Drop off Point adjacent to The Pilot Boat Pub. We decided that the route would be from the Pilot Boat Pub to the Lifeboat Station at Moelfre [plenty of badgers there but at least it was Moelfre]. The Group walked on a bearing of 40 degrees Magnetic heading for Red Wharfe Bay. On arriving at Red Wharfe Bay the wind changed from a light breeze to a strong wind then a short distance from the beach we witnessed the water skiing and aerial skills of the Kite Surfers. You have to admire these guys and gals with their rubber immersion suits connected to a harness system leading to a Kite Type Sail. They would endeavour to catch the wind and once they had achieved this they would hurtle skyward then a controlled glide [sort of] down to the surface of the water.

Then the whole thing would be repeated. Brilliant. [Better than Saturday shopping at Tesco, well almost] We decided to stop on the edge of the beach and have our cups of tea and partake of our packed lunch, banana and jam sarnies.

Lovely!



By this time we were in urgent need of a Comfort Stop. Thankfully situated a short distance from the Beach was a Car Park complete with a Public Convenience and we all took advantage of this facility. [One of life's few pleasures]

Trusting no one, Mick Fisher (background) checks the map!

When everyone was ready we headed along Red Wharfe Bay towards Moelfre and on arrival there we took advantage of the Big Eats being offered while we gathered our strength for the final push to our RV.

The Moelfre Lifeboat had carried out more than a few rescues over the years and had several Shipwreck Artefacts on display, plus on the sea wall a Plaque commemorating the rescues that they had taken part in.

We pressed on to our final RV The Pilot Boat Pub. It should be mentioned that one of our Group Dave Diogenes [Dodgy Knees] Davies was off like an Olympic Athlete and finished well ahead. He must have been thirsty. Hats off and respect to Harry Lockwood who despite having had a quadruple by-pass finished the walk in good order.

Respect Harry Thank you and Respect to all the following: All the Ladies [Dorothy, Margaret and Sheila] who volunteered for and finished the walk.. Peter Kershaw, Bernard [Barney] Rooney, Bof Harrop still walking and hanging in there despite a life threatening injury a few years ago. Tommy [Dino] Downie (funny as ever) and Mick 'Gurney' Fisher [Shepherd], Thankfully the weather was kind to us and we all agreed that we had enjoyed a brilliant day out finishing at a Pub in time to watch the FA Cup Final. That day we were all millionaires.

Roll on next year.

Care to join us for 2009? I guarantee you'll have a great time in good company, excellent food and a few blisters and aching limbs - but you only live once!

Daphne and I and Big John did a Sinai Recce Too

Sir Donald Spiers CB TD

Regular readers will have seen accounts of Sinai recce carried out by 9 Squadron during their time in Egypt in the early 1950s. (David Brooks in Issue No 5 (December 2001) and John Hooper in Issue No 21 (April 2007). This is an account of the final 9 Squadron recce carried out in April 1954 just before the Squadron returned to Aidershot.

The Brigade Intelligence Officer at HQ 16 Para Bde knew that if he wanted a sensible recce carried out in the Sinai, the only unit to do the job was 9 Squadron. Thus it was that when he needed an up to date opinion on the going and the water supplies in the Sinai before the Brigade left Egypt for the cooler climes of Aidershot, he turned to us. The route to be covered was across Northern Sinai to the top of the Gulf of Aqaba, down the West coast of the Gulf to Sharm el Sheik and then back to Suez via St Katherine's Monastery. At that time, 54 years ago, Sharm el Sheik was a miserable hovel, rather than the very up market holiday resort suitable for a Tony Blair vacation that it is today. To make our recce more interesting, we were to take a 3 Ton truck and one of the recently acquired Land Rovers as well as the trusted and tried Jeeps. And to make it harder still, we had to be at a specific grid reference just north of Sharm el Sheik at a specific time for a RAF re-supply drop so that we could carry on eating. The whole operation was to take 14 days and was named Exercise Marco Polo.

The exercise commander was Lt John Grosvenor RE (Daphne to his men), who was the 2 Troop officer and, as the young Sprog, I was to be the recce officer (in other words I had to write the recce report). Other members of the team included Lt Trevor Mound from 2 Para, who came along to see how Sappers did things, Sgt Bert Stevenson, who was to maintain order and discipline amongst the officers and Cpl John Smith to maintain order and discipline amongst the rest of the team of assorted drivers, cooks and radio operators. For vehicles we had a 2 Para Jeep, the 2 Troop Jeep and a Bedford QL 3 Tonner. In addition, because my Troop Commander, Dennis Eagan, had just returned to the UK as pre-advance party for the impending Sqdn move back to Aidershot, I had full control of the 3 Troop Land Rover with its driver, Sapper Prescott. Of course with Dennis in the UK and me in the Sinai that left command of 3 Troop to Sgt Eric Blenkinsop, but since Eric had essentially been running the Troop anyway, my absence made little difference!

We set off on Friday 16 April 1954, crossed the Suez Canal at Kubri Ferry and then proceeded due East through the Mitla Pass and reached Nakil by dusk without encountering any problems. The following day we passed through Themad and continued down Wadi Watir before reaching the Gulf coast at Wasit, just across the border with Israel at Eilat. We had now covered in reverse exactly the route along which Col Ariel Sharon led his 202nd Parachute Brigade on 31st October 1956 to link up with the 395 men who had parachuted in to seize the Mitla Pass at the start of the Suez Campaign. The next stage of our recce down the west coast of the Gulf of Aqaba would also be exactly the route followed Col Avraha Yaffa and his 9th Infantry Brigade on 2nd November 1956 when they seized Sharm el Sheik as part of the same Campaign. I have often wondered since whether our recce report found its way into Israeli hands!



We left Wasit on 19th April to move south down the Gulf coast to Dahab, but it soon became clear that, although the Jeep and Rover were making light of the terrain, the 3 Tonner would not be able to cope. We spent many hours using sand channels, but progress was painfully slow and eventually the decision was taken to turn inland towards St Katherine's Monastery where the 3 Tonner and most of the party would wait while the Jeep and Rover went on to Dahab, south to Nebk and hence to the re-supply DZ. With a lot of hard work we finally got the 3 Tonner to the Monastery by close of play on 21st April.

Jeep in the Wadi

Time was now moving on and a command decision was taken that I should lead the mission to the re-supply DZ, where the RAF were due to arrive at 1000 on 23rd April. I never knew whether this was because they thought I could read a map and use a sun compass, or because I had to write the recce report, or because, being only the Sprog, I was considered expendable!

Either way, early on 22nd April I set out in the 3 Troop Land Rover driven by the trusty Sapper Prescott with Bert Stevenson in the 2 Troop Jeep. We followed an Easterly route along various wadis and arrived at Dahab around midday.

The jeep, which had seen service in WW II and was getting old, gave a bit of trouble, but the Rover never missed a beat, even towing the Jeep through some soft going at one stage. From Dahab we pressed on South down the coast of the Gulf of Aqaba through Nebk and on to the re-supply DZ, which we reached by late afternoon.

At this point we were well pleased and thought everything was under control. Then over the horizon appeared a jeep carrying an Egyptian Army Captain. He stopped and came over looking unfriendly so I saluted him smartly. His first question was simple: who gave you permission to be here? Now I knew from the Semple/Hooper experience that "King Farouk" would not be an acceptable answer and I was fairly sure that "General Neguib" wouldn't work very well either, so I tried "General Sir Francis Festing, Commander in Chief Middle East Land Forces, after consultation with your Army Commander." This appeared to placate him so he asked my name. He

then said, "you must wait here and I will consult my higher command". Now of course we had every intention of waiting there because it was our DZ, but I decided not to mention the re-supply drop coming the next morning. He then disappeared to consult and later returned to say that it was OK for the famous British singer Donald Peers (you remember him "In a shady nook, by a babbling brook...") to carry on. Fortunately he didn't ask me to sing.

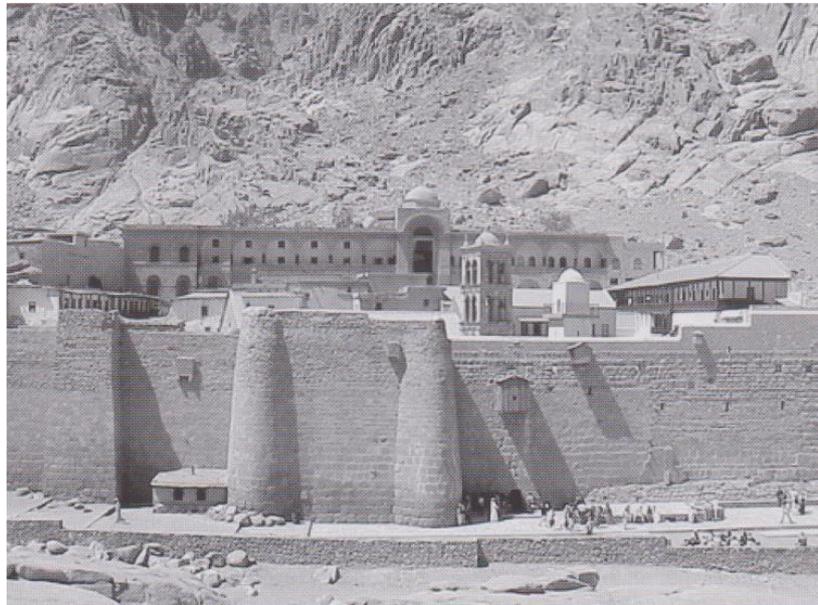


So the next morning, 23rd April, we set out our DZ with regulation markings and waited for the appointed time of ?1000hrs. Nothing came. We waited until 1100 and still nothing came. Then, just as we were packing up, a Valetta appeared about a mile off track (there was no question of us being in the wrong place of course) and we finally attracted its attention by jumping up and down and waving flags (no VHF radios to talk to it in those days!). Having identified us the Valetta made two runs, dropping a total of 23 SEAC packs. It then made an ultra low pass and there, standing in the door waving to us was our 1 Troop Commander, Captain John 'Louie' Chapple. He was laughing because he knew where he was going to eat and sleep that night!

Daphne riding shotgun on the Land Rover

The successful re-supply drop had left us with a problem nowever, because, without the 3 Tonner, we now had a lot more supplies than we could fit into a Jeep and a Land Rover. We therefore started a ferrying process with the Land Rover moving ahead with the first load and establishing a base camp at Dahab before returning for the remaining stores and the Jeep.

The following morning I set off for St Katherine's Monastery in the Rover with the first load of stores. It immediately became clear that while navigating along the coast and along wadis travelling towards the sea was fairly straightforward, finding exactly the right wadi to travel inland back the Monastery was not so straightforward. They all looked alike; had similar mountains on each side; they all ran in the same compass direction; and they all seemed to correspond with our maps. Of course there was no GPS to help so in the end we simply used low cunning by identifying the distinctive tyre tread pattern left by the Rover when we arrived at Dahab and then following its tracks back up the correct wadi.



When I arrived at the Monastery that afternoon it was to discover that, in my absence over the last three days, the exercise commander, John Grosvenor, had managed to shoot himself in the leg while cleaning his Browning 9mm pistol. This action was observed first hand by John Smith and was a very thorough job with the bullet going into his thigh, then through his shin and finally through his foot.

Our first aid skills and equipment did not run to this sort of accident but fortunately the monks at St Katherine's took it all in their stride, patched him up and got a message back to Brigade HQ, who then evacuated him to the British Military Hospital in Fayid.

You may wonder at this stage what happened to our own 62 Set communications link. The answer to that is quite simple - it didn't work! Despite all the efforts of our signaller, we never at any stage made satisfactory contact with Sqn. HQ in Moascar. Being an HF set it was never going to work in Groundwave mode through the mountains



and for the Skywave mode we were on the fringe of the skip distance for much of the time, so no joy. The other recce task we had been given was to report on water supplies along the way. In fact there was water at all the villages we passed and testing it with our water sterilisation packs showed that, when push came to shove, it was all drinkable, even if some of it needed the odd water sterilisation tablet added.

John Grosvenor & Stevenson bartering with the locals

Over the next two days we ferried the rest of the supplies from Dahab to St Katherine's so that the whole team, less Daphne, was back together after being split up for the past week. We then spent a day looking around the Monastery, seeing the mummified head and hand of St Katherine and the charnel house where the bones of every past monk are catalogued and kept in perpetuity. We were also shown what was said to be the original Biblical Burning Bush that handed down the Ten Commandments to Moses.

Sadly it now looked a pretty dejected shrub behind a large fence and not really capable of giving any further executive orders. We attended a service in the Chapel of the Transfiguration and were entertained to drinks (strictly non-alcoholic) afterwards by Archbishop Porphyros III, a charming man who spoke good English.



Rover at the Monastery

The following morning, Thursday 29th April, we set off in convoy heading West to the Red Sea coast of Sinai and then North towards Suez. The tracks along this route were good and indeed we saw one or two battered taxis taking adventurous tourists to the monastery. About 6 miles from Suez however, a very strong Khamseen blew up and the dense sand storm made further progress impossible until the following morning. Finally the next day we reached Kubri Ferry, only to find that it was u/s, so we had to press on up the East side of the Suez canal to Ferry Point where we were finally able to cross and so return to our barracks at Moascar.

What had we learned? That the 3 Troop Land Rover was a good reliable piece of kit that could go anywhere in the Sinai; that if you found any water you could safely drink it; and that the Type 62 HF Radio was not much use. And finally, as they say, if you are going to clean a 9mm Browning pistol it is best not to pull the trigger with a round in the chamber.

The next few weeks turned out to be busy and eventful. I had to write the exercise recce report and then debrief the Brigade Intelligence Officer. Then on 18 May John Grosvenor was court martialled for shooting himself (a self inflicted injury not conducive to good order and military discipline and contrary to Section 40 of the Army Act)

and given a severe reprimand. In the outside world Roger Bannister ran the first four-minute mile on 6th May, while the following day Dien Bien Phu fell to the Vietnamese and the French were finally defeated in Indochina. On 7th July, 9 Squadron held its farewell parade in Moascar, with the salute being taken by the Chief Engineer MELF and on 12th July embarked on HMT Dunera at Port Said to return to the UK. Twelve days later the Squadron disembarked at Southampton and after the short train journey to Aidershot marched into Waterloo Barracks East to start a new phase in their proud history.

Two years later the Squadron was back in Egypt for the Suez war, but that is another story.

Thoughtful Tom

It is important for men to remember that as women get older, it becomes harder for them to maintain the same quality of housekeeping as when they were younger.

When you notice this, try not to yell at them. Some are over sensitive, and there's nothing worse than an over sensitive woman. My name is Tom; let me relate how I handled the situation with my wife, Rita.

When I retired a few years ago, it became necessary for Rita to get a full time job along with her part-time job both for extra income and for the health benefits that we needed. Shortly after she started working, I noticed she was beginning to show her age. I usually get home from the golf club about the same time she gets home from work. Although she knows how hungry I am, she almost always says she has to rest for half an hour or so before she starts dinner. I don't yell at her, instead I tell her to take her time and just wake me up when she gets the dinner on the table. I generally have lunch in the Men's Grill at the club so Eating out is not reasonable. I'm ready for some home - cooked grub when I hit the door. She used to do the dishes as soon as we finished eating. But now it's not unusual for them to sit on the table for several hours after dinner. I do what I can by diplomatically reminding her several times each evening that they won't clean themselves. I know she really appreciates this, as it does seem to motive her to get them done before she goes to bed.

Another symptom of ageing is complaining, I think, for example she will say that it is difficult for her to find time to pay the monthly bills during her lunch hour. But, boys, we take 'em for better or worse, so I just smile and offer encouragement. I tell her to stretch it out over two or even three days. That way she won't have to rush so much. I also remind her that missing lunch completely now and then wouldn't hurt her any (if you know what I mean) I like to think tact is one of my strong points. When doing simple jobs, she seems to think she needs more rest periods. She had to take a break when she was only half finished mowing the lawn. I try not to make a scene. I'm a fair man.

I tell her to fix herself a nice big cold glass of freshly squeezes lemonade and just sit for a while. And as long as she is making one for herself, she may as well make one for me too. I know I probably look like a saint in the way I support Rita. I'm not saying that showing this much consideration's easy. Many men will find it difficult. Some will find it impossible! Nobody knows better than I do how frustrating women get as they get older. However guys, even if you just use a little more tact and less criticism of your ageing wife because of this article, I will consider that writing it was well worthwhile. After all, we are put on this earth to help each other.

Signed: Tom

Editors Note:

Tom died suddenly on 27th July of a Perforated Rectum.

The police report says he was found with a Galloway extra long 50 inch Big Bertha Driver Golf Club jammed up his rear end with barely 5 inches of the grip showing and a sledge hammer lying nearby. His wife Rita was arrested and charged with murder. The all-woman jury took only 15 minutes to find her Not Guilty, accepting her Defence that Tom somehow, without looking, accidentally sat down on his Golf Club.

Good Morning

Michael retired in his early 50's and started a second career, however, even though he loved his new Job, he just couldn't seem to get to work on time. Every day, he was 5,10, or 15 minutes late.

But he was a good worker and really sharp, so his boss was in a quandary about how to deal with it. Finally, one day, his boss called him into the office for a chat. " Michael, I must tell you, I truly like your work ethic, you do a splendid job, but being late for work nearly every day is quite annoying to me; as well as your fellow workers." Michael replied, " Yes I know. I'm sorry, but I am working on it." " That's what I like to hear," his boss said. "However, the fact that you consistently come to work late does puzzle me, because I understand that you retired from the British Army, and they have some pretty rigid rules about tardiness. Isn't that correct?" " Yes, I did retire from the Army, and I'm mighty proud of it!" said Michael. " Well, what did they say when you came in late?" asked his employer. "They said, "Good morning, General".

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Poles Apart- Further Comments

Anon

Regarding the article by Eric Blenkinsop about the Poles at Hameln published in the April 2008 edition.

As I recall the name of both Poles began Sty, One being Sibinski and the other Shumanski. One day one of them was pulled out of the Weser by the German police, the body was somewhat decomposed. The other Pole disappeared but then arrested by the German police and finished up in detention at Bindon Barracks.

During the day he was employed mainly painting the barrack gates supervised by the Regimental Police, and in the evening he was signed over to the Night Guard (One Live Body) until the following day when he again became in the care of the Regimental Police. At that time it was usual for a prisoner to go to the cookhouse with an escort to help carry the guards supper back to the guard room, and it is when this Pole was being used in this capacity he escaped out of the cookhouse window and over the barrack wall. No one knows where he finished up, he wrote regularly to an address in Molineu Road, Liverpool but it is more likely he headed for East Germany.

As for his nationality, he was definitely a Pole; he originally served in a Polish armoured unit, then in a German Artillery unit stationed at Konigsburg, and finally finding his way into the British Army.

The question asked was who was his escort, No Names, No Pack drill, but it was one of the night guards. If he had tried to escape during the day I know one person who would have happily shot him.

Straight From The Horses Mouth

Eric Blenkinsop

This is as it was related to me by letter from one of our members, Bill Cox.

Quote: I was the Junior Guard Commander that evening and we had three prisoners in custody Shumanski and two others, Bill Kirk was the Guard Commander and he had gone for his evening meal.

I sent the prisoners three in number for their evening meal with an escort Spr Ford, (this was customary practice)

About twenty minutes later two prisoners returned to the Guard Room while the escort chased after the escapee.

Then pandemonium broke loose when the Orderly Officer and Orderly Sgt appeared. Spr Ford and myself were confined to the cells until the next morning.

A court of enquiry was convened and the Officer tried very hard to get me to agree that it was my fault but I firmly disagreed as I had simply carried out my duties as was the norm.

It was about a month later that I learned that I was exonerated.

Eric Richards

I was serving in the then 9th Airborne RE when we were based at Bindon Barracks in Hameln, BAOR, when Sappers Sibinski and Shumanski were with the squadron.

It was Cpl Joe Malley who was sent with a 3-ton truck to Mindon to bring the body of Spr Sibinski whose body was found in the River Weser near Mindon and return it to Bindon Barracks where it was left on the square to await the SIB's investigation. It was believed that the last time Spr Sibinski was seen was in the company of Spr Shumansky, who was then arrested and put in the squadron Guardroom cell.

Spr Shumansky escaped from the barracks, never to be seen again. Many rumours were banded about at the time, one of those rumours, possibly given by the SIB, was that these two Poles were involved in the local Black Market in Hameln, being they both spoke German, and that one evening they rowed and Spr Sibinski either fell or was pushed into the River Weser.

Later I heard that the SIB during their investigations found out that Spr Shumansky had served in the Waffen SS in Italy and had either deserted, or was captured by Polish troops, telling them he was Polish and was conscripted into the SS. So when the Polish forces were disbanded in the UK, for reasons unknown he transferred into the British Army with no questions asked. After 'P' Coy and the Para Course, he joined the Squadron in Hameln, and following his escape from Bindon Barracks, and being able to speak perfect German, he made his way over to the Russian Zone, and so hid among the local German population there. But he had definitely has served in the Waffen SS in Italy.

Now all the records of those who served in the Polish Army are kept in the Polish Institute and General Sikorski Museum at 20, Princes Gate, London SW7 1QA, who may

still have his records there.

Spr Sibinski was definitely Polish, now did he find out that Spr Shumansky was actually German rather than Polish and so was a danger to him now knowing he has served in the 'Waffen SS'?

So the mystery still stays with us!

George Barrett

Following the story of Poles Apart by my friend Eric Blenkinsop, I would like to relay what I can remember of those far off days.

I first met the two Poles back in 1947 at No.1 TRRE Malvern, they were I believe two intakes after me. The first Pole George Shumanski was 'Jack the Lad' never stopped talking, the second Pole, Spr Sibinski was very quiet, I think they both must have seen service in other parts during the war (according to Shumanski).

Eric and I and a few other 3 Sqn lads met up after our Para Training at Barton Stacey, Eric was made up to Sergeant to take our group out to Neumunster to meet the SSM (the Beast), which is another story! At that stage we met up with the two Poles again in Hameln - I used to sell my cigarette rations for German Marks because I had my eye on a German watch.

At some stage Sibinski landed up in the guardroom for some misdemeanour. On the day of his release he wanted some local currency to go out on the town, and always having an eye for a bargain he sold me a pair of hand made leather shoes - which were hard to come by in those days. That was the last I saw of Spr Sibinski, until he was pulled out of the river Weser and placed in a box coffin on the Regimental square. George Shumanski was arrested and held in custody in the guardroom - it was then that the rumours started. Sibinski had found out that Shumanski was in fact German and not Polish. When the SIB came to interview me regarding the German Deutsch Marks found on Sibinski's body, they didn't want to know how I had acquired them through the 'Black Market', but just how many I had given him for the pair of shoes. So the mystery began.

While Shumanski was in custody he began to write his life story, and while I was on guard duty one night he related to me his story and escapades about his life. He could speak six languages and had been in the Foreign Legion! Could Sibinski have known something different?

At that time Bill Kirk was the guard commander and Bill Cox the junior commander. The routine each night was to march Shumanski to the cookhouse for his supper, it was on one of these occasions that he took the chance to do a 'runner' and over the wall dressed in denims and shirt sleeve order.

Did Shumanski have outside help that evening? Did he ever make it back to East Germany? What happened to George Shumanski?

At this time it still remains a mystery. Unless of course one of our readers knows the answer!

The 'Fergie' Semple Golf Tournament 2008

The above-mentioned event will take place on Friday 17th October (Reunion Weekend) and is to be held at the Whitefield's Golf Club, which is approx. 15 minutes drive from the Royal Court Hotel (Coventry).

Whitefield's, which was built in 1992, is set on the outskirts of Rugby, Coventry and overlooks Draycote Water. The Back nine is set around the reservoir to give breathtaking views whilst you enjoy a relaxing round of golf. The championship course consists of 13 challenging par4's, 2 lengthy par 5's and 3 of the toughest par 3's in the area, with the 16th being the courses signature hole. 174 yards off the yellow tee, downhill to an island green which can easily make or break your scorecard.

They are also equipped with an 18-hole putting green, a 16 bay floodlit driving range, a practice chipping area and a fully equipped Pro shop for all your golfing needs. Buggies are available to rent and there is ample car parking space.

Would all budding 'Tiger' Woods who would like to play in this competition kindly notify myself (Dave Rutter) on 01252 326140 or e-mail d_rutter@sky.com by no later than Monday 1st September. Confirmation of venue, timings and cost will be notified to all entrants 4 weeks prior to the competition.

The competition will be a Stableford format playing off full handicap over 18 holes. In addition to the presentation of the 'Fergie' Semple Trophy to the highest score, there will also be prizes awarded for the longest drive, nearest the pin, lowest score and finally a prize for the player who losses the most golf balls!

This will be a fun day to start off the Reunion/AGM weekend - please dust off the clubs and join us for an enjoyable day on the golf course.

Don't delay - book with Dave today!

Combat Stress

Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society

A large proportion of the proceeds from the 2007 Grand Raffle held during the Reunion/AGM 2007 in Harrogate was donated to the charity fund Combat Stress and the following acknowledgement has been received:

I am writing to thank you for your extremely kind donation of £550.00 received as a result of your Annual Dinner held in Harrogate. This is a very generous gift from which our Veterans shall benefit enormously. Thank you so much. I would be most grateful if you would pass on my gratitude to your President, Mr Bill Rudd MBE for choosing Combat Stress to receive this wonderful sum.

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

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

Thank you so much for helping to make our work possible.

Your continued support really will make a difference to the help we can offer a particularly needful - but often overlooked - group of Veterans as they rebuild their lives.

Once again, thank you so much for your support.

Best wishes and kind regards, Kelita Groom

The Airborne Soldier

Eric Richards - RE Para 1943/1953.

They walked through Airborne History in to immortality so joined their immortal comrades of Airborne Battles long past.

Of yester years we were many, we are the few, we are the elite, we are despised by few. But we are a Family as families are All for one, one for all.

Our symbol is but one That Red Beret, that Red Beret.

Of Hastings, Agincourt and Crecy of Amarda, Blenheim and Waterloo of the Crimea, Boer war to of World War One and in to World War Two They found us few; from few to many we did grow.

In Africa, in Sicily Italy and Greece and Normandy in to Arnhem, The Ardennes and the Rhine to Norway we did go, not forgetting Southern France Our symbol is but one, That Red Beret, That Red Beret.

Of later years can add Palestine, Malaya and Borneo to and on we go to Cyprus and on to Suez and on to Aden to, then on to Northern Ireland, and the Falklands, hero's made, and on into immortality the Airborne Soldier goes, with his symbol, goes that Red Beret.

When will it end, now called Air Assault, so on to Iraq and now to Afghanistan and so their Honours go on and on are they born for the Airborne or are they trained and made.

Yes they are "AIRBORNE ALL THE WAY" into the History of the British Army in those yet years to come. And to the many whom of them that were called to 'VALHALLA' and they were AIRBORNE ALL THE WAY into eternity, to forever follow 'PEGASUS' across the skies by Day and by Night. "That Red Beret, That Red Beret and their Wings of Glory".

CHWARAE TEG Fair Play

Harry Barnsley

The tangled web of conflicting international ambitions, which had been building up in Western Europe for many decades, exploded with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife on 28th June 1914.

Germany had been building up a large navy and army for some time because they resented the powerful British Navy and our extensive British Empire. That fateful day of 28th June was the excuse they wanted to start the war. If they entered neutral Belgium to attack France they knew that we would keep our Treaty with Belgium and so would be drawn into the war.

While Britain had a powerful navy her army had been somewhat neglected. Methods of warfare, training and equipment had not altered much since the Boer War. The leadership by the British top brass was pathetic. The total qualifications in that elite group were, first a healthy bank balance, a lordship or dukedom, and no experience in the front line.

As the conflict developed into trench warfare the losses mounted, the death of 10,000 men to gain a few metres of ground was deemed to be a great success but those Generals who were responsible were never closer to the fighting than about 30 miles. As men were subjected to the constant noise and the trauma of witnessing the daily toll of death, they became shell-shocked and when they just couldn't take anymore they were shot for cowardice.

Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig signed death warrants and we are told he never refused to sign one, some of which he never even read. These were our leaders who sent the 38th Welsh Division to capture Mametz Wood, which resulted in carnage, and those who never had mud on their boots branded the 38th as cowards.



The Welsh are a proud nation, so are the Scots and the Irish because they are Celts who can all give good accounts of themselves when it is necessary. The Welsh have their own flag, the cross of St. David which is yellow on a black background but is not included on the Union flag because Wales has never signed an Act of Union with the United Kingdom, neither was Wales conquered, it was annexed. Wales is a nation of culture but COWARDICE, "NEVER", and the following chapters will prove it.

The Normans infiltrated Wales, they built strong castles but they were constantly under attack - the castle at

Neath was burned down three times. This happened all over Wales until finally both sides decided to tolerate each other in an uneasy peace, but Wales was never subdued.

The lovely Dragon overlooking Mametz Wood was made of steel by a blacksmith who was the son of a very famous Welsh boxer by the name of Jack Peterson.

MAMETZ WOOD

Possibly more has been written about Mametz Wood, than any other wood, feature or village in the Somme area.

The reason being that it was such a very difficult position to capture, also battalions were continuously fed into the position under terrible conditions for the attacker. The wood was the next objective after Mametz Village, and is due north of that village, east of Contalmaison and south west of the Bazentin villages.

Its capture was essential in order to avoid a salient in the allied lines and to enable the allied artillery to be brought up for use in an attempt to take the German Second Line.

Allied shelling had brought down many of the trees, which were going to add to the hazards of the attackers in the forthcoming battle, as they had fallen in full growth. The Germans had built machine gun posts in some of the trees; in addition they had trench mortars, heavy guns, as well as field gun batteries. Barbed wire was strung from tree to tree and machine gun pits were also dotted here and there to command any clearings.

Haig wanted the capture of Mametz Wood in order to secure the British left flank and it was thought that Haig had become impatient of any delay. The attack started on the 4th/5th July. The 38th Welsh Division was to become most associated with the wood, the fighting and the final capture. Its 113th Brigade marched up from Mametz village into what was called Happy or Death Valley and the brigade occupied positions to the south west of the wood on the night of 4th July. 'A' Company of the First Royal Welch Fusiliers were first in but were caught by snipers and took shelter in a quarry. Later on this Company moved off again for an attack on the Quadrangle Position close to the wood. On 6th July the 116th Brigade was to the right and the 113th to the left, in front of the wood. The 115th Brigade was to replace the 116th Brigade. On 6th July the 11th South Wales Borderers halted with the 10th South Wales Borderers behind Mametz village. They were both to attack the wood as part of the 115th Brigade attack.

On 7th July the 38th Division attacked the wood again at 8.30a.m. but the 16th Welch and the 11th SWB were held up by machine gun fire and the CO of the Borderers was killed.

The Welshmen could get no closer than 250yds from the wood. They were particularly affected by machine gun fire, which came, not just from the wood, but from either side and from the valley higher up to the north east. The operation was abandoned with the loss of over 400 men.

On 8th July the Germans brought down a heavy barrage on the attackers and the fighting for the wood over the next few days was to be ceaseless. On 10th July a British bombardment began at 3.30 p.m. The 38th Division then took a direct assault against the southern edge of the wood. They were assembled in trenches above a dip in the ground. The plan was to advance and then descend

into the hollow before crossing the bare slope, which was covered by machine guns. On their right as they advanced they would be exposed to enfilade fire and they were expected to go forward in three stages to penetrate the wood despite there being no smoke screen to give the advance any protection. The operation was in isolation without any support from either flank. The two remaining brigades of the 38th Division were to attack the Mametz Wood once more and it was on 10th July that the "flower of young Wales stood up to machine guns with a success that astonished all those who knew the ground".

The full 38th Division attacked on 10th July with the 113th and 114th Brigades, the 115th Brigade was in reserve.

The attack was led by the 13th RWF to the right, the 14th RWF in the centre and the 16th RWF on the left. Despite suffering heavy casualties the 14th speedily cleared the portion in the centre of the line. Eventually all three battalions were able to form a line. There was a gap between these battalions, which was filled by the 10th Welch Regiment. The 19th Welch Battalion was ordered up in support. The wood was now partly in allied hands and on 11th July a further advance took the 38th Division to the northern end of the wood. Among the casualties was Lt. Col. Flower of the 13th RWF who was killed by a shell.

Apart from all the horrors of wood fighting and the continuous German shelling there was also an acute shortage of water.

It was not until the early morning of 12th July however that the wood was completely in British hands. When it was finally cleared hundreds of dead bodies were found, the place was littered with the dead and blocked by fallen trees. The attack had been very costly partly because co-operation between the artillery and infantry was still in its infancy and it was hard for the infantry always to keep up with their own barrage.

Other regiments now coming through the wood found that the numbers of dead were even thicker often German and Briton were locked in a death grapple. There was apparently a shell hole every three yards and it was described as a place where something almost unheard of had occurred - fierce hand to hand fighting in the open

with bombs and bayonets. What seemed extraordinary was that all the dead bodies there lay just as they had fallen in their original places, as though they were being kept as an exhibit for a War Museum.

The 38th Division, with whose name the wood will be always most associated, ironically captured the wood again after the German breakthrough in the spring of

1918. The 14th and 16th RWF erected memorials in the wood to commemorate their involvement and in July 1987 a wonderful memorial to the Division was unveiled in front of the wood.

The 38th (Welsh) Division- 10 July 1916 and the 38th try again.

The new commander: Maj Gen Watts prepared a plan utilising two brigades and a refined method of artillery bombardment.



The idea of a lifting barrage had been employed for some time. At predetermined intervals the artillery would lift their sights and thus bombard the area further back. The infantry supposedly following on in the wake.

Bert Croucher (1st AB Div) & Harry Barnsley in front of the memorial. (Bert's father lost both legs serving as CSM with the RWF in the Mametz Wood and Bert joked that he was visiting the location to look for his dad's boots!)

This had not always worked so well, and on the 1 July 1916 many of the advancing troops had found themselves cut down as soon as the shelling moved off the German front lines and the machine gunners came out of their deep shelters.

This time Watts was going to use a plan that the French had been employing. The front line positions would be shelled, the bombardment would lift for a few minutes,

and then *drop* back onto the front line again in the hope of catching the emerging machine gunners. Once this had been done they would use a creeping barrage to accompany the attack. Surely this would gain them access to the wood. After all the Germans were outnumbered three to one. Unfortunately they were also the ones dug in, holding the position and with a considerable number of machine guns.

At 03:30 hours on 10 July 1916 the artillery opened up and twenty minutes later the smoke screen was put down. At 04:00 hours the Welshmen began their attack.

Leading the attack on the left the 16th RWF suffered heavy casualties including their commanding officer: Lt Col Garden who was initially wounded. Having continued to lead his men forward he was later killed at the edge of the wood.

He is buried today in Carnoy Cemetery - the Skull & Crossbones of his own unit, the 17th Lancers displayed on his headstone.

To their right the 13th Welsh were under heavy machine gun from the Hammerhead and were beaten back on their first two attempts. A third attack was made and they gained a hold on the edge of the Wood.

Behind the 16th RWF the 14th RWF were suffering as badly and the attacks began to lose momentum. Pushing on with the reserves all of 113 and 114 Brigades were soon involved in the fighting - eight y lunchtime parts of the wood were in Welsh hands and by 18:30 hours the 17th RWF had reached to within 25 metres of the northern edge of the Wood. The 10th SWB had taken the Hammerhead and the Germans forced to withdraw. One of the great problems for the front line infantryman (and probably on both sides) was the *drop short*. Artillery firing at

the limits of its range and sometimes with inferior shells (A British problem at this stage of the war) could not always manage to hit the target and the rounds would fall onto their own men.

At 14:45 hours on 11 July and despite the fact that they hadn't asked for one, an artillery barrage began in anticipation of a further attempt to finally gain control of the entire wood.

Unfortunately the Welshmen ended up taking casualties from many of the rounds before launching their attack on the remaining German positions at 15:30 hours.

Despite some successes the Germans hung on and by nightfall the Welshmen were back where they had started, but something had been set in motion. The Germans had come to realise that trying to hang on to the last corners of the wood was a bit pointless and costing them too many men.

By the following morning the wood had been evacuated and left to the 38th Division. Mametz Wood had been won.

As already mentioned the performance by the Division had come in for criticism at the highest level. It is hard to say this far removed from it all, but the Division suffered 4,000 casualties in these few days which strikes me as adequate testament to the courage and tenacity of the men involved.

Today the red dragon of the 38th Welsh Division looks out across the fields towards the southern end of the wood.

SIEGFRIED SASSOON WINS HIS MILITARY CROSS IN THE BOIS FRANCAIS TRENCHES

Sassoon had joined the 1st Battalion Royal Welch Fusiliers at Festubert on 24th November 1915. Robert Graves had taken part in the Battle of Loos (25th September 1915 to 8th October 1915) whilst serving with the 2nd battalion Royal Welch Fusiliers. Tending to be a little outspoken, he was not very popular in the Mess or with his superiors. However by November he had been transferred to the Regiment's 1st battalion joining them at Festubert. Here the two men with similar literary interests began a friendship that (apart from some ups and downs) continued throughout their lives.

The battalion was moved to the Somme front taking post in the Bois Francais trenches opposite Fricourt. Both men were particularly fond of 2nd Lt. David Thomas and were both devastated when, in a series of officer casualties on the 18th March 1916, and within a space of 24 hours, three subalterns were killed including David Thomas. (The others were Pritchard and Richardson all three being buried at Point 110 (New) Cemetery).

Sassoon was particularly upset at David Thomas' death.

His reaction was to take on dangerous duties, especially in patrol work, sometimes going on missions into No Man's Land with an experienced and highly regarded N.C.O. - Corporal O'Brien. The battalion called Sassoon "Mad Jack".

Returning from a course at the 4th Army School at Flixecourt, Sassoon was disappointed to learn that he had not been selected for command of the forthcoming raid on Kiel Trench. Instead, his friend Lt. Norman Stansfield was to take charge of the raiders. Thus, on the 25th May 1916 at 10.30 p.m. Stansfield's party of 27 men (including 5 N.C.O's), set off to raid the German lines at Kiel Trench.

As was usual, they were equipped with hatchets in their belts, bombs and knobkerries. All had blackened faces.

Corporal O'Brien led the way with a few others into the darkness of No Man's Land laying a trail of lime so that the raiders would be able to find their way to the German front line. Sassoon was in command of an evacuating party which lay out some 20 yards beyond the British trenches and whose job was to cover the return of the raiders.

The raid was a failure. Whilst trying to negotiate the German barbed wire the alarm was raised and the British party became involved in a bombing fight in which several of the raiders became casualties, in particular, Sassoon's Corporal O'Brien.

Sassoon then went out into No Man's Land and met Lt. Stansfield wounded but being assisted back to the British lines by two of the raiding party. Sassoon then discovered that O'Brien was lying badly wounded at the bottom of a 25 feet deep crater. Returning to the British trenches he came back with some helpers and managed to get a rope round the wounded Corporal who, with the aid of a stretcher-bearer and others, was brought to safety.

Alas, Corporal O'Brien died of his wounds and was later buried behind the lines at Citadel Cemetery Plot 3, Row F. Grave 17. For this exploit Sassoon was awarded the Military Cross. When the award was promulgated on 29th June, the battalion Medical Officer-Kelsey Fry took the M.C. ribbon from his own tunic and no doubt using his medical expertise, neatly sewed the ribbon on to Sassoon's tunic.

After the capture of Fricourt one of the Army's next objectives was to take Mametz Wood. This task was to be given to the 38th (Welsh) Division, sometimes lightly referred to as "Lloyd George's Welsh Army". The Division was recruited in rural North Wales and from the mining valleys and towns of South Wales. One battalion, the 15th Royal Welch Fusiliers was recruited from Welshmen living in London and was known as the London Welch. The poet David Jones was one of the members of this battalion. In the event, despite the Bravery of the men involved, the capture of Mametz Wood was dearly bought. It took the Division from the 7th to the 12th July 1916 to do so and cost them 4000 casualties, including 600 killed.

Thereafter and quite unjustifiably, the Division was not held in high regard. Command thought that the time taken to capture the wood was quite excessive. The next wood to be attacked was High Wood. The attack there commenced on 14th July but it was not until the 15th September 1916 and after very heavy casualties that this wood was finally taken. Thus, by comparison, the success of the 38th (Welsh) Division was very creditable. The Division behaved splendidly in the Ypres salient in 1917 and "regained" its reputation. Mametz Wood fell to the Germans again in 1918 but by an accident of fate the Division was back in the Somme in August of that year and retook the wood, this time with very little trouble.

But that was in the future. Preparations for the 38th (Welsh) Division's attack included the need to take positions adjacent to Mametz Wood and this task fell, in part, to Sassoon's 1st Royal Welch Fusiliers. Thus on 4th July, and starting from a wood called Bottom Wood on the Contalmaison road, the battalion managed to capture part of the German's Quadrangle Trench. Later the trench position was extended towards Wood Trench, which led into Mametz Wood itself. Sassoon's company was occupied in carrying material for the Royal Engineers, but afterwards Sassoon went up to Quadrangle Trench on his own. There he met 2nd Lt. Newton who was holding a bombing post near the entrance to Wood Trench. As enemy fire from Mametz Wood was causing casualties amongst the fusiliers holding Quadrangle Trench, Sassoon decided to take a bag of hand grenades and bomb his way along Wood Trench. In doing so he surprised some 50/60 German soldiers who immediately ran for cover in the relative security of Mametz Wood. As Sassoon remarks in his Diary, Quadrangle Trench was then the most advanced position held by his Corps.

By 9.30 p.m. the battalion was back in Bottom Wood being relieved in the trenches there by a sister battalion - the 14th Royal Welch Fusiliers-recruited in Llandudno and its surrounding area in North Wales. For this exploit Sassoon would normally have been recommended for a further decoration, perhaps a Bar to his Military Cross. However, the failure to effect the prompt capture of Mametz Wood did not dispose the Authorities to look favourably on recommendations for awards and Sassoon's award was disallowed.

In *Memoirs of An Infantry Officer* Sassoon calls this officer "Fernby". He was in fact 2nd Lt. Vivian Frederic Newton age 19. He was educated at Cheltenham College and Sandhurst. He died of wounds received in the battalion's attack on Ginchy on 3rd September 1916. He is buried in St. Sever CWGC cemetery in Rouen.

In *"Memoirs of An Infantry Officer"* Sassoon condescendingly describes the soldiers of the 14th Royal Welch involved in the relief as being "like a lot of children." It is interesting to read the comment of one of the officers in the 14th Royal Welch who actually took part in that relief. He wrote of the 1st battalion "that he had never seen a quicker departure". As soon as the 14th arrived in Bottom Wood the 1st battalion was "up and went off". He goes on to say that in the light of experience he could see why they did so.

On 5 July the 7th Division were relieved by the 38th (Welsh) Division.

Because of the shape of Mametz Wood the right hand section, which the 38th now, found themselves opposite was known as *The Hammerhead*.

Looking down on it today from the Welsh Dragon Memorial you can see just how large this wood is - the largest on the Somme Battlefield.

The 17th Division were attacking the wood from the south and the 38th from the east. This entailed crossing the valley, which went by two names: *Happy Valley* and *Death Valley*. The latter strikes me as being the more apt as the attack would have to be made across enfilade fire from the German machine gun positions at Flatiron Copse to the Division's right.

The capture of Mametz Wood was to be the responsibility of the 38th Division with support from the 17th Division coming from the west. In the wood was the Lehr Regiment of the Prussian Guard - well trained and determined.

The plan for the attack on 7 July was for the 17th Division to attack Acid Drop Copse and the left hand side of the wood. The 38th Division would attack the *Hammerhead*.

Brig Gen Evans of the 115th Brigade felt that it was only possible to attack on a front of a single battalion and nominated the 16th Welsh. Concerns were raised though and in the end the 16th went into battle with the 11th SWB (South Wales Borderers) on their left.

The deployment was going to pack an awful lot of men into a front only 450 metres wide.

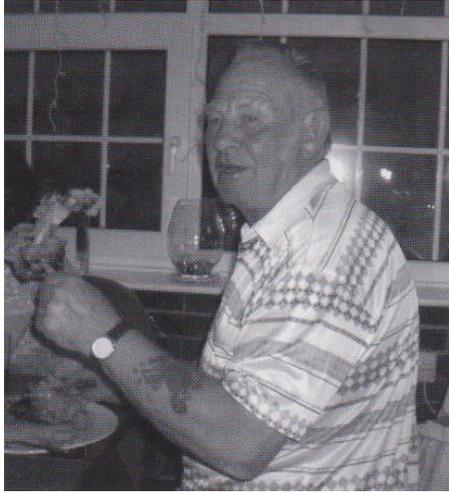
A duck shoot for the German machine gunners in front and to the right. To alleviate the problem a smoke screen was to be put down prior to the attack.

The timing of the attack was critical and the 38th wanted it to be at first light to give their men cover from Flatiron Copse. The 17th needed more time to prepare and the attack was planned for 08:30 hours on 7 July 1916.

On time the 11th SWB and 16th Welsh climbed out of their trenches and immediately came under fire from the German machine guns in Flatiron Copse. 200 metres short of Mametz Wood their casualties were so bad they were forced back.

Reinforcements arrived in the form of the 10th SWB but further attacks on the wood proved to be costly failures and the assault was called off to allow the Division to reform and review its plans.

The three battalions had suffered over 400 casualties in an unsuccessful day of fighting. The machine gun enfilade fire had been made worse following the failure of the planned smoke screen. 17th Division had fared no better but it was upon the 38th that Douglas Haig poured his scorn - a stain that was to be a year in the removing. The commander of the Division: Major General Phillips was sacked and replaced with Major General Watts.



Big 'H' Harry Lockwood gets stuck into a lamb shank May 2008

2008 AGM Agenda – Coventry

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| 1 Chairman's Opening Address | Mick Humphries |
| 2 Silent Tributes | Mick Humphries |
| 3 Apologies | Mick Humphries |
| 4 Minutes of the Previous AGM | Mick Leather |
| a. Matters Arising | |
| b. Acceptance of the Minutes | |
| 5 Treasurer's Report | Dick Brown |
| 6 Membership Secretary's Report | Billy Morris |
| 7 Airborne Engineers Journal | Dave Rutter |
| 8 Election of Officers | |
| With the exception of electing a new Chairman, there have been no retirements from either committee. All members are prepared to stand for re-election. There have been no nominations received, so a vote will be taken all officers of the Association en block | |
| 9 Appointment of Trustees | |
| 10 Constitution-Proposed Amendment | Dennis Egan |
| 11 AOB | |
| 12 Venue/Date of 2009 AGM | Mick Humphries |

OGM Agenda

- | | |
|---|-----------------|
| 1 Chairman's Opening Address | Mick Humphries |
| 2 Minutes of the Previous OGM | Mick Leather |
| a. Matters Arising | |
| b. Acceptance of the Minutes | |
| 3 Structured reporting of Branches | Mick Leather |
| 4 Archivist Report | Fred Gray |
| 5 AEA Sports Club Report | Billy Morris |
| 6 Shop Managers Report | Ray Coleman |
| 7 IT Members Report | Dave Pace |
| 8 John Rock Bust | Eric Blenkinsop |
| 9 Gala Dinner 2008 | Mick Humphries |
| 10 AGM/Reunion 2009 | Bunny Brown |
| 11 AGM/Reunion 2010 | Mick Humphries |
| 12 Life Vice Presidency Nomination | Joe Stoddart |
| 13 Date/Venue of next OGM | Mick Humphries |

Proposed amendment to the AEA Constitution

Col Dennis Egan

In today's society when there is seemingly and regrettably instant recourse to litigation, it is considered prudent to include in the AEA's Constitution the power of the Executive Committee in respect of a Member of whatever category i.e., Normal, Honorary Life or Life Vice President, who is in breach of the Constitution.

To this end the following amendments to the Constitution are proposed:- Amend paragraph 4.

Delete " The Committee.....conduct." Insert" See new paragraphs 20 and 21Add new paragraphs 20 and 21.

20. Breach of the Constitution

- a. The Executive Committee shall have the power in respect of a Member of whatever category i.e., Normal, Honorary Life or Life Vice-President, who is in breach of the Constitution.
- b. The Executive Committee shall have the power to recommend to the AGM changes in categories of membership.

- c. The Executive Committee shall have the power to suspend from membership of the Association any normal Member who is in breach of the Constitution or found guilty of any misconduct bringing the Association into disrepute.
The Executive Committee may alternatively and additionally impose such other penalty, as it deems appropriate in the circumstances.
- d. For second or subsequent offences the Executive Committee may withhold indefinitely membership of the Association for the offending person.
- e. The Executive Committee shall have the power to suspend from the appointment, any Honorary Life Member or Life Vice-President.

21. Appeals

- a. Any offending Member, as defined in paragraphs 20c and 20e above shall have the right of appeal to a SGM or the AGM, whichever is the sooner, against a decision made by the Executive Committee under paragraph 20 above.
- b. Any appeal must be lodged within 14 days of the decision being appealed against having been promulgated, in writing with the Secretary of the Association or, if it is that incumbent who is appealing, then the appeal must be lodged with the President of the Association. The Secretary or the President, as appropriate, shall then appoint an Appeal Committee, which AEA Constitution shall consist of not less than three Members who have not previously been involved in adjudication of the matter.
- c. There must be lodged at the same time as the appeal, the sum of £50, which shall be returned in the event of the appeal being successful.
- d. All appeals must be heard with all possible expedition.
- e. The appellant may elect for the appeal to be heard by written or oral submission but in either case, the language used shall be English.
- f. The findings and recommendations of the Appeal Committee shall be put to the Executive Committee, which shall then confirm, alter or reject the recommendations.
- g. There shall be no appeal against this decision of the Executive Committee.

Music On Fire

**A 007 James Bond Spectacular At the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst
on Thurs 18th Fri 19th and Sat 20th September 2008**

Music on Fire, the UK's most stunning outdoor spectacular returns with a new production of live popular and classical music, interspersed with a thrilling continuous firework display and magical Son et Lumiere.

Celebrating **James Bond** and the centenary of his creator, former Sandhurst Officer Cadet, **Ian Fleming**, world class artists perform with a **100-piece orchestra** and a **100-voice choir** in true 007 style!

Special guest performers include Theatrelands first Supergroup Teatro and acclaimed classical singer Hayley Westena, whilst well known voices narrating the show include: **Rowan Atkinson, Peter Bowles, Hannah Gordon, Joanna Lumley, Sir Trevor McDonald, Prunella Scales, Timothy West and Edward Woodward**.

There will also be a breathtaking night-time parachute drop from **The Red Devils** and **The Black Knights**.

This unmissable event is held in the impressive setting of The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and guests are invited to picnic on the lawn in front of the Old College as they enjoy the show. Gates open at 4pm.

The event is devised and produced by Major Sir Michael Parker, the man behind the Queen's Golden Jubilee celebrations outside Buckingham Palace.

All proceeds will go to the Army Benevolent Fund which is the soldiers' charity supporting soldiers, former soldiers and their families in times of need. Money raised will go to the ABF's new fund for Veterans of current operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Tickets

£29 standard

£39 (premium - central area directly in front of stage)

Children: £21 (standard), £31 (premium) valid for under 16s when accompanied by a full paying adult.

Army (Regular, Reserve, TA or Cadets):

£20 (standard) £30 (premium)

Groups of 10plus: 10% discount

Tickets are available from Ticketmaster 0844 847 1657 or book online www.musiconfire.com

For group bookings call (0844 2121)

For further information, please contact the Army Benevolent Fund on 020 7901 8914

Show Commences 7.30pm. Music on Fire is an open-air event so please dress for the prevailing weather.

No seating is provided so please bring chairs, cushions, rugs etc. ticketholders are welcome to bring picnics and drinks.

The event will finish at approx. 10.30pm.

Journal Subscription – Increase

Editor

As approved at the AGM held in Harrogate on Saturday 3rd November, the increase to the annual Journal subscription will come into affect commencing 1 st October

2008. As many of you will have discovered, the Post Office have dramatically increased their prices (three times in less than 2 years) and their new postal rates now consumes one third of the of the current annual subscription. The current annual fee is to be raised from £6 to £8 for UK subscribers and £10 for all overseas/European-based members. An "Amendment to a Standing Order" slip is enclosed in this current issue for subscribers with "Standing Order" agreements, simply complete this item and hand it into your OWN BANK.

Subscription reminders are enclosed for those members whose subscriptions are due with affect 1 st October 2008.

PLEASE NOTE: IF YOU DO NOT RECEIVE A

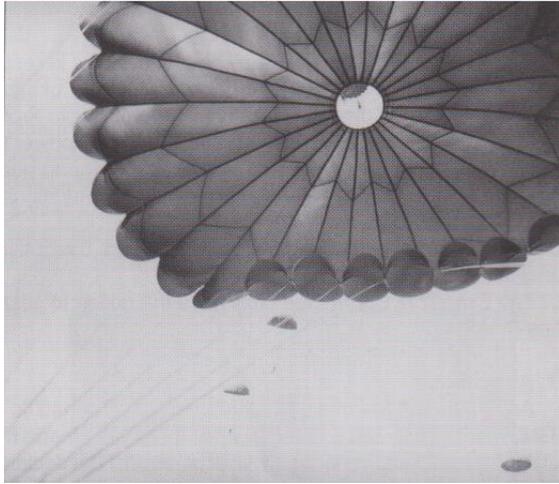
SUBSCRIPTION REMINDER THEN YOUR ACCOUNT IS

STILL IN CREDIT.

You can make life easier, not only for me but also yourself, if you opt to pay your annual subscription by Standing Order. PLEASE, give this method serious consideration - it actually saves you money - no need to pay ridiculous postage charges sending further cheques for your subscription.

Snappy Action

Robert Burgess MC



I was very interested in the picture by Brian Stuttard on page 6 of the December 2007 issue of the Journal. I too was a photographer in the 2nd Para Sqn RE and took the attached picture 4 seconds after leaving the plane. I actually jumped holding my camera, a 16 on 120 film Super Ikonta, stopped down to f 16 and already cocked.

The parachute developed extremely quickly due to stepping out of the C47 straight into a 120 mph slipstream.

You can see the chute is horizontal at the moment I took the picture. The incident was at Anzio during the allied invasion in 1943. The film I was using was a German Aero film we captured in North Africa and cut down to size. But that is another story!

Kill a Man for his Giro

Mick Leather



You will have to forgive me for the heading but back in 2007 when you receive the telephone call I did from two Scousers; perhaps you would understand. The call went something like this: Scouse Hogan: "Hi mate, how old are you next year?" Me: "50. Why" (I am now thinking meet up, drink beer) Scouse Hogan: "You're going to kill a Man for his Giro"

I know we yearn for our youthful days when wine women and hat bashing were considered a calling, and the bonds that we formed were so strong that the promises to always be there were a given, But I was now concerned that for my 50th birthday I was going to be travelling up to Cheshire to help sort out some unemployed scally who had inadvertently, (Because he couldn't have done it deliberately) gone and upset me old mucker Tony Hogan.

When the conversation continued, worse was to come. I realised that I wasn't going to be party to the demise of someone born within the sound of hubcaps being removed, but in fact Hogan was making reference to some mountain in Tanzania called Kilimanjaro. Ian Strettle BEM, good friend and brain dead ex fieldie had come up with the idea that for his 50th he was going to climb the mountain. Not only was he going to do it but he was going to drag, kicking and screaming, a team of similarly aged men, who once on the list, could not drop out because, such was the group, that failure to show or complete meant an after life of complete public humiliation at every opportunity.

I must name the 'Chosen' few then any that knew them will no doubt remember the sharp wit and repartee that used to emanate from our numerous gatherings. The majority were ex Support Troop and it has been said that 'Fieldies' used to attach themselves to the group in the hope that it would improve their status and increase their vocabulary beyond 'Ugh' and 'Arrgh'. They were: -

Ian Strettle, Howard Strettle (ex ships cook and excused boots), Graeme Armstrong (Now a Professor in America and a card carrying member of the Tree Huggers Society), Jim Cryans, Gordon Pincombe, Nick Dennett, (affectionately known as 'Bomber' to those who exited AFTER him'), Tony Hogan and me.

I was not worried at this stage as, like many ideas I expected this one to run it's course as an after dinner anecdote and peter out. My only concern was that Ian Strettle had already been going to Snowdonia on a regular basis

training and he was a 'head down, arse up' go get it fieldie and once they focus on something, hell and high water is not going to get in the way. Still what can be so hard about a trek!! Loads of civvies do it and even WOMEN. So how hard can it be!!!!

Ian organised some weekends for all those that could attend. I had already done Snowdon earlier with Tony and no problems. So when I arrived at Camp Hogan in Anglesey I wasn't worried. Nick Dennett made the 4th attendee and in true style started the weekend off with an 'O' group in the nearest hostelry.

Nick's approach to the whole trip was summed up when he stated TH buy my boots at the Airport!' and he needed to because on the climb on Saturday the sole fell off the boots he was wearing. It was fortuitous for him, but a stark indicator to me, that I was struggling on the first ascent that I dropped out and came down. I swapped boots with Nick who in good old buddy fashion, failed to point out that the other sole was coming off and I ended up doing the last mile in my stocking feet.

The weekend confirmed 2 things. One the trip was a serious endeavour and 2 I was in no shape to do anything, let alone climb a mountain 19 and a half thousand feet high! Ian was looking very lean and had tried to get the message across to us that there was truth in the facts he was sending us. Only 6 out of 10 make the summit. This started us looking around and eyeing up who was going to fail. There were a lot looking in my direction including me!

Christmas took on an easy option for presents and we were all inundated with woolly socks, survival kits and walking poles. The proposed trip was the last 2 weeks in February, which wasn't far away. The 'sledging' had started over the Internet about, well, just about everything. Fieldies v Support Troop, music choices and sleeping partners. One thing was for sure; Tony Hogan was not going to be sharing with Gordon as Dylan has never ever got on with the Nolans. The intensive training schedules that we had set were now bringing us to a peak just at the right time. I could now order 2 big whoppers and super size it without breaking sweat and I suspected that Hogan wasn't far behind.

The time came to start the campaign. Ian, Howard, nick Tony and myself were flying out of Manchester so we met up at Tony's place, plan fora light meal, couple of beers and an early night to catch the 0400 hrs start. Well that went for a ball of chalk, a crate of beers and 4 bottles of wine later, we bleary eyed made our way to the airport. We were Amsterdam bound to meet up with Gordon, flying in from Canada, Jim (Heathrow) and Graeme (Iowa). We all met at a coffee bar in Schipol Airport at 0800 hrs which apparently was beer o'clock so we had a couple of pints of Heineken for breakfast.

Breaking the ice was no problem even after not seeing some of the team for a long time. It was over these beers that Ian felt the best way to buddy up for room and tent sharing was to draw straws. The first couple pulled couldn't have gone better. Knowing the idiosyncrasies of the likes of Gordon, it was nothing short of ecstasy for all when he was paired with Tony Hogan. That is of course except for Tony who was going to be Gordon's Plaspatu for the next 2 weeks.

Having been duly allocated our partners for the duration, we departed for Tanzania. The flight with KLM was uneventful and we touched down in the evening. Then the Tour organisation took a turn for the worst because the Tanzanians had an input. We were 2 bags short and no one knew where they were. One of them was Ian Strettle who had every bit of gear he needed for the climb in it. We made for the Transit lodge and made straight for the bar, which was closed for a nano second, but we soon got it open. After a small debrief over a quiet glass of Chablis we all retired to what was some pretty good accommodation, Tanzanian style.

We had 2 days to acclimatise so the next day round the pool we had an 'O' group to decide what we would do to pass the time, apart from search the universe for Ian Strettle's kit. We didn't have a definite plan so we decided to have a beer and talk about it. 2 Days later we left the pool side bar, with no plan and d with our wallet's a lot lighter. Needless to say it was the 'fieldie' element that led us astray. The only suggestion that was offered was by Gordon who after another round of drinks, suggested doing the climb in 36 hrs which would give us more time for, guess what...drinking!

Prior to setting out L to R: Tony Hogan (checking out he's still a man), Gordon Pincombe, Nick Dennet, Ian Strettle, Howard Strettle, Graeme Armstrong & Jim Cryans



The journey to the start point at Machame Gate was in a ramshackle old bus with no air con and still minus Strett's kit. He was going to have to start without it, using scrounged kit and the head porter promised us it would be with us the next day and he would bring it up. This saga went on until hours before the summit climb when it finally arrived. No one volunteered to scrape Strett's skiddies off but we were all glad of the clean gears arrival.

The bus to Kilimanjaro seemed to stop at every village on the way and pick up another cook or porter. By the time we got to the start point there wasn't enough room to swing a choggie!

The enormity of the logistics became apparent when we got to the start point, Machame Gate, when we were presented to the 20 odd porters, chief cooks and bottle washers. No only were they going to carry their own kit but each had camp equipment to carry as well, such as cookers and utensils, tents, sleeping bags, water and food for all for the duration.

Added to which, they were wearing the most ramshackle kit and foul weather gear, we understood now how 20 of them die each year, it had to be from hypothermia.

We eventually set off once we had been booked through the gate. They needed us to know all sorts, such as our passport numbers etc. but all they got was our service numbers or a variation thereof. What were they going to do? Throw us off the Mountain! We would have quite welcomed that as we started to realise that 2 days in an 'O' group was not good preparation.



From here on it was only up and as we set off we were being constantly told to slow down. Of course no one listened and everyone in the group was striding out whilst secretly willing the others to slow down and let the beer come out slowly instead offeree straining it through every fepore

Nick Dennet & Graeme Armstrong - Are we there yet?

We reached a stop point about lunchtime whereupon the porters began to set up tables and chairs with tablecloths and produce some fine, if not basic, soup, bread and pasta. The thunder box that they had set by, which was just off the trail and a permanent feature, something we were going to become very familiar with, assisted the aroma. We pushed on after lunch and reached our first camp at Machame Hut. I think we were all glad that the first day was over. We had got to 3000 metres by the end of the first day and we were all feeling the effects of the trek and previously consumed libations.

We had come out of the forest and the landscape was starting to turn towards its true nature of volcanic ash. The foliage would disappear over the next couple of days to reveal the Mountains true terrain.



The next couple of days followed a very familiar pattern. The food whilst basic was good. They kept insisting that we accept everything they gave us, but when they were hovering by, we got the impression that what we left was for some of the less important porters; such was the pecking order amongst them.

If The team take time to pose for a "What made Britain Great moment" L to R: Jim, Nick, Ian (behind), Gordon, Tony, Graeme (behind) Howard and two porters

We got up very early and prepped for the day by washing out of a bowl but not being true to it we decided that if there were no QARANC's to chat up we really couldn't see the point. The route followed a well established trail which, bearing in mind we were at 3000 metres on the first day, took us up and down in a manner that some of us started to think was arranged to wind us up. I think after day 4 we were only at something like 3800 metres. We had been higher but they kept bringing us down. It was hard work and we talked about every conceivable subject under the sun. Some of us had developed the trots, which is not really surprising as one of the party caught the porter's straining the drinking water, which was obtained from the mountain streams, through a tea strainer. These streams were in too close to the thunder boxes and were obviously used higher up by other parties. The 4th day saw us make big inroads to getting to Barranco, which was the launch point from which we would make for the summit. This point got us to the point where altitude sickness could kick in. We departed from Shira Cave and were to make several climbs and descents before arriving at this point.

We were boosted by 2 ex 9 Squadron blokes, I am sorry I have forgotten their names, who had served in the Squadron in the 90's, were 15 years our juniors but heard we were on the mountain and had been looking for us for 2 days. The pair of them were in South Africa carving a living. Their stories were such that whilst the names are different, they were obviously 2 of the more prominent characters during their time. They were great company and we saw them several times after that.

The climb to Barranco from Karanga, which was the stop after Shira Cave, saw us start up the Barranco wall, which was more of a scramble than we had been previously used to. Here we nearly lost one of our porters as we were trying to negotiate a protruding rock. You had to swing your leg out past the ledge and grab hold the other side using your momentum to bring you round. One of the porters attempted this whilst carrying his own kit and a large tent on his head.

He lost his footing and if Gordon hadn't grabbed hold of him he would most certainly have gone back the way he had come but at a much faster rate!!!

Graeme Armstrong & Ian Strettle - Oiling up in the buddy buddy system before bedtime!

At Barranco we pitched camp and this is where the head porter decided that we would take a rest day. It was frustrating but once we started the Summit climb, which was going to be at midnight the following day, we understood the logic.



We were now quite breathless and once night came very cold. Some of the party had some minor injuries but nothing to worry about. The climb was

getting serious and the mood became more reflective in our preparation. Even when trying to sleep at night, some of us would wake up, thinking we were choking. It was only the lack of oxygen coupled with the shallow breathing whilst at rest, but it didn't make for peaceful slumber.



Sometimes you would wake up choking because of the contribution your partner had made to the atmosphere but that is another story!

Tony Hogan & Mick Leather - "Don't look up mate, it won't seem so high!"

Time had now come where we had to stand up and be counted. We had slept as best we could prior to the wake up call for a final meal before setting out for the summit. During our rest day the other 2 ex-Sqn blokes came to find us and hand over the golf club and balls so that we could hit some balls from the top. Their summit climb was successful, but they were in the minority as high winds and temperatures of around -20°C had forced the majority of the climbers to turn back. We had

also felt those winds but from the comfort of our biwies. We started wondering what we would wear. By this time, Strett's kit had arrived and so at least he had a choice. Everything said wear 4 layers but the ability to move freely and concerns about sweating and hypothermia was a dilemma to us novices. I personally opted out of the Mountain jacket and went with thermals, loose top and fleece. Only because I had no room to carry the outer layer. Even the water we had to carry had to be protected otherwise it would freeze. It did anyway and not long into the climb so the last 5 hours of the 6-hour climb was done without water. Even our runny noses would freeze and form ice corks in our noses. Not that I was going to breathe through my nose. I was gasping everything I could get in through my mouth which must have had an effect on my voice box because speaking became difficult, again not that we were doing much talking! The climb itself was like walking in slow motion through treacle up a steep gradient. The ground underfoot in places was giving way causing you to lose half of the distance you had just climbed.

Jim Cryans was not well and suffered early on but he dug in and kept grinding away, and Jim, if you're reading this, hats off to you (No pun intended!). Not so lucky was Howard you succumb quite early to altitude sickness. He was vomiting heavily and really struggling to keep pace. He went down a couple of times until a particularly bad bout left him in big trouble. Like the tight group we are, but using age-old procedures, we decided that if a man went down we would leave him and push on. So it was with Howard. We left a guide with him and pushed on. I was looking at our Chief Guide and even he was puffing like a train and he had done this climb over 200 times!

It wasn't good and it wasn't pretty but the 'snake' of our group persisted for the 6 hours. The wind was not as evident as the previous night and the temperature was probably about -10 to -15° but dry.

As the dawn started breaking, we came over the saddle at the top and it was quite an emotional time. We had all made it, which in itself was a great result as all we had heard and researched was a high percentage failure, but with that much ego and testosterone on the Mountain, we should have believed in ourselves a bit better.

We made it! Graeme Armstrong, Ian Strettle, Gordon Pincombe, Nick Dennet, Mick Leather, Jim Cryans & Tony Hogan

The saddle was not the end but was a point where a lot of people failed because having reached it and stopped to rest, they have difficulty in finding the motivation to carry on the last 200 yards to the true summit.

I found this last 200 yards harder for that very reason and because it was flatter and wrongly I thought it would be easier.



We all made the true summit and the cameras came out, but not for long, as when you took off all your gloves, you could only hold the camera for a few seconds before your hands started to freeze.

Tony Hogan & Mick Leather - "They really should have taken a complete set of clubs, plus a trolley".

Tony and Graeme duly hit golf balls from the summit and there were copious amounts of backslapping. Tony also had his usual strop and wanted to punch some civvie's lights out, for no other reason than that was his reaction!

Half an hour at the top is more than anyone can stand so we all started to make our way down.

When we got to the saddle to start the steeper descent imagine our surprise when over the ridge comes Howard and his guide. He was not going to be beaten or talked about and had dug deep into his reserves of determination and kept going.

Ian, his brother, duly turned round and went to the summit with him. The rest of us, in ones and twos, continued on our descent. This was hard on the knees as it was almost like mogul skiing with the soft terrain underfoot.

We reached our camp and with no alcohol to celebrate, waited for the return of the Howard and Ian, contemplating another night on the Mountain before starting our descent to base camp the following day. Fortuitously, Howard returned some hours later, but he had gone temporarily blind due to a combination of exhaustion and altitude sickness. There was no panicking but we did see an opportunity to get off the Mountain a day early. The only problem was that the team of '50 something's' were contemplating an old fashion stretcher race, which didn't please any of us, least of all Howard.



The result was that he was slung between the shoulders of 2 porters and walked down.

What was the first thing we bought when we got down? Yes, you guessed it, 6 bottles of warm beer - we had done it!

Ian, Gordon, Tony, Nick, Mick, Howard, & Jim (Graeme took the photo)

The remainder of the trip was made up of some real easy days in a lovely beach side lodge in Zanzibar

overlooking the Indian Ocean with white sands; 6.00 a.m dips in the sea and lounging around the pool. That part of the trip was idyllic. We even managed a trip into the old town of Zanzibar to visit the bar that was apparently the birthplace of Freddie Mercury. In normal Tanzanian fashion, they had no T Shirts, No Food and a couple of posters on the wall. Still we have put another tick in the book of places we have been.

I am under strict orders not to discuss the Beach Volleyball between the Fieldies and Support Troop but needles to say the rules kept changing, scores were disputed and the outcome...well if you want to know that then really you should have been there. As all of you know. What goes on tour stays on tour...

Stories Old & New Wanted

It's no use waiting for others to write articles for the Journal - you too have much to offer. If you wait too long time will pass you by and your story will be lost forever! So sit down at the computer, typewriter or write something down in long hand.

No need to worry about grammar or spelling, the desktop software will sort out the majority of errors - of course I do slip the deliberate editors error in, but that's just to keep the observant members of the association on the ball - George Jones, down there in Australia please take note!

News from the Branches

Aldershot Branch

Fred Gray (Chairman)

The period from April to July has been relatively quiet but from now until to the next publication of the journal things will start to get busy. A good number of the branch made their way along the M3 to Twickenham to watch the annual good-humoured well-fought game that ended in the predictable victory for the Army. As is usual on these occasions the huge crowd of over 45000 produced a good many fancy dress outfits and a lot of friendly banter between the two warring services. This year we even had a streaker by one of the male spectators who put up some good evading tactics until brought down to grass level by the security staff. He had the biggest cheer of the afternoon with the girls shouting their appreciation.

The branch held their AGM and OGM on Sunday 1 st June

2008. The branch committee stays the same with the exception that Joe Stoddart MBE steps down as Chairman to take up an appointment within the AEA. Fred Gray volunteered to take on the vacancy left by Joe for a period of two years. Colonel Dennis Eagan continues as the Branch President and Mrs Betty Gray stays as secretary.

Dave Rutter as treasurer and John Smith BEM as entertainment secretary Three new members joined the branch during the year.

Roy King has been a member of the Yorkshire Branch almost from its formation but has now moved back to the county of his roots, and as we are the nearest branch to him he joined us. Major Peter Wade, former 2/ic of the Squadron 1955—58 has also become a member. We first met up with him at our annual Christmas dinner in January of this year. He enjoyed our company so much and it also gave him the opportunity to meet people he had served with, he also decided that it was worth the annual branch subscription to join with us. Sir Donald Spears and lady Spears have also become members of the Aidershot branch. Sir Donald already knew a number of our members as had served in the Canal Zone (1951-53 period) and then had a lengthy spell with 131 Parachute Engineer Regt (TA). Welcome to our new members and we look forward to seeing them again soon.

One of our overseas members, Dennis Thomas (Australia) has attended our meetings whilst over here for a six-month visit. He has now returned to OZ and I'm sure all our members wish him a safe journey home and we look forward to seeing him again in the not too distant future.

Our next event is our annual BBQ. If the weather holds, this usually is one of the most enjoyable afternoons we have together. John Smith is busy making arrangements for a trip to Arnhem for the 65th anniversary of the battle in

2009. Time is getting very short as accommodation and coaches have to be booked well in advance. Anyone from the AEA who would like to go on the trip please contact John on his return from Spain on July 31. The list is closing very shortly.

Anyone from the, AEA in the catchment area of Hampshire, Surrey and Wiltshire and who would like to join the Aidershot Branch please contact Mrs Betty Gray on the number below: Secretary: Mrs Betty Gray 01252 668339 Entertainment: John Smith 01252 326100

Birmingham

Bunny Brown

The Branch held our AGM in April, the Committee must be doing something right because the whole committee were voted back en block, so it is still me in the Chair, Brother Steve as Secretary, Elsie Barratt as Treasurer and Tom Carpenter as our trusted President.

Several members of the Branch made the annual pilgrimage to Ripon for Bill's annual dinner. It was a little later in the year this time so unfortunately clashed with the Branch's intended St Georges Dinner, which unfortunately had to be cancelled due to lack of support. The annual Clay shoot also had to be cancelled due to the land owner

pushing up his prices, which would have made it both expensive or less well attended (as it was it poured down all day). Many thanks to Brian Care and Mike (Ozzie) Holdsworth for all the work they put in for those events.

The Branch rambling section are still getting out and about helping to destroy the beautiful Warwickshire countryside.

We start at a pub (before they open) and return after 4 or 5 miles for a couple of refreshing beers. Again thanks to Norma Phillips and Wendy Clarke for keeping the pace down to a bibble.

The RRF SA80 Shoot turned out fine for a change. We only entered two teams this year and one member of those failed to appear, so Maureen Aitken had to make up the numbers, with, may I say, a good score for a first time on full bore. We managed to let the RRF win the Trophy this year by one point. The best AEA shot was the author with two highest possible scores, (some people will never live it down).

The weekend (5th July) saw most of the Branch at Mike Holdsworth's Garden party or informal pig roast. Les Chester came up from Lewes with the pig (dead of course) and the BBQ equipment. Many worked hard from the Friday into Saturday to make this a memorable event, the rain from early evening onwards made it even more memorable - thanks again to all who have helped out with our functions this year.

I look forward to seeing you all at Coventry.

Chatham

Eric Blenkinsop

Well hello again from Chatham and as we ended our last newsletter 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Assault) were establishing themselves in Afghanistan.

So it was not long before several of our members were in Maidstone along with thousands more of the public to give the warmest of welcomes home to 36 Engineer Regiment on their return from Afghanistan as they marched through the town followed by a commemorative service in All Saints Church. It was a most compelling service made even more poignant by the sad fact that the Regiment had suffered two fatalities.

We were pleased to be able to represent the AEA on this occasion, as our Birmingham Branch had been busy sending Shoe Box parcels to the Regiment at Christmas

time. Following this resounding welcome home the Maidstone Borough Council agreed to the commissioning of a Bronze Statue of a Ghurkha Engineer Sgt as a tribute to the Ghurkha Engineers who have long been part of the Maidstone community. There are now two Ghurkha Squadrons in 36 Regiment, 69 & 70 Sqns.

Friday 30th May 1700 Hrs received an unexpected but most heartening phone call from RSM Iain Murison in Afghanistan. A feedback on the well being of the Regiment and extolling the value as a little boost to moral of the Shoe Box Parcels that they were receiving, particularly those from the Birmingham Branch all of which have been sent to him for distribution, and emanate from George & Elsie Barrett also Brian Care on behalf of the branch.

Friday 20th June. We said farewell to Ron (Smokey) Gibson who passed away on 10th June. Our branch secretary for 11 years and a very special character, he will be sorely missed. Thank you Bob Prosser for bringing down the Yorkshire standard and Bill Shield for carrying it on the day.

Saturday 21st June the John Rock dinner. The principal Guest of Honour Lt Col Jock Brazier with wife Helen and son Julian the Member of Parliament for Canterbury were seated with 'Jocks' former Troop Sgt Paddy Padfield and section Cpl Charley Barker in their time in Palestine and John Smith his Troop Sgt at Suez 1956. Our other Guest of Honour was our Association President Bill Rudd and wife Dorothy. There were 59 members, family and guests seated, the dinner was very good and the service excellent.

Jock talked to us in some detail how his father formed Kent Fortress RE as a TA unit from scratch in 1932 and their subsequent early link with the Airborne Engineers. This link was primarily through Capt Stephen Dorman

who left KFRE to form Air Troop RE. He interviewed and recruited Norman Swift and Jack Hobbs into Air Troop and we were privileged to have them with us, with their respective daughters at the dinner.

All in all it was a most memorable evening. Our thanks go out to Nick Gibson for the superb menu cards, real collectors items, to our Toast Master Jim Rogers, to Pam & Bob Seaman for another splendid raffle which realised £180, now to be rounded up to £200 and a cheque to be paid direct to "Help for Heroes".

Finally thanks to all who attended the dinner to make it such a happy occasion.

We now look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the AGM at Coventry and in the meantime like all of you we will carry on packing the Welfare Shoe Boxes.

AEA 2008 AGM/Reunion- Grand Raffle

This event is the responsibility of the Chatham Branch who have been tasked by the Association Executive Committee to raise at least £1.500 for charity. The chosen charity is:

"HELP FOR HEROES

This charity has been formed to help those who have been wounded in Britain's current conflicts.

The main project is to provide an urgently needed new gymnasium and a full size swimming pool at the Tri Service Rehabilitation Centre at Headley Court Epsom Surrey.

After hospitalisation and surgery at Selly Oak hospital the next step for the wounded is the Defence Medical Education and Training Agency at Headley Court, which has the tremendous task of healing and preparing the wounded for the best possible quality of life thereafter.

We in the Chatham Branch will do our very best to make this event a very special one. What we need from you at the weekend is your generosity on two counts:- Bearing gifts for the raffle and the purchase of lots of tickets before the draw.

By digging deep, you can help us to reach and perhaps beat the target.. So start now to put away a few bob a week in order to give this very special project your full support in true AEA style.

Yorkshire

Bill Rudd MBE

This has been a quiet period and in real terms, not much happening. Our Branch meetings continue to take place and I am pleased to say that the turnout of branch members is healthy. Our 2008 Annual Dinner was a tremendous success story with a 100 members and guests in support. Our principle guests were the Mayor and her consort from South Tyneside and RSM Tony Pick of 38 Engineer Regiment. Tony's previous appointment was SSM 51 Para Sqn RE, and we congratulate him on his promotion to RSM. Speeches were made and music for dancing was produced by Dave Grimbley's young daughter Nina, might I say a most professional choice.



Dancing went on until early in the morning, the bar closed, sorry I meant did not close until the last person left. A very good party with a real Airborne Family spirit. A big thank you goes to Tony Pick for allowing us to use the mess and making us feel so welcome.

WOI (RSM) Tony Pick welcomes members and visitors to the WOs & Sgt's Mess

It does seem that our next period is going to be more than busy and we look forward to the oiling activities, firstly our intended visit to Arnhem, dates 18th - 21st September 2008. This will be followed by our Association AGM weekend in October at the Royal Court Hotel Keresley. We then look forward to our invited visit to Woodbridge for the dedication of our John

Rock Bust in the garden of reflection. This will be followed by a presentation of medals by Maj Gen Peter Wall CBE to all the boys who have just returned from Afghanistan tour.

Included in this period will be 1st Para Sqn annual dinner and the Double Hills ceremony plus many branch activities.

Whilst on the subject of functions I would like to thank members of the Birmingham branch for their kind invitation to the Golden Brick Garden party. A great night.

Even the rain could not spoil it. And finally, thank you to the members of the Chatham branch for their kind invitation to the John Rock dinner - yet another evening among friends.



Dorothy Rudd, Barbara Braniff & Mollie Ward - Ripon Dinner Night



The 'Brummies' dress for the occasion at Ripon

The year 2009 looks to be just as busy with trips now well in advance on the planning side, these will take place in Normandy 3rd - 7th of June and Arnhem 16th - 20th September. These dates are the 65th anniversary respectively.

Association members wishing to join the party please contact me.

The news on the get-well card system is that Tom Thornton is back to his good old self, Ginge Goodfellow is progressing well with his cancer treatment and Bill Holmes informs me that his prostate cancer is well under control. Lastly that ever young and good looking Willie Wiltshire has over come his medical problems and is now back on the road, might I say, without a grey hair on his head!

Airborne Engineers Association- Sports Club

Bob Chatterton

The AEASC is proud to announce a 50% increase in members since the last journal. We have one new member. WO1 Mick Stewart (former SSM 9 Para Sqn) surprised Billy and myself by turning up for the start of the South Downs Marathon. He gave us some waffle about it being his first marathon then shot off leaving us plodding in his wake, not to be seen again until we crossed the finish line 4 hours+ later. I think we both secretly hoped he was going to blow himself out, but it wasn't to be. This performance we both agree allows him to take over Billy's title of Club Captain. I hope on future runs Mick continues the Captains role of pathfinder by wearing the traditional red signal gloves and buying lunch in the pub after.

Saab Salomon Turbo Challenge 10 miles+

We turned up early Sunday morning on 18th May, to run the Saab Salomon Challenge. The route meandered all over the training area in Bordon. For those that are not familiar with the area it's more or less the same as Long Valley and if you don't know Long Valley, you're probably reading the wrong Journal. The run was attended by at

least 300 runners many of whom didn't know what lay ahead. When we got under way I said to Billy that I was going to take it steady and he agreed because his chest was feeling a bit tight due to a trampoline accident a few night previous. Sensing a sign of weakness and the opportunity to beat him for once; well at least since last year when I waited 13 miles 100 yards on a run then stepped in front of him at the line, I increased my speed and left him cursing. The course was up and down hills through mud and deep water but was really enjoyable. We

both finished in the top half of the field and we are looking forward to doing another one later on in the year.

South Downs Marathon

The South Downs Marathon was on 14th June and started just North of Chichester on the Downs and finished in The Queen Elisabeth Country Park near Petersfield. Most of us know the South Downs from P Company so can imagine the constant climbing and descending through the countryside for 26 miles. I started of conservatively and let Billy and Mick disappear off down the track it was very hot for early June and I wanted to take it steady and save myself for the rest of the course. Once in a steady rhythm the miles soon started to clock up and I set myself targets to keep me going, such as keeping pace with someone or catching up and overtaking people especially on the hills.

The last third of the race was especially good for me because this is normally where I begin to taper off and the run becomes a bit of a slog, however this time I felt pretty good and managed to catch a fair number of people however; Mick and Billy weren't amongst them. For those that like a challenge this is for you. At the end Billy and myself rated this harder than the Snowdonia Marathon.

Race times

Saab Salomon Turbo Challenge 10 miles+

Bob Chatterton 1 hour :22 mins

Billy Morris 1 hour :23 mins

South Downs Marathon

Mick Stewart 03 hours :54 mins

Billy Morris 04 hours :26 mins

Bob Chatterton 04 hours :43 mins

If you want to join in the fun, or challenge Mick for his place as team captain, just contact one of us to find out where we are running next.

Membership Report

Steve "Billy" Morris MSM Membership Secretary

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

Warrick Forsyth	9 Para Sqn RE	Oct 2007-Still serving
Dean Sykes	9 Para Sqn RE	1985-1991, 1994-2000
Simon Rogers	9 Para Sqn RE	1987-1994

Total membership as at: 09/07/2008 Past and Present 1,333

Pegasus Village- Canal Zone 1952- 53

Were you involved in the construction of the Canal cottages of Pegasus Village in the Canal Zone 1952 - 1953?

It was to be a 1 Troop project but was passed to Park Troop under the direction of Bob Radford; who ran the whole show the 16 Para Bde. Bob Radford is trying to gain information from members who were part of the project with the aim of writing an article for the AEA Journal and at the same time recording this event as part of 9 Sqn's history. If you have any information regarding this request; please get in contact with David Brooks.

23 Engineer Regiment (Air Asslt)

WO1 (RSM) Iain Murison

Joint Force Engineer Group Headquarters Task Force Helmand, Afghanistan May 2008

The situation out here is beginning to hot up in more ways than one. Tactics are changing and the Taliban are employing devices that have not been seen here before. The men are good at what they do and have prevented many lives being lost by detecting them. The kinetics as far as direct fire weapons are not being employed as much as expected, however the poppy harvest will be over in a few days from now and the shovels will undoubtedly be exchanged for AK-47s as the unskilled fighters find other ways to feed their families. Guns for hire is the unwritten law.

Infrastructure support is as always in the fore of any operation and really committing the men to task. If they are not on patrol then it's to the grindstone to improve the patrol bases, which are still very basic in terms of protection from Indirect Fire, potable water and general facilities. The task is endless and manpower very stretched. In short, without wanting to sound like a chunter we are a scarce commodity in huge demand, it's just about prioritisation and resources.

On a completely different note, the Corps has recently been approached by the Regiment about changing the title from 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Assault) to 23 Airborne Engineer Regiment. This I feel reflects the value of Airborne Sappers in its truest sense "by air to battle" and will certainly be welcomed by many as a suitable change. I hope you agree. The new DZ Flash is now in use by the Regiment and again reflects our Sapper heritage without losing the integrity of the blue diamond. It was a necessary change and one that has been embraced by all.

I have less than 6 weeks left to serve as the RSM and would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support during my tenure. It has been an absolute pleasure to serve within the airborne brotherhood and one that I shall never forget. Having been exposed to such an organisation is very humbling and inspiring; this has allowed me to finish my soldier service in awe of Airborne Sappers and the highest standards they bring to the Corps. It has been an interesting journey and one that I hold close to my thoughts.

Until then, "Slainte Mahath

23 Engr Regt- Commanding Officers Forward

Extract from the Regimental Newsletter -Published 29th June

Whilst normal 'routine' support to the Battle Groups is continuing, all Squadrons are focusing hard on infrastructure and winterisation works (always slightly strange in the blistering 50 degree summer heat). The days are long and hot but the work is needed and much appreciated by those who see their rough living conditions improving. I suspect the impression in the UK media at the moment gives the feeling of increased levels of fighting in Helmand, certainly 2 Para and 23 SAS (V) have had a very unlucky time recently and our thoughts are with them. The reality out here is that things have not changed significantly. That equally rings true for the Regiment who continue to crack on with work regardless. In the continuing churn of summer postings, this week we saw WO1 (RSM) Murison leave theatre to hand over to the new RSM, WO1 Walton. Our great thanks and best wishes go with Capt Murison and Lucy as they head off for Germany.

All's well out here (don't believe all you hear on the news).

23 Engineer Regiment (Air Asslt)- Parade

It is proposed that a full Regimental parade will be held at Rock Barracks on Friday 21st November 2008. The inspecting officer for this parade will be Major General Peter Wall CBE, this will be the occasion for the presentation of campaign medals for those who served in the Regiment's tour of Afghanistan. Following the parade there will be the official opening of the 'Garden of Reflection' and the unveiling of the Lt Col JF Rock RE bronze bust.

There is currently no firm itinerary concerning the parade and 'bust' unveiling, but once confirmed the details have been received, they will be displayed on the AEA website and e-mails forwarded to branch secretaries for onward distribution.

Members wishing to book accommodation in or near Woodbridge are recommended to contact: **Amanda Cox-Osborne on 01394 421359 or e. mail at woodbridge@hivegb.co.uk** Amanda is undertaking the task of locating and booking hotels and other sources of accommodation.

The Lt Col John Rock bust prior to it being mounted on its plinth in Rock Barracks



Lt Col J.F. Rock- the History

Airborne forces, as with most elite military units, were not created overnight, but rather, were moulded and shaped by men of foresight, vision and determination. Such a man was Lt Col John Frank Rock RE.

Right at the beginning of the war several far-sighted people were beginning to see the potential of airborne forces. The Germans, with their customary efficiency, were the first to realise this potential. But even within the British army the idea was beginning to make sense. Sir Martin Lindsay, then a junior officer, sent a memo to the war office suggesting that a small parachute cadre be set up to study the problems that may arise should they decide to train paratroops. Having been passed all the way up to GIGS, it was returned with the hand-written response "I am not going to ask Englishman to do that". Sir Martin was to become the second army officer to be tasked to build the airborne forces, later to become Brigadier.

On the 22nd June 1940, almost 4 years to the day before the D-Day landings, Winston Churchill wrote a minute directing the War Office to form a "corps of at least 5000 paratroops". John Rock would not at first have seemed to be the most obvious choice to be the man to take that job on. Recently returned from Dunkirk as Bde Maj. of 11 Inf. Bde, he had no experience of parachuting or flying.

He was born in 1905, the son of a Naval Officer who was killed on active service during WW1. Educated at Imperial Service College and RMA Woolwich, he was commissioned 2Lt RE on 3rd September 1925 and promoted to Lt exactly 2 years later. Up to his posting to command 31 Coy on the 27th April 1935, then stationed in Ceylon, he had completed courses in Mounted Duties, Anti Aircraft Defence, Air Photography, small arms and could speak 4 languages including German. He was posted to SME Chatham on 3rd Mar 1938, having since been promoted to Captain, and was to be Assistant Instructor (Construction) until his move to the Staff College in Jan 1939, and his subsequent round trip of France to the beaches at Dunkirk.

The Central Landing School was opened at Ringway Airfield, near Manchester, on 21 st June 1940, under the command of Sqn Ldr L A Strange assisted by Sqn Ldr J E Benham. 3 days later Maj. Rock and Capt. Lindsay arrived as the senior army officers. Also present at these early days was Capt. W Brandish, Capt. J Lander, some RAF

'enthusiasts' and a few ex-professionals 'stunt jumpers'. No2 commando provided an initial detachment of some men, not all of who were entirely enthusiastic about the idea.

A impression of the kind of energy that Rock was capable of may *be* seen by the fact that the first 'Live' jumps were commenced on 13th July, less than 3 weeks after his arrival. When, a week later, the first fatality occurred, he again showed his mettle by insisting on being the first to jump when training recommenced on 8th August, as he did on all occasions where an injury or fatality threatened the morale and confidence of his troops.

Rock's vision can also be seen in the minutes of a meeting held at Ringway on 19th June 1940 where, among many other items, the issues of extra pay for airborne soldiers, specialised jump clothing such as helmets, boots and the smock, (copies of captured German equipment), redesigned battle dress trousers, the provision of specially trained parachute packers ("These may be women") and the acquisition of the ideally equipped Douglas Dakota aircraft were all raised and dealt with. Even down to considering the need to provide paratroops with gloves, anklets and 'jock straps' for their protection.

By the spring of 1941, the Central Landing School had become the Central Landing Establishment and was visited by Winston Churchill, Rock having been promoted to Lt Col on 9th February 1941. Churchill had, early on, accepted the case for Glider Operations in conjunction with parachute troops and with the CLE at maximum output Rock's talents were now focused in this direction. He was appointed CO of the Glider Pilots Regiment on 21 st December 1941.

From 22nd December 1941 continuously until 9th September 1942 he learned to fly from scratch. Elementary training followed by advanced on Magisters and then converting to Hotspur gliders and finally the large Horsa Gliders. Less than a month later he was to die tragically. On the 27th September 1942, during a night flight at Shrewton, the towrope of his Hotspur Glider broke and he was injured when he crashed into a telegraph pole on landing. He died on 8th October 1942 at Tidworth Hospital.

He was 37 years old and unmarried. His next of kin was his sister, then Miss M A Rock. Amazingly his only decorations were the 1939-45 star and medal, awarded posthumously on 8th April 1949.

Although he has been largely ignored by the annals of history, his achievements can never be. A Sapper from the outset, not only was he our first parachute soldier but also the first glider soldier. The legacy of pride and ability that he began in 1940 thrives in today's airborne soldiers, not just in our army but in the armies all over the world that have based themselves on his model. The tradition of ABI 'airborne initiative' that is such a vital component of today's parachute soldier, can be traced directly to the early days at Ringwood and John Rocks inspiration.

The Official War Office Record, Airborne Forces, compiled by Lt Col TBH Otway DSO says:-

"The greater part of the credit, on the Army Side, for the success of the initial experiments and trials must go to Major Rock, whose unfailing courage and determination in the face of all difficulties was an inspiration to others".

Person Tribute - Lt Col J.F. Rock RE (Published in the one of the Tabloids in 1942)

The death from a gliding accident of Lieutenant Colonel John F. Rock is not only a great shock to his friends but a serious loss to our airborne forces, in the technical development of which he played a leading part. In June 1940, Rock was chosen from the Royal Engineers to start parachute troops, and took his share of the risks and mishaps of the early experiments, which have now made the landing of soldiers by parachute comparatively safe. Military gliders grew up around him, and when a Glider Pilot Regiment was formed, he was appointed to command it. He still continued to do more than his share of new development work in spite of at least one serious accident, which might well have deterred a less gallant man. He died in a military hospital on October 8th from multiple injuries received in a crash a fortnight before when making another glider flight of an experimental nature.

From uk Imperial Service College Rock went to Woolwich and was commissioned in the Royal Engineers in 1925. His early career as a sapper subaltern included a period as a Garrison Engineer, construction work in Ceylon, and being an instructor at the School of Engineering. In 1937 he went to Germany and obtained his first class interpretership a year later, shortly before going to the Staff College. During the fighting in France and Belgium

he was brigade major of the 11th Infantry Brigade. His father lost *his* life at sea as a naval surgeon in the last war; his mother, to whom he was devoted, was a great influence in his life. He was unmarried. His death will be deeply felt because of three qualities, which he possessed to a quite exceptional degree: strength of character, ability, and personal charm. It is no exaggeration to say that those of us who served under him came to love him. His work goes on and the better for his inspiration, for he set us an example, which we shall never forget.

Memoirs



Ronald Arthur 'Smokey' Gibson - Ron was born on the 12th November 1923 in East Ham, London, the youngest of 5 sisters and a brother.

He attended Central Park school, infants, junior and secondary until in 1937 he was awarded one of only six scholarships to West Ham Municipal College of Arts & Craft.

There he began a study of decorative arts. In 1939 his studies were ended with the onset of war. In order to avoid evacuation with other school children he left school to seek employment with the Firm of Houghton-Butcher, camera manufacturers in Holborn.

At this time he was very active in the scout movement, having received the award of 'Kings Scout', with the '1st East Ham' Scout Troop. During the London Blitz he was used as a 'scout messenger' for East Ham Police Station passing messages between the police stations and emergency services whilst normal communications were disrupted during the raids. Later during this period he spent time on the 'Discovery', then moored permanently on the Victoria Embankment, as part of the 40th Westminster Sea Scouts whose task it was to patrol the Thames looking for German parachute mines dropped during the night. This was later taken over by the Navy who, in 1940, formed the Royal Naval Auxiliary Patrol. Since the scouts younger than 18 could not remain in this unit he lied about his age and was taken on as a naval rating for 6 months before he was found out and had to leave. He received a rare award of a Scout Association 'National Service' Badge for these contributions to the civil authorities' war efforts.

At this time Ron found employment as an apprentice Lighterman on the Thames, working on a fuel carrier between Whitehaven and Battersea Power Station. This did not last however and having tried, unsuccessfully, to enlist in the mercantile navy at Liverpool, October 1942 found him taking up work with the Oxted Lime Company.

Called up for army service in January 1943, having been passed 'A1 fitness', he initially entered service in the General Service Corps in No.8 PTC at Beverley Yorks. Here his usefulness as an experienced Thames Lighterman was immediately recognised and so in typical army fashion he was recruited into the Royal Engineers and found himself as a Dill Lighterman shovelling coal off a collier ship in Cardiff Docks as part of No.6 Dock Group RE.

In April 1943 he volunteered for Paratroops induced by the attractive maroon beret and (more importantly) the extra pay. He reported to AF Depot & School at Hardwick camp, Chesterfield on the 4th.

On the 15th April he reported to RAF Ringway (the Central Landing School) for his jumping course and subsequently was posted to 3rd Parachute Squadron RE at Bulford in Wiltshire.

During his NCO cadre course in August-September 1943 he was injured in a bad jump and was subsequently admitted to Shaftsbury Hospital on 13th December.

On the 22nd January he married Grace Nicholls at St Michael and All Angels church, Manor Park, London, Discharged from hospital on 21st February 1944 he was sent to Lychett Heath Convalescent Home near Poole and subsequently to 'W2' Sub Unit, 34 RHU 101RG at Leigh-on-Sea in Essex finally being returned to 3 Para Sqn on 8th March 1944.

The Squadron was moved to transit camp 'Red Lodge' on the 25th May and at 00:50hrs 6th June Ron landed in France. The squadron remained in France on active service till they were halted at Honfleur on the 30th September and embarked for England on the steamer 'Empire Dauntless' on the 8th September to return to Bulford.

The squadron was returned to action on 25th December 1944 when they were sent to the Ardennes to help contain the German Advance during the 'Battle of the Bulge'. Moved on the 21 st January to Heythuggen in Holland to relieve 15th Scottish Division they were finally returned to Bulford on 26th February 1945.

A return to Transit Camp 'Red Lodge' and subsequent landing at Hamminkeln Germany as part of the Rhine Crossing on 24th March 1945 followed a period of leave in early March. The advance was pressed through to the Dortmund-Ems Canal where on the 1 st April 1945 he was wounded whilst trying to recover a wounded comrade under heavy enemy fire.

He was taken to 224 Para MDS at Greven and subsequently to 34 CCS. Thence to 9 BGH at Venray and 75 BGH in Brussels he was finally airlifted to Down Hampney and Wollaston House Emergency Hospital in Newport S Wales arriving on the 7th April 1945. He was transferred to Aldersbrook Hospital at Wansted, London on VE Day, 8th May and then to 102 Military Convalescence Regt at Kingston Surrey on 4th July 1945.

He was posted to 249 Field Coy RE at Bulford on 18th Oct 1945 and embarked for Palestine from Newhaven on 11th Dieppe. Arriving in Dieppe on 12th December he embarked on a 2 Day Train Journey to Toulon in Southern France where he boarded the Dutch Vessel 'HMT Volendam' bound for Port Said. Arriving at Port Said on the 19th December he travelled overland and across the Suez Canal arriving at Gaza on 27th December 1945 where he joined 9th Airborne Squadron RE then stationed at 'Biet Nabala'.

Wishing to re-trade as a Plant Op he went to 286 Field Park Company ay Nairserat Ridge in Gaza on 17th April 1946, which continued until 4th August 1946 when he was accredited as Op-Ex Bill and also qualified as Heavy Goods Driver.

He returned to 9 Squadron RE until posted to 249 Airborne Park Sqn RE on 16th September and a week later attached back to 3 Parachute Squadron RE recently returned from the Far East.

On the 3rd May 1947 he was moved to Port Said to begin his return to England and demob being completed at 12:15 17th May 1947.

In 1961 Ron enlisted in the Territorial Army joining 82 Inland Water Transport Sqn RE and later moving to 271 Port Sqn RE the Squadron re-badged in 1967 to the Royal Corps of Transport and Ron was finally demobbed for good in 1973 in his 50th year with the rank of Staff Sergeant.



Post war Ron sought work in a depressed economy driving trucks & later busses in the East End. Eventually finding his way to Tate & Lyle at Silvertown where he worked for some 36 Years until retirement. During this time he was Shop Steward for the T&GWU later becoming branch secretary Of No1 branch at Tooley St. Active in many ex-Servicemen's Associations notably the RBL, AEA, REA, REA (A), Suez Vets & RNAS. Ron was a popular veteran member of the HQ RSME WO's & Sgts Mess and was Branch Secretary of Chatham Branch Airborne Engineers Association.

Ron passed away peacefully in his sleep on the 10th June 2008 having suffered for some time with pulmonary oedema. A widower he leaves two children Lynne & Nick and two grandchildren Alexander & Victoria.



Keith King & George Dunn- Twickenham 2008



Colin Campbell, Alex Cockburn & Jim Harrower - 2008



Led by Major Lyle-Grant MC, RE and WOII (SSM) Bill Powell MM 9 Indep Para Sqn march past the inspecting officer. Can anyone assist in naming other members on parade? Fred Gray our archivist would be delighted to receive any details.

OBITUARIES

Col BH Holloway It is with regret that I have to inform you that my father, Beverly Harold Holloway passed away peacefully in Geneva on 11 May 2008 aged 93 years.

He had not been well for some time although this was not apparent and indeed he had also played it down. He was finally admitted to hospital on 20 March 2008 and even then he was being prepared for a return home within one month. As you know he always liked a party and his final weeks in hospital was no exception with many friends and relatives visiting and chatting.

The funeral service was on Monday 26 May at 3 p.m. at Holy Trinity Church, Geneva, Switzerland. My father in conjunction with the church planned the service with military precision; there was a reception afterwards to which those that attend were made most welcome.

I am very sorry to have to address you with a circular letter but, as you probably realise, father had many friends and relatives and I would otherwise be continually writing or telephoning.

Father did stress that his passing should be a celebration of his life and, whilst we all naturally mourn the loss of a dear friend and relative, we celebrated as best we could.

WOII (AQMS) Greenhaigh (belated entry) Ron died in December 2006, aged 68. He had served on contract in SAF in the 1980s as a Warrant Officer in tech EME Workshops, where he was recognised as being an outstanding artificer and teacher of great determination, commitment and humour. His service in the British Army started at the Army Apprentices School at Chepstow and continued with the REME detachments with the Parachute Brigade, where, despite his small stature he was respected by all with whom he came in contact. Stories about his humour are legion, as a young soldier serving with 9 Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers at Cove; he took to marching out to the main Oxford - London railway line and saluting the train. Clearly mystified but feeling the urge to respond, after a few days the passengers would all stand to attention in the carriages and return his salute!

He is much missed by his wife Irene and their two daughters, and by his many friends.

Association Shop

Ray Coleman

Description	Price	P&P (UK Post Rate)
Ties		
Association Ties (Pegasus logo)	£15.00	£1.00
Anniversary Ties (Wings & Pegasus logo)		
9 Para Sqn Ties (Wings logo)		
Bow Ties (Pegasus & wings logo)		

Badges		
Association Blazer Badges	£14.00	£1.00
9 Squadron Blazer Badqe	£14.00	£1.00
Lapel Wings - Blue Enamel S/C	£3.50	£1.00

Clothing		
Association Jumpers (sizes 38 - 48) Maroon or Blue with Pegasus logo embroidered 'Airborne Engineers	£25.00	£3.10
Association Sweatshirts - Maroon with blue logo - Small/med/lge or X large	£16.50	£3.10
Association Polo Shirts - Fred Perry style - Maroon or blue with Pegasus logo - small/med/lge or Xlge	£15.50	£2.50
Association 'T' Shirts - Maroon with logo - small/med/lge/Xlge	£9.00	£1.80
Association Shower proof 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

Miscellaneous		
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 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