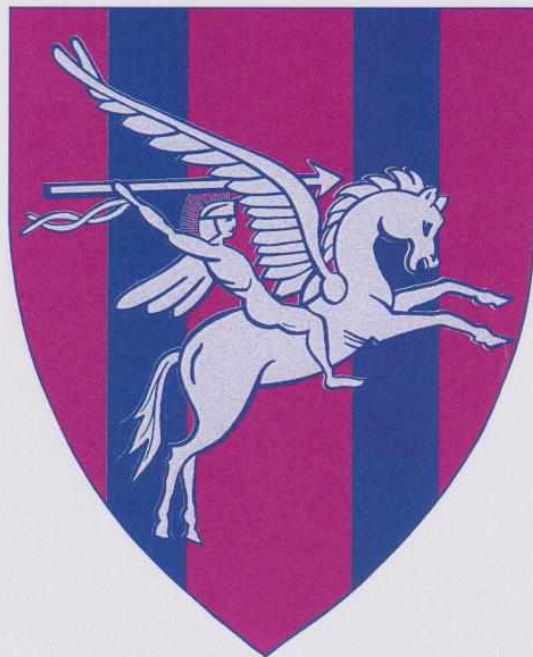




# THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS JOURNAL



Airborne Engineers Association  
Registered Charity No 1009201



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## JUNE 2021 ISSUE No. 56

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## President's Update

### John Lee

It seems that at long last we are coming out of this pandemic with things slowly returning to some sort of normality. Hopefully in a few months' time we will be able to attend functions that have been on hold for the last 12 months or so. Looking in the diary there are certainly a number which I hope to attend in the late summer and autumn. At the time of writing this these events would include the Double Hills and Cromwell Lock memorial services in September.

Routine matters have however, carried on, with the Executive Council holding an OGM by 'Zoom' recently at which a number of items were discussed and these will be put to members at the AGM which is still planned for Harrogate in October.

Although we are not out of the wood yet I feel that in these times we should still do all we can to maintain contact with our members and the association is there to help should the occasion arise. With these thoughts I will now close and wish all members and their families my best wishes for the future and look forward to seeing many of you soon, especially at Harrogate.

## Chairman's Comments

### Steve Wallis

Hi Everyone.

As I write this, we are coming to the end of a lockdown that has lasted far longer than any of us could have imagined. Personally, this has meant that I have now been working from home for over a year conducting most of my business with the aid of 'Microsoft Teams' and 'Zoom'. Using 'Zoom' we have been able to conduct the regular business of the National Committee as we have held two OGM's and one AGM during lockdown.

As we start to open up, we will have to get used to the idea of sharing space with others that we have been avoiding during the pandemic. Once again, we will be able to meet face to face which means that we can resume the normal business of the Association with a full programme of Branch meetings and memorial events.

I have received correspondence from the Royal British Legion concerning the Remembrance Parade at the Cenotaph. There are plans to hold the usual march past with 10,000 veterans taking part. I intend to apply for 36 tickets on behalf of the association. I will post more information on the Airborne Engineer websites when I have it.

The annual AGM and Gala Ball will take place at the Cedar Court Hotel in Harrogate over the weekend of the 15<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> October. It will be great to see many old friends face to face, to share a beer and retell all the old stories yet again, always remembering that the older we get the better we were.

Unfortunately, there will be a few old friends absent this year as they have departed to the Sqn Bar Above. Included amongst these is Gerry Bonner who was secretary of the new Wales and West branch of the association. Gerry died suddenly in his sleep and was buried in the churchyard at Manley following his funeral in Hereford. 44 years ago, Gerry was one of the staff that took me through pre-para, and I was honoured to carry the AEA National Standard at his funeral. He will be greatly missed.

I hope that you are all well and keeping safe and Melanie and I look forward to seeing many of you throughout the year.

## Cancellation Of All Journal Standing Orders (S/O)

To those members who have been paying their journal subscription by standing order should now notify their respective bank to cancel any further payments with immediate effect.

Your last S/O payment covers the cost of the last hard copy of the journal, which is due for publication in December 2021. Don't delay, do it today!

## Airborne Engineers Association - 31st AGM/Reunion Weekend

Your booking form for attendance at the 31st AGM/REUNION weekend to be held at the Cedar Court Hotel, Harrogate 15-17 October 2021, is enclosed in this issue. You will also find a programme of events for the weekend.

To avoid disappointment, get your booking completed soonest!

## Fergie Semple Golf Competition 2021

The annual Fergie Semple Golf Competition is planned to take place at Heworth Golf Club, York on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> Oct 2021.



Heworth Golf Club at Muncaster House, Muncastergate, Heworth, York YO31 9JY. It is Yorks most friendly and accessible golf club. Members consider it a "Hidden Gem" of a club.

Only a mile from the historic centre of York (If your wife/Partner wants to visit York there is a bus stop opposite the club which runs every 10 minutes)

Picturesque setting, tree-lined fairways, quality greens.

For more details of club, course etc. visit [www.heworthgolfclub.co.uk](http://www.heworthgolfclub.co.uk)  
Please use this email address only as there is another Heworth Golf Club in Gateshead.

### Format of the day:

Arrive No later than 0915

Coffee, Tea, Bacon Rolls

Brief on the day (We will be playing off yellow tees, full H/C)

Tee off booked 1000 hrs.

Lunch: Pie and Chips

Prize Giving

Disperse to Cedar Court Hotel Harrogate (Approx. 40 min drive)

Cost of the Golf and food is £25 cash, which I am sure you will agree, is a good price (Paid to Mick Wallace on the day) I hope see as many Golfers take part in this golf day as possible, lets kick the weekend off in a good manner, if you would like to play please drop Mick Wallace an email to [mwallace734@gmail.com](mailto:mwallace734@gmail.com) to secure your place.

## The AEA Shop Merchandise

### **Jeannette Rutter (AEA Shop Manager)**

As we intend to spend a long awaited holiday to coincide with the reunion weekend in the Yorkshire Dales and Peak District, I will only be bringing a limited supply of the shop merchandise.

To avoid disappointment and to save on the postal charges, those requiring specific items please notify me by e-mail or by telephone of your requirements and these will be delivered to you by hand at the Cedar Court hotel. Obviously I will need the size and colour of any garments you may require.

To ensure that I have sufficient stock on hand, please forward your requirements by the end of August as the suppliers usually take 3-4 weeks to complete an order.

Well done and thank you Mick Mathis your order which will be delivered to you at the hotel. Are you sure you're extra-large? I shall bring a couple of the size large items just in case!

Several members have in the past enquired about the purchase of a "9 Indep Para Sqn RE" scrolled Pegasus plaque. Provided a minimum order of Qty 10 are requested as a one off consignment, these can be obtained through the Shop. But we need to have your details soonest. Plaques will only be sold to members who served in 9 Indep Para Sqn RE.

## Future Articles for Publication

### **Dave Rutter**

As no doubt you are all aware, the final hard copy of the AEA journal will be the December 2021 publication.

The outline plans for the way forward in displaying the journal 'Online'. This endeavour is being undertaken by our webmaster Dave Pace, full details are published on page 39 of this issue.

However, I do need to ensure that the final paper produced magazine is filled with the usual interesting personal accounts and anecdotes together with photographs to compliment your articles. So let's fill this final edition with a bumper crop of those stories/tales that you've been promising to send me over the past 20+ years.



## Blasts From The Past

**3 Troop 9 Indep Para Sqn**



**Hamala Camp Bahrain 1964**

**Hank Coding, Phil Dunkley, Bob Brownhill, Sid Grounsell, Bill Rudd, Taff Lougher, Bob Ferguson, (sitting) Frank Glennet, Biddy MacMillan, Frank Brady – All alone, Met Metcalfe**



**Radfan 1964**

**John McConnell, Sid Grounsell, Sammy Clyde, Taff Lougher, Met Metcalfe, Bob Ferguson  
In front, Geordie Smart & Geordie Small**



**Kenya 1971**

**Sammy & Sid in Playboy pose**



**Kenya 1971**

**Sammy Clyde, Eric Gallimore & Sid Grounsell**

## A Red Beret, Wings and a Dennison Smock

Col Doug Swanson



Well what more could a young officer want to make him look different from the rest and be considered elite by many?

The only difficulty was passing something called 'P' Company, and then completing a four week parachute course where you would need to master the art of parachuting and complete two descents from the cage beneath a moored balloon and six more from an aircraft, one of which would be at night.

The 'P' company bit was very hard - as was the training to get to it. The other two officers on my pretraining 'died' during this spell. It sure made for plenty of leg pulling by the lads on the course with me. "Come on Sir, you ain't going to die on us, are you?" they would shout! Well I didn't! It all passed with a great degree of difficulty and quite a lot of pain. That is until we arrived at RAF Abingdon for our four weeks parachute training. It should have been called Abingdon Holiday Camp, as that was what the luxury Officer's Mess and training was like after 'P' Company. It all ended with a lovely little ceremony where some RAF officer presented you with a set of 'wings' and shook your hand. Crap Hat no more! Hurray!

Once in the Brigade it struck me that I had moved from an Infantry Brigade in Germany with a Parachute Commander to the Parachute Regiment Brigade with a similar chief. That is as if one considers Frank King and Tony Farrar-Hockley similar. One had parachuted into Arnhem and survived their aircrew being killed and getting his men out of their plane safely into the cauldron of Arnhem. And the other had surrendered the Gloucester's in Korea and spent time being interrogated in prisoner of war camp. Both were terrific commanders and wonderful, if tough leaders and inspirers of people.

To join the short list of Postal Officers who had commanded an airborne unit was a great honour, with a pile of inspiring

examples to follow. So, best to make sure we knuckled down, trained hard, played hard and proved a unit worthy of our Formation and Commander. This meant a good deal of background activity. Things like finding who needed what course, finding what courses were available and preparing our training schedule four months in advance and also finding how to get seats on aircraft to parachute. It was all in the manuals and folks records and to get seats I became the unit's air Adjutant as well as OC.

**Checking the account with Sgt Rod Whiting**



So, we settled into a routine of military fitness and parachute training as well running our Field Post Office (FPO) and supporting overseas exercises and operations, mostly with one or two away on trade or education courses. Exercises and operations were mostly for two or three personnel, although we did all manage a 3-week exercise in Germany in 1967 on which we did much postal work and a fair bit of soldiering. We also took part in several Brigade exercises in the UK. We did organise a good task in the summers when we ran the FPO at Earl's Court for the Royal Tournament and each December we decamped all those not needed in Aldershot to Mill Hill to help with the Christmas post. Hard work-but also a ton of fun!

Our reputation grew as our sportsmen played or fought better in Brigade competitions. Several units got to know us better by parachuting with us. There may have been 8 of us on a drop along with 40 Parachute Brigade members, but the chalk commander was ever the senior service.





So, as Sappers we held the job. In 1967 we managed to hit the top spot in parachuting by completing more jumps per person with zero injuries than any other unit and all were from aircraft and 30% by night! Proud or what!

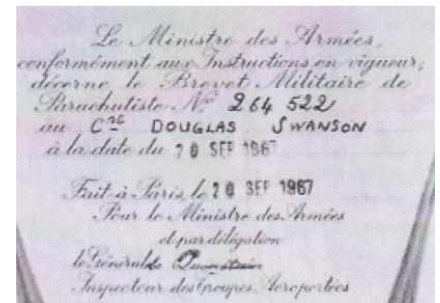
But as we celebrated the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Airborne Forces I thought of our two wartime officers Capt JCG Hine who went to Normandy with 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division. He and 5 other 'Posties' went by glider and another 4 by parachute whilst the rest of the unit went with the sea tail. One of the glider party received a broken arm and leg on landing and two of the parachute group were wounded by mortar fire whilst crossing the bridge over the River Orne. The rest carried out their postal duties.



Lt JE Morris with 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division was either luckier or less fortunate, depending how one looks at it. He and his unit were left to get to Arnhem with the sea tail and so missed all the fighting there and stayed in the UK.

I did several memorable things in the Paras - like having lunch with The Queen (twice) and doing an exchange au pair with the French Paras when we did one week parachuting and training with Les Paras

and the second week with the Les Étrangers (The Foreign Legion) including a drop into the Lake at Lourdes. Bless me! Best of all were the men in the unit and the camaraderie of being a member of Britain's Parachute Brigade.



One officer and 12 men made up the unit. There were six soldiers who made WO1 eventually and 3 of those were commissioned - Don Bramley, Eddie Lyons and Jack Bullen. Not bad for no more than 40 soldiers. The WO1s were Paul Stoddart, Dick and Brian Lee.

My own parachuting days were no over as in 1972 I spent 4 months in Northern Ireland. After lunch with 1 Para one day I was given a parachute helmet and told to be at Aldergrove Airport on the Thursday to jump with them. And so started my Thursday afternoon recreation breaks! Dropping on to Slemish Mountain from 800ft. More great fun!



#### 6 Airborne Divisional Unit RE

The 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division Postal Unit RE was formed in 1943, under the command of Captain JCG Hine RE. Although at first there was little enthusiasm among the Divisional Staff for the Division's 'Postmen' to take part in the actual airborne assault on the Continent, it was however finally decided in the interest of administrative efficiency and the maintenance of morale that element of the unit should accompany the assault forces prior to 'H' Hour.

In the lead up to the invasion when the Division was sealed in its marshalling camps the postal unit provided the only official link for the private soldier to the outside world - the last delivery of mail to assault troops was made on D-1 (5 June). To maintain security all private outgoing mail was collected by the postal unit and forwarded to holding offices where it was not released into the postal system until the news of the landings had been made public knowledge by the news agencies.

The plan was that 6 'posties' were to travel in the gliders and a further 4 with the with the parachutists,



while a 'follow up' group of 12 men were to come in by sea on D+1 or D+2. It was intended that the first 10 'posties' should set up a Field Post Office on 'D' Day which was to be located near the Division Headquarters (Div HQ) and to be operational by D+1 (7 June).

Captain James Hine RE travelled with the gliders, he later wrote of his experiences:

*It did not seem long before we were on our way to the airfield. We took our seats in the glider and then we were off. With nothing to do, my imagination began to run riot, and after a time I began to wonder where we were. I had worked out that we must have been in the air for something like three hours, when suddenly someone shouted that we were over the coast. I felt cold. A few more*



minutes and the towrope went and then we were down to a rough landing. The glider was groaning, cracking and splitting open. Someone was shouting, "Out". There seemed to be a hell of a noise going on. I grabbed my tin hat and marvelled at the sense of security it seemed to give me. Then I was out!

Nearby, a glider went up in flames and another straddled a wall. It was as though all hell had been let loose and I thought, "If I ever get out of this, I shall be lucky". I wondered how my 'jumper' lads had fared (later I found to my dismay that one had been wounded in the leg and thigh and another in the backside). I'd no idea where we were but discovered afterwards that we had come down west of Ranville, and close to one of the bridges over the River Orne which had been seized earlier by men of the Division who had crashed landed in gliders right on target. It seemed to me at the time that the chances of getting a postal service started were about as good as those of winning the pools.

Then all at once, the organisation began to take over. Someone was shepherding us of the landing zone and I remembered I'd got to make my way to Div HQ, wherever that might be. I saw a military policeman and asked him if he knew where Div HQ was. Pointing to a lane, he said, "Up there". I set out and, after walking for what seemed to be about half a mile, came to a house, which, wonders upon wonders, turned out to be Div HQ. Standing there was the DAQMG who wanted to know what sort of trip I'd had and which way I had approached Div HQ. He said, "You're lucky to have made it old man. There are snipers busy down there and they have got seven or eight chaps". He also said there was a lot of activity between the Div area and the coast and that it was out of the question, for the time being, to think of getting back to the beaches to collect and dispose of mail as had been planned.

A short time afterwards, one of my corporals turned up. He's left the UK with a stock of stamps and some other postal equipment but had become parted from it in the shock of landing. Having reported in, he went back to the landing zone, and after a search, which to some time, he came with the missing items intact.

Soon others of my lads reported in and we "set up shop" in a barn in the Div area. Conditions were pretty primitive and we spent a lot of time in the slit trenches. But from D+1 (7 June 1944) post orderlies called daily and we despatched outgoing mail. How we got back to the beaches to make the despatches is another story, but we did, and I have found personal proof that the mails despatched got home for, on D+5 (11 June) my mother received some Ranville butter wrapped in cabbage leaves in my emergency ration tin that I had sent!

On D+2 (8 June) members of the unit managed to make their way to 'Sword' beach where they contacted the Beach Group Army Post Office S698 and with them had the distinction of making the first mail despatch from Normandy.

#### **Credit to "The Royal Engineers Postal Service" On Operation OVERLORD**

Working for long hours under extremely heavy pressure and often under the most trying conditions, never blessed with a sufficiency of numbers, they worked until given their first relaxation at Christmas, when, after delivery of Christmas morning they 'downed tools' for 24 hours. Much of their work was perforce done behind the scenes, but nevertheless, efficiently and well. Secondly the postal administration staffs, without whose work, and especially that done in the planning period, the difficulties would have increased tenfold.

Lastly, but by no means least, full credit should be given to the Home Postal centre, truly the 'behind the scenes' organisation, without whose efforts no army Postal Centre could have been a success.

The average soldier in the British Liberation Army regarded as commonplace to have his letters from home put in his hands within two, or at most three, days of posting. In that fact alone is abundant testimony to the quality of the work which has been done and the excellence of the results achieved.

#### **Extract from the "Parade" Magazine**

After a visit to the Home Postal Centre the correspondent wrote:

/ had a particular interest in the next room I visited. This department makes sure that no postal packet is returned to the sender inscribed "Killed", "Missing" or "Prisoner of War" until it has been ascertained that the family in question has been properly notified of its loss. It would be impossible to describe in full the care taken by the Army Post Office of the letters entrusted to it. At no time does it distinguish between a message to a general or to a private. I saw a dossier of about 50 messages dealing with the problem of delivering a letter to a private soldier. It reached him alright in the end.

**They are not "soft wallahs, these Army Postmen.  
They do the same parades and drills as infantrymen.  
They work with their rifles beside them.  
They will use their rifles if the need arises.  
They are fighting men.**

**To them, therefore the letters they handle are the greatest personal treasure of comrades in arms".**

# A Personal Account of an Army Parachute Jumping Instructor (APJI)

Ray Ogden



Immediately after completing National Service I joined the Para Engineers (TA) where it soon became apparent that the heroes that everyone looked up to the APJIs because they were so calm when all the other NCOs were shouting and creating panic during all our activities.

My hero was Bert Fordham, ex-Indian Army who instead of shouting "GO" in our ears said softly, "off you go churn", when we jumped from the balloon. So my dream was to become an APJI.

The only problem was I would have to be a Sergeant which wasn't easy in the TA, because you had to wait until someone senior left allowing everyone to move up, unlike the Regulars, who moved on every three years, making promotion much easier. Eventually I went to Abingdon with 11 others on a PJI's course where we were split up into 4 groups of 3, each group having an RAF PJI.

It was difficult because one of us practiced teaching rolls, fan exits etc. while the other two did all the work, we then swapped round so there was no rest.

The most memorable event came on my 1<sup>st</sup> despatch from the balloon when my 5 students were the RAF PJIs, after checking the flags for clearance I dropped the exit bar and called no 1 forwards, whereupon No 2 jumped in front of him and said "I have to go 1<sup>st</sup> because I am a Flight Sergeant and he is only a Sergeant", I had my back to the exit trying to sort out what was becoming a bad tempered argument between the two of them when I got a tap on the shoulder, it was No 5 who unseen by me had pulled out all his static strop, climbed out over the back of the cage, came round the side to the front and asked "Can I go 1<sup>st</sup>," I told him very firmly, "No you can't, get back in the cage", then equally firmly told No2 to get back to his place, all a big act on their part, (I realised later) after which all went smoothly, I had remained calm and under control so passed the course with 5 others to carry on for 20 years doing my "Dream" job.

I tried to beat Bert in calmness by saying 'cheerio' as they jumped out, so I became known as Cheerio Ray.



I had moved on to the RCT. and we were asked to become 'guinea pigs' not so much that we could take a bit of rough and tumble but because we had access to Land Rovers and were made instructors to the new sport of parascending by Walter Newmark. He told us that one day 'people will be jumping from the top of mountains', we looked at him thinking he had lost his marbles, so we called him 'The mad professor', one of guys, Les Shaw had to retire because of age (45) and started 'The Green Dragons Parascending Club' which we helped him with, but we couldn't start an Army club because of our very heavy TA commitment's did not allow the time.

One day I was hang gliding when I saw someone struggling to get a paraglider off the ground so I thought 'that will never catch on' (how wrong can you be) and now people are jumping from the top of mountains.

My youngest son took up the sport and is now a paraglider test pilot in the south of France .He is presently ranked No 1 in the World, helped by the lockdown, so the rest of the sport are waiting for the lockdown to end so they can knock him off his perch.

The RAF. did all the despatching from aircraft but on one occasion I was allowed to take charge of a full load of T.A. jumping from a 'Hercules' onto Salisbury Plain, shouting out the various orders to the port and starboard sticks while the PJIs carried out the checks up to the point of 'Action Stations' whereupon the RAF. took over and I went to my position at the port door. When the green light came I despatched the whole port stick in one go very successfully. After we pulled all the strops in, I fitted my container and prepared to jump out and jokingly asked "Could they drop me off at the RV. please" after they kicked me out I came down all alone and guess what, I landed right on top of the RV. and was the 1<sup>st</sup> to arrive, (well done the navigator) I was able to tease everyone for taking so long to get there, but they got their own back when some bright spark made a rule that the 1<sup>st</sup> one to arrive should "Get the beers in".

I was very proud of the fact that of the hundreds I helped to train during pre para and doing lots of rolls, no one broke a bone until our unit was going non para and the last person I sent to Abingdon on the last course for our unit was killed. He was a good soldier, but on exiting the aircraft he went out headfirst causing a spin and the parachute wrapped around him so he couldn't pull his reserve.

APJIs were in short supply so we were kept very busy by all the various units booking the balloon at Hankley Common at W/Ends and night jumps mid-week.

On one of the mid-week jumps I took a friend with me from work to go up for a ride to watch the men jumping out, the other APJLs fitted him out with a smock and helmet, then showed him how to do the “airborne grimace” so when he led his stick into the cage I did not recognise him in the dark and called out ‘up 800, 5 men jumping’ where upon he let me know it was him, so I had to call out ‘as you were up 800 4 men jumping’

One of the great shames of being an APJL in the T.A. was that we were never allowed to despatch regulars because they had a very low opinion of the TA, a situation I believe has changed in recent years, THANK GOODNESS.

## 9 Squadron in Egypt 1953-54

### Memoir by Sir Donald Spiers

I arrived in Egypt in July 1953 on the troopship HMT Empire Ken which docked at Port Said. I was met by 2Lt Trevor Creech, the National Service officer who I was replacing, who drove me down the canal road to Ismailia and hence to the Squadron lines in Moascar garrison.

The correct title of the unit was then 9 Independent Airborne Squadron RE which was the Sapper support unit for 16 Parachute Brigade. The Squadron was an all regular unit apart from a few National Service officers.

The senior people in the Squadron at that time were:

O/C	Major Tony Poynder MC
2i/C	Capt Derek Eales
HQ Troop Officer	Lt Nick Fisher
SSM	WO2 Bill Powell MM
Chief Clerk	Sgt Roy Whittaker
1 Troop Commander	Capt John Chappel
1 Troop Officer	2Lt David Brooks (replaced in 1954 by Lt Mike Matthews)
1 Troop Sgt	Sgt Ned Parker
2 Troop Commander	Capt Peter Wade
2 Troop Officer	Lt John Grosvenor
2 Troop Sgt	Sgt Bert Stevenson
3 Troop Commander	Captain Dennis Eagan
3 Troop Officer	2Lt Donald Spiers
3 Troop Sgt	Sgt Eric Blenkinsop
Park Troop Commander	2Lt Bob Radford (replaced in 1954 by Lt Roger Spencer)

Junior NCOs who subsequently achieved great things included John Smith, Peter Myatt and Paul Scoble.

2 Troop and 3 Troop lived in concrete “igloos” while 1 Troop lived in a standard army wooden hut. The officers lived in the 2 Para officers mess.

Each troop Commander had a quite new Land Rover with a personal driver and each Troop Officer had a battered WW2 American Jeep. The 3 Troop Land Rover was driven by Sapper Prescott and my Jeep by Sapper Harvey. Radios in use were the HF 62 set and the larger 19 set.

Parachute continuation training was usually carried out from Valetta aircraft based at nearby RAF Ismailia and using the Spearhead dropping zone which was about 3 miles north of Moascar. There were no reserve parachutes then, but very few failures anyway. I only remember seeing one death due to parachute failure in 1953/54. Heavy drop training was done at RAF Kasfereet, about halfway down the Suez Canal near the Great Bitter Lake, using Hastings aircraft. Jeeps were crated and carried externally underneath the aircraft. Heavy drop platforms had not been invented yet.

Bridging, rafting and watermanship training were carried out at Gebel Maryam, which was located close to the Suez Canal just to the South of Lake Timsah. Weapons training was also carried out at this location.

Troop training camps were occasionally held at Bir Odeib, which was a site on the Red Sea to the south of Port Suez. A major task at that time was the building of Pegasus Village, a cluster of wooden huts built in wooded land near Lake Timsah for Brigade families. The work was undertaken by the Park Troop led by 2Lt Bob Radford. Bob was a much older National Service officer than the rest of us, having completed his university training as a civil engineer before his National Service, whereas the rest of the NS officers, like me, had joined the Army directly from school and before going to university. Bob was therefore older and looked very experienced and as a result was sometimes mistaken by other units as a Major because he only had one rank badge on his shoulder. He often got saluted by non-airborne Captains because of this!!



Each Troop also took its turn at manning an internal security checkpoint in Ismailia known as the Banyan Tree (named after the large Banyan tree in the centre of the site), usually for 2 weeks at a time.

We also took part in overseas Battalion Group exercises including parachuting into Northeast Cyprus and into Jordan, where we spent time liaising with the Arab Legion engineers at Zarqa.

The Squadron usually did well in inter-unit sports, often reaching the finals in Rugby, Soccer and Hockey, although not always winning the final when up against major units like the Welsh Guards.

On 7<sup>th</sup> July 1954, 9 Squadron held its farewell parade in Moascar, with the salute being taken by Brigadier Gayer, the Chief Engineer MELF, and on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1954 the Squadron 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 Aldershot marched into Waterloo Barracks East to start a new phase in their proud history.

I left the Squadron on 17 September 1954 at the end of my 2 years National Service and transferred to the TA where I joined 131 Parachute Engineer Regiment RE (TA). Very shortly I was joined in that unit by John Chappel, who became the Adjutant, together with Eric Blenkinsop and John Smith, who arrived as Permanent Staff Instructors. The commanding Officer of 131 at that time was Lt Col Ian Lyall-Grant RE, a previous O/C of 9 Squadron who went on to become a General.

## Tom Hicks, 1st Parachute Squadron RE and Railwayman. 14 Aug 1919-24 Jan 2021

**Col Chris Davies MBE**



Tom Hicks was one of the last of the WWII generation of men who stepped aside from their chosen civilian occupations and volunteered to risk their lives in some of the most valiant encounters of the War, then quietly stepped back into 'normality' for the rest of their working lives. The valour with which they fought and the humility that they exhibited in putting the horrors they had witnessed behind them is their enduring legacy and a source of awe for us all.

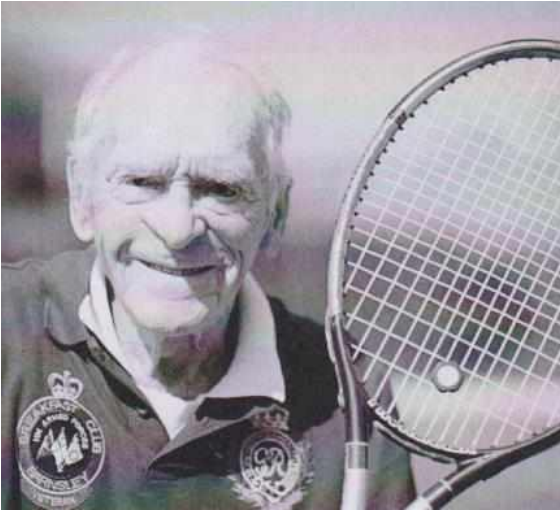
Tom was born in Widnes, Lancashire. From the age of 12 he lived in Royston, near Barnsley, for the rest of his life, so it was no surprise that it was an ardent "Yorkshire" heart that beat within him. Tough, resolute and loyal yet unassuming, amusing and warmly personable, Tom was a much respected and much-loved friend.

The life and times of Tom are wonderfully recounted in his son Norman's book: *Captured at Arnhem*. From *knocker up*, through Engine Cleaner to Fireman and Driver, Tom was a Railwayman at heart and he spent the majority of his working life hauling countless tons of coal and, occasionally, passengers, across the network of rails that covered northern England.

When war came, in 1939, he could have remained safely in a *reserved occupation* but he chose to volunteer to "do his bit". Posted, inevitably, to Longmoor, the home of the Army's Military Railway, again he could have resigned himself to a "cushy number". However, he volunteered for the nascent Airborne Forces and, in March 1942, he joined The 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers. With The Squadron and, as a member of 'C' Troop, closely embedded with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the Parachute Regiment, Tom fought in the bitter Tunisian winter war which earned the newly formed Airborne troops the *nom de guerre* of "Red Devils" from their German enemy. In July 1943, he parachuted into Sicily to capture the Primosole Bridge. His experiences there and his luck in surviving make an enthralling story in itself. But survive he did and, after a few months of long-range patrolling and a busy time *Sapping* in Italy,

The Squadron returned to England to prepare for its next encounter with the enemy: Arnhem. Tom was one of those engaged in the hectic defence of the Oosterbeek perimeter where he spent six days of exhaustion and horror before being wounded and captured. The months of captivity, coping with hunger, cold and fatigue whilst working in a German mine, required all of his innate grit, courage and *stickability* to survive.

He returned to England in May 1945 where, in 1946, after recuperation, Tom returned to the railway in Royston, to serve through the tribulations of nationalisation and the evolution from steam to diesel, until his retirement in 1982.



Tom maintained his acute awareness, fitness and zest for living. On retirement he was a passionate gardener and he returned to parachuting. He jumped into Arnhem for the last time when he was 88! He walked, weekly, in his beloved Yorkshire Dales until well into his 90's and, at 95, he bought a new tennis racket for his twice weekly sessions, quickly explaining, "ah, but I only play doubles now!"

He also charmed the ladies at his weekly jazz night dancing sessions in between tennis matches.

Duty, loyalty, warmth, humour, courage, endurance are all characteristics that applied to Tom Hicks in full measure. They earned him enormous respect and his quiet, unassuming manner earned him countless friends. All will mourn his passing and bless their luck in having known such a uniquely humble and inspirational man.

## Looking back on 131 Para Engrs (TA)

**22244552 John Holmes**

(Written in 1997)



Leaving the Royal Air Force in 1947 I had a very personal reason for my interest in Airborne Forces and in 1948 I applied to join what was at that time the nearest T.A. Airborne Unit which was in Birmingham. It was a task which appeared formidable due to the travel involved and yet eventually I was accepted and commenced attendance at Aston Barracks with a T.A. Unit of the Parachute Regiment. As you will be aware, at a later date we were then embodied with 131 Parachute Engineers at Barrows Lane, Sheldon. The memory of walking into that Drill Hall for the first time remains with me still, for here I was a stranger amongst the 'Brummies'. But from that time onwards I enjoyed a comradeship which continued for the next 34 years.

### On patrol in Aden

It is hard to describe exactly what that comradeship meant but suffice it to say that it held me captive through Annual Camps and Exercises in Germany, France, Cyprus, Libya, Aden, Denmark and the Gulf. The comrades I knew could be relied upon, no matter what circumstances existed and it must be said that no volunteer soldier makes it completely on his own, but always with the able support of a devoted Wife and family.

True ..... that special friendship or comradeship fades as we all grow older and some of the Sappers I knew have sadly since died. Continuing on until 1982 however, I had the privilege of helping to train some of their sons.....over a period that saw the arrival and the passing of seven different Troop carrying Aircraft, from the Dakota right through to the present day Hercules. Each of the aircraft in its own way, left lasting impressions on people's minds and could even be attributable to minor injuries sustained.....someone would say he had a 'Fairchild Ankle'.....whilst another suffered from a 'Hastings Neck' would protest that it wasn't the bad exit he had made that had burned his neck, but the static line which ran down to the floor at the exit doors. But throughout those years the spirit and humour of 131 stood out shoulders above the rest. Before emplaning the lads would laugh at each other in their final attire....a 'leg kit bag' giving a lopsided appearance and a zip up-overall (affectionately known as the Maternity Smock) covering from the shoulders down to the hips. But no hard training is undertaken without some risk and 131 had its share of sadness with the loss of John Lonergan at Aden, Alan Paynter in a parachuting accident, and the ten Sappers lost in the River Trent tragedy at Newark.

But then came the '**threatened**' defence cuts by the Government and things looked dismal for 131's future role. How we recall the speech and the assurance given by Major General John Cowtan as he assured us that he would fight to obtain for the Squadron a role that we would be equally proud of.....end this he certainly did.

I admit that age was catching up with me as we flew out to Cyprus on an 'Acquaint Exercise' with 59 Squadron, but again the same old comradeship accepted me without question and the transfer from the Red beret to the Green beret became reality. But not without minor problems as I recall, for the lads of 59 Squadron (quite rightly I suppose) felt that they were a little more professional than the reserve sappers working with them. '131' soon cleared up any doubt of their ability in engineering tasks, as they produced culverts that were second to none.

Even towards the end of that Camp there was a reticence to mingle, as 131 prepared a huge fire on the sea front at Akamus complete with crates of beer cooling in the water's edge, with meat, salad and Cypriot bread in plenty. Seeing the lads from 59 grouped together in the glow of the fire whilst 131 were some distance away, it became obvious that 131 had to employ one of their rare talents.... the capacity to produce a couple of hours entertainment with songs, monologues and tip top humour. The marriage of the changeover was complete and so in full circle the 50th Anniversary of 131 Squadron is to be held at Weymouth. And Wyke Regis has seen some very wet and hectic days at the Bridging Camp, My very last Camp was indeed at Weymouth and I recall that as I placed my kit outside the tent on that last day, I looked around as I stood on my own and suddenly realised that it was the last time in my life that I would actively be there .... and I suddenly felt so empty inside.

But when we leave it is what we leave behind that really counts. I know on this 50th Anniversary you will all have your own personal memories. It is my sincere wish that as your service with 131 continues it will bring you the happiness that mine always gave to me. With very good wish for the future.

## The Brigade Exercise May 1984 (AKA "The Battle of Westdown Camp")

**Baz Bassett BEM**



I apologise at the beginning for my lack of memory of exact names and a bit of leeway is asked for. I guess lockdown for me reminds me of the many tours I have faced where we were restricted to camp or duties. Not quite "lock down" but a restriction that I was reminded of was the "The Battle of Westdown camp" circa May 1984, this tale has been told before but my memories of it were the following. The Sqn were on a large Brigade exercise (This included 36 Engr Regt with RHQ i.e. CO, RSM and the Training wing) and at the time we were based at Westdown camp. Arriving that afternoon we found that the Sqn were on duty and guarding the camp from the enemy, (trusty issued pick helms at the ready). The remainder of the Brigade for some reason were allowed down-town, or at least to the local hostelrys.

**For the exercise, I was of course dressed in combat kit!**

That evening as they returned to camp various individuals treated the guard to a bit of verbal ping pong, but unusually they goaded no response from the Sqn. No names no pack drill but as the evening drew on the returning units / individuals were obviously getting a bit cheeky, they were advised to go to bed and sleep it off, the majority took this advice and to their beds did depart. A particular 4 tonner was very late, over-loaded and of course had all the rather more loud and vociferous individuals on board. Needless to say the Guard, just 2 sentries may I add, were given a bit of grief when they politely asked the passengers "to get out of the vehicle and show your ID cards" The ensuing pantomime then occurred - From the back of the 4 tonner came a variety of suggestions on what the sentries could do with themselves, very strong suggestions on their parenthood, their family DNA traces and the final insult of "Just who did the guard think they were", The 4 tonner was taking them to their accommodation and that was that, and no one was going to stop them!

There then followed a rather comical scene whereas they were jumping off the tailboard they were met by what can be best described as, the guard standing their ground, it was described to me later that those individuals landing on the ground were very quickly adopting the prone position and not necessarily by choice. When the tailboard dropped down and the main body of the vehicle disgorged itself and threatened the 2 sentries, reinforcement appeared from the guard room and it would appear that there began an ad hoc Brigade "catch all weight" boxing match. Shortly after the Ord Officer appeared but by then it had calmed down. However, the statement read to the OC by the Brigade Commander from the Ord Officers report went along the lines of "Sir it was like a scene from the film Zulu, bodies were piled up knee deep around the thin red line"!! I assume he was referring to the Berets worn by the Sqn men.

I was of course innocent and a bystander in all of this and early next morning while on the ranges I remember being briefed by Troopy Othen, the Three troop commander, who having received a signal (see copy of original attached) pointed out that he had to go and recce our new location. Which turned out to be a field on Salisbury plan.

Basically, the Sqn were to move into the field for the complete exercise and operate from there, as clearly we were taking our role of protecting the camp much too seriously. Being sent to live in the field for the Sqn was probably the best decision the Bde Cmdr could have made, after all, if we were training for war, then let's train as it should be. The Sqn were delighted, no guard, no DROS no duty vehicles etc. etc. Even the SSM Colin Walker, thought it a good idea, keep them as far away from other personnel as possible.

LINE 4 ROUTING INDICATORS	Precedence Action	Precedence Info	DTG Month Year	Time
	R	R	210000Z MAY 84	
FROM	O.C. 9 SQN.			
TO	9 SQN REES ORD A & C RANGE - PERHAM.			
INFO	/			
MESSAGE INSTRUCTIONS				
SECURITY CLASSIFICATION (Messages referring to a classified message must be classified RESTRICTED or above.)				
SIC				
WARNING ORDER (O) SENT TO MOVE INTO THE FIELD DURING THE COURSE OF DAYLIGHT HOURS. NO MOVE BEFORE 21 1300A MAY 84 NEW LOCATION TILSHED AREA //				

This is the original signal delivered via dispatch rider (Bob the Dog RIP) - to the troops in the field, found amongst the piles of rubbish I have kept. I can only assume the OC Chris Davies was so busy he did not sign or authorise it, it is the original.



Having grabbed our Parrots and Monkeys (The word used by the QM Paddy Fulton) from camp and deployed into the field we bashed up, somewhere on the plain. While inspecting the men and visiting the troop the following morning I mentioned to the Troop commander Alan Othen, the big O, that we needed to pep them up a bit as they will feel that the Sqn have been made the scapegoats. His quote to the men was "Gents get up early, have a good wash and shave and give your boots a dam good polish, it's worth an extra couple of hours in bed". I think it was a classic Sandhurst quote that had been drilled into him.

A couple of things also stand out on that exercise, we were really under pressure to perform not just as Airborne engineers but as we were out with the Regiment all the tasks were Combat engineer type ones, Mine fields, proper Bridging, Water supply etc. Not really difficult and actually all completed very well and on time by the Sqn. However, I remember the troop were given an MGB task, it was on a restricted site (very restricted) and supposed to be a silent build (how can that be with metal on metal and have you heard the noise bridging pallets make when they come off the vehicles) Troop Recce was George Asquith, a big responsibility, restricted site recce, lay out the various pegs and to get the bridging vehicles in order was his role. At the orders group the RCT Cpl in charge of the bridging train assured George that they had all done this before and they knew what to do.

Off we jolly well go to build the bridge Caz, Andy Shankland, John Foran and Runner Costan start to do what good Cpls do and start preparing left, right and centre of bridge and far bank parties (sorry, all very Cbt Engr stuff) I remained calm with the first of many brews made by, I think Spr Phil Ord, our Driver and Radio Op. Troopy Othen was sorting out the reports and returns for the Sqn CV, neither of us had concerns over the build. For me I was totally confident as the NCOS were all outstanding Sect Cmdrs and I knew from the courses at Chattenden that this was bread and butter to them. But more than that there is nothing that the Sqn likes better than a challenge, the harder it is, the better they perform. So with total confidence (fingers crossed) and reminding myself that the last thing NCOS needed was their Troop Staffy sticking his nose in I took a wander around the site, convincing myself the NCOS will get us through this bit of technical stuff. I wandered over to the bridge train, which for some reason had gone quiet, they can't all be off loaded yet I thought. As I approached I could hear George speaking to the drivers in his broad, low and quiet, Geordie tone. Strangely enough Georges voice always gave me confidence in him as there was never any panic in the tone.

The conversation went along the lines off. "whah man, divvy you newer mind yah canna mind to reverse these veeahicles with wa trailer attached". (My apologies to Geordies everywhere for my spelling and use of grammar) I noticed that the drivers had decided not to follow George's instructions and his off-loading plan and they were in a real mess with one vehicle and trailer attached, stuck. The driver declaring he could sort it out but just give him a second. The RLC NCO had somehow disappeared!! We watched for a total of about 5 minutes while the driver achieved the square root of "naff all" and George went into action. First immediate action I saw was the driver being ejected from his seat very quickly and George replacing him. Then, rather like the massed bands you see on Horse guards during the Queen's birthday parade (With all the swirling, counter marching and moving about, crossing and criss-crossing, it all then comes together in an organised layout), the bridge pallets were down and correct.

You have to remember this was a very restricted site build so the pallets had to be in a specific order and layout critical, not a lot of space to negotiate and we did not want the Troops humping pallets and bridging panels miles. The drivers by now were all in awe of George as he shunted reversed and shunted pretty well the complete bridge train into position. He had the drivers running around and as it all now seemed to be on track and not wanting to disturb George, who by now was bracing up the drivers and showing them how to do it, I went back to the CV to brief Troopy, so he could report all was on track. The amusing end to this was the trailer that was stuck. George decided that the only way to remove it was by hand and the drivers were going to have to shove it themselves, give them there due they did dig in and eventually they turned out all right, but for their punishment they were then nominated as the Decking party under Andy Shankland, ouch!!

Did we get it right, of course we did, was it on time, yes it was, was it a silent build. I am not sure about that but It was bridge down and decked with minutes to spare and as the CV drove over to "prove the bridge", out from the far bank bushes sprang one Geordie QMSI, who strangely was not impressed that we had finished on time. In his books, only BAOR soldiers can build bridges and lay mine fields. What didn't help was the comments from an unknown individual in the CV, who was heard to say, ay that's what trained monkeys do!! The CO, one Lt Col Richard Oliver (Some time 2iC of the Sqn) was satisfied, a nod to us all, a chat to the big O and they moved on. For the troop, it was Norwegians of stew from Paddy Boyce and his boys delivered by the QM, one Paddy Fulton.

Time for a brew and the next job please, we were just getting warmed up and were ready for whatever was next.

## Memories to smile at

### John (lofty) Smith

When Covid decided to close down our social life we all had to make necessary adjustments. Martin Walker and I used to keep in touch by phone two or three times a year. We decided that when the 'lockdown' began, we would make those calls once a week. Every Sunday we'd chat like two old women over the garden fence. We'd put the world to right, talk of politics, the Covid situation, Kim Jong-Un's haircut and of course 'The' Squadron.

### Martin Walker

For some years now, Martin has been in touch with Jimmy Murray, Budgie Cartwright and Jack (Geordie) Atherton.

Of course whenever a name is mentioned we recall various incidents or escapades that we had got involved in.



Not long after the instructors at Abingdon thought I could land OK, I joined the Squadron in early 1973.

16 Parachute Brigade, as it was called then, soon organised a brigade drop onto Salisbury Plain. This was in practice for a NATO airborne exercise later in Turkey. 9 Sqn were amongst the first wave. Leaving the aircraft was no problem, however, approaching the ground was very different! A miscalculation had been made about the strong wind we were to encounter as the ground came nearer. Tossed around like rag dolls a great number of us suffered break, dislocations and a battering.

I remember a medic giving me a shot of morphine and then running to get clear of the second and third waves as they came into land.

When the coast was clear we were put into various means of transport and taken to the nearest military hospital (Tidworth).

For quite some weeks or months, a number of very sad paratroopers hobbled around Aldershot with their bandages, stitches, pins and braces. We were a sorry sight.

As we got stronger the big test loomed. Would we have the confidence to jump again?

One overcast morning Jack Atherton and I ascended in the 'balloon' above the Hankley Common DZ. This was it. The RAF dispatchers called me forward, as the heaviest I had to jump first. Once my 'chute had deployed I looked up and saw Jack leaving the cage. We both landed safely and that night sank a few warmers into the bank to celebrate.

Martin who had previously made a mess of his ankle gradually got stronger and was soon hurling himself to the ground again.

I only knew Martin for about 2 years, but I would like to put the record straight - he led me astray!

I did warn him a few weeks ago that all his secrets would come out. Most of us in 1 Troop will remember his talent for bending the barrel of his SLR on a lamp post in Belfast. In an open back 4-tonner with weapons bristling over the sides we hurtled through the streets. We were ready for anything. It must have been an IRA lamp post which came too close. At first we thought Martin had been shot but our concerns turned to laughter after we saw the condition of his weapon. He did have a bruise for a while.

Someone in the section did comment that he'd be able to fire round corners without exposing himself to returning fire.

Back in Aldershot after a heavy session among the many drinking establishments downtown, Martin and I carried four 45 gallon drums upstairs into the Troop lines. These were then put under the legs of Jake McKue's bed.

The joke was on us, when Jake came in he simply climbed up, settled down and slept all night. In the morning he didn't really notice he had to reach further for his boots. Naturally, we cleared it all away before inspection by our Troop officer, Capt Jim Snape. Sorry Jake.

In 1974 the Sqn deployed to Hong Kong. We were working in the mountains of the New Territories near the Chinese border. It was a mammoth task, constructing a concrete road, access routes, culverts etc. throughout a large area.

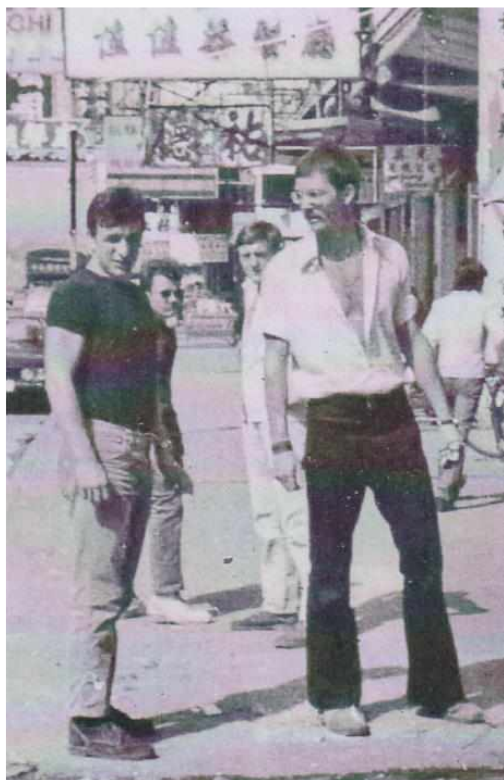
Umpteen pieces of machinery were in use on the project, graders, diggers, concrete mixers, dump trucks and every tool an industrial site required. Naturally the area had to be guarded, and on duty one night Pete Warren, Martin Walker and myself were detailed.

After a quiet night we decided to patrol the site before the Sqn arrived to commence work. Amongst the various machines were a number of Dumpers - and someone came up with the idea of using one to patrol the site. Pete and I climbed into the front bucket as Martin had decided he would like to drive. Initially, all went well.

Due to the steep incline on one particular hill the machine struggled. Pete suggested we could walk up the hill quicker, and we made it. Now the problem started, the slope on the other side was just as steep, but throwing caution to the wind, off we went. The speed of our descent was really picking up and we knew that there was a very tight bend at the bottom. Pete and I turned around with the intention of saying to Martin, "Excuse me old chap, would you mind slowing down a bit. Thank you", or words to that effect. The driving seat was empty, a hundred yards or so up the hill we could see Martin jumping up and down waving his arms.

At a rapid rate of knots the sharp bend approached and as we went over the edge our training at Abingdon paid off. Pete did a side left and myself a side right. The landing, thankfully, was soft and the Dumper embedded itself between us. Scrambling back onto the road to be met by a very breathless Martin who explained that he'd lost control and could only think of abandoning the ship!

When the Sqn arrived on site I was naturally given a bollocking by our SSgt Terry Wick.



**Martin Walker, Colin Sandwin, Pete Warren and John Smith taken in Yueng Long by Colin Lovely in 1974**

Martin and I laugh about it now, and hope Pete doesn't have nightmares. Just remember, if Martin Walker gives you a lift anywhere, just check now and again to make sure he's still in the driving seat.

A message for Pete Warren, do you remember the day you left the Army? I gave you a lift to the railway station in Aldershot. As you went to board your train, a young lady stepped onto the platform and ran towards me. You shouted, "Put him down Wynne, you don't know where he's been".

Thankfully she didn't put me down and we have been married now 46 years.

## Membership Report

**Steve (Billy) Morris MSM**

We welcome the following new members

Membership No	Name	Units	Service Dates
1525	Anthony (Tony) Peter Goodall	9 Indep Para Sqn RE 22 SAS	1973-1976 1990-1993
1526	Derek (Rocky) Rockett	9 Para Sqn RE	1983-1992
1527	Gary MacDonald	51 Para Sqn RE	2002-2009

**"GENTLEMEN, WELCOME TO THE AIRBORNE ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION"**

## Rugby Reminiscing

**Roy Gambrill**

Sitting watching the Six Nations Rugby back in February, reminded me of my introduction to the game while serving in 9 Para Sqn. With the usual depleted numbers compared with the major units, the Sqn team still managed to win the majority of their matches in Aldershot.

At this time during the early 60s the Sqn had a formidable pack with Charlie Edwards as hooker, Rick Mogg and Dennis Scott as props. Other notable forwards were Bill Rudd, Ben Guest with George 'Brummie' Morrow a knowledgeable scrum half or standoff. A good 'kicker' and full back was Dave Rance.

Fast forward a few years and I was APTCI attached to 34 Lt Air Def Regt based in Dortmund whose rugby team I trained and successfully won the BAOR RA Rugby Cup. This result afforded us a trip to Woolwich, London to play the UK RA Cup Winners for the RA Macawain Cup. I firmly believe that winning this match meant more to both the CO 34 Regt and myself than any other competition, as the defeated opposition was none other than 7 RHA Para Regt!



# Brief Outline On The South Sudan Mine Action Programme (SS MAP)

John Moran MM



## Introduction - Background

The South Sudan Mine Action Programme is a key component to the UN's Mission in Sudan. Ex members of 9 Para Sqn RE have played key roles in the mine action programme filling roles as Programme Managers, Operations Managers and Technical Field Managers with mine clearance organisations. These include Mark Livingstone, Julius Unsing, Nigel Clarke and John Foran.

Sudan is a landlocked country in east-central Africa and borders, clockwise: Sudan from the north, Ethiopia from the east, Kenya, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo from the south and the Central African Republic from the west. It gained its independence from Sudan in 2011. The Nile River (White) is the dominant geographic feature of South Sudan, flowing 3,000kms from Uganda in the south, through Juba and Malakal and Khartoum to Egypt in the north.

## Recent History

The country was affected by two civil wars. The first from 1955 to 1972 between the Sudan government and the Anya Nya (colloquial name for 'snake venom') rebel army followed by the Second Sudanese Civil War between the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) and the government of Sudan. This lasted for over 20 years. The country suffered serious neglect, lack of infrastructural development, major destruction, and displacement. Families fled the fighting and became refugees in neighbouring countries or Internally Displaced People (IDPs). Following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed between the Sudan government and SPLA (M) in 2005 many returned to their former areas to rebuild homes. However, the legacy of the fighting identified land had become contaminated with landmines, Exploded Remnants of War (ERW), Abandoned Ammunition (AXO) and cluster munitions. Its impact created a serious risk to life, non-use of arable land, and lack of redevelopment all contributing to a negative effect on economic survival. As a result of two other major incidents of fighting in 2013 and 2016, additional ordnance has been encountered.

The United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) supported the implementation of the CPA during the interim period set up by the Government of Sudan and SPLM. The CPA called for a referendum to take place to determine the status of Southern Sudan. It was held in January 2011, with the overwhelming majority, voting for independence.

Following the end of this interim period, and the subsequent independence of South Sudan in July 2011, the Security Council established a new mission, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

## United Nations Mine Action Services (UNMAS)

UNMAS is an integral component of UNMISS and supports three of the four main core UNMISS mandated activities:

- Protection of civilians,
- Creating the conditions conducive of the delivery of humanitarian assistance,
- Supporting the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement and the peace process,
- Monitoring and investigating human rights abuses.

The presence of explosive hazards not only threatens the safety of civilians in terms of physical harm from explosion, but such hazards are a barrier between communities and the resources or services they need.

To achieve this, UNMAS coordinates and tasks Mine Action teams with manual, mechanical, and canine capacities to perform the following tasks:

- Survey and clear mines, ERW, and ammunition stockpiles.
- Conduct route verification and clearance to allow safe access and to enable the delivery of humanitarian assistance.
- Monitor, investigate, verify, and report on the use of indiscriminate explosive weapons, such as cluster munitions.
- Provide risk education to enable people to recognize, mitigate, and report explosive hazards in their midst, and awareness training to UN and humanitarian personnel.
- Collect data, map new hazards, and disseminate threat information to UN and humanitarian partners.
- Conduct entry point control and search activities with explosives detection dogs (EDD).
- Monitor and assure the quality of mine and ERW clearance work conducted in South Sudan.

UNMAS consists of national and international staff; many are former military personnel with a wealth of hands-on experience, management and competency from working with commercial organisations and NGOs in other mine affected countries. Their main office is within the UNMAS HQ in Juba and they have regional offices in selected states within the country.

**Information Management System Mine Action (IMSMA).** IMSMA is a globally used and internationally accepted database and software system that allows mine action programmes to efficiently correlate and evaluate information. In addition, IMSMA provides powerful tools to rapidly disseminate information on hazardous areas (HAs) and other important aspects of mine action by providing digital information as printed maps and statistics.

All UNMAS mine action offices and mine action partners are provided with an IMSMA system capable of receiving, analysing, and displaying many types of data ranging from minefield locations, clearance operations and Explosive Ordnance Risk Education

(EORE). IMSMA implemented a new data collection method IMSMA Core system in August 2020 using Survey123 web application. IMSMA is updated monthly.

**National Mine Action Authority (NMAA).** South Sudan has its own National Mine Action Authority (NMAA). It is responsible for overseeing all demining activity in the country with assistance from UNMAS. It works in cooperation with other demining actors to direct surveys and clearance work, as well as providing Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) through implementing partners to impacted communities.

#### **NATIONAL TECHNICAL STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES (NTSGs)**

All demining activities including mechanical and manual, Battle Area Clearance (BAC) and disposal of items located including, stockpile destruction, White Phosphorous, Cluster Munitions and incineration of ammunition are conducted in accordance with NTSGs, and organisations own Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs). Other activities such as EORE are also included as are other procedures such as: Survey, Non-Technical Survey (NTS), medical, communication training and accreditation, Task Site Documentation and Quality Management Systems to list a few. NTSGs continue to evolve and will reflect any amendments or new introductions to the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS).

#### **RECRUITMENT**

All mine action organisations' demining personnel including Team Leaders (TL) and some Technical Field Managers (TFM) are recruited from the South Sudan Defence Force (SSDF - changed from SPLA in 2018) through the NMAA. Most will have previous experience from the MAP having previously worked with other contractors or NGOs.

Those who are required to work on the EORE programme are recruited from open sources but will have previous experience from other Mine Action organisations or NGOs. Some individuals will also have attended and completed courses such as Non-Technical Survey (NTS) at the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD).

Initially, medical staff came predominantly from Zimbabwe but as more South Sudanese completed higher level education and medical training (mainly in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania), those qualified and with relevant experience and competency are employed as Team Medics on completion of training and UNMAS accreditation. Medical coordinators continue to be Zimbabwean or Tanzanian. These individuals completed their training in South Africa and gained experience working in A&E in hospitals in their own country or South Africa. Medical coordinators and Team Medics continue with Distance Learning through Continuous Development Programmes and attend exams during leave periods.

Programme Managers and Operation Managers come predominantly from a military background. TFMs (who manage teams in the field) were initially from western countries and ex-military but in recent years these positions have been filled by qualified, experienced, and competent national staff and other African personnel, chiefly from Zimbabwe. These attended and passed their Level 3 IMAS course at the International Mine Action Training Centre (IMATC) in Nairobi. Following the closure of the IMATC, individuals attend the IMAS Level 3 and Level 3+ courses at the MAT Kosovo School in Pristina.

#### **TRAINING**

All team managers complete a specific in-house training programme that is divided into two distinct phases: Management and Technical Training. Management Training is a 10-day programme and includes below some of the topics:

- **IMSMA documentation.** Information identified in the field on ordnance or HAs is inserted into IMSMA documentation and forwarded to UNMAS for input to the database using Tablet Survey123 application. Therefore, TFMs and TLs need familiarisation with the required documentation to ensure its accuracy before submitting. Time is allocated on this important topic to introduce new members to the documentation. It includes but is not limited to: Daily Reports (including EORE Daily Reports), Hazardous Area reports, Hazard Completion, UXO Survey, Accident Reports and Route Assessment. Each has their own requirement; information may be duplicated but the key to completion is accuracy.
- **SOPs.** Any change to procedures is introduced and a questionnaire on SOPs is provided for management to complete each evening and hand in prior to the completion of the management programme. This is marked, and any issues identified are raised and discussed separately with the individual and group. Organisations SOPs are submitted at the beginning of each awarded contract for accreditation by UNMAS ensuring they reflect any changes made to NTSGs.

- **Land Service Ammunition (LSA).** This consisted of both a PPT of commonly located items in South Sudan and a recognition test on inert items located from the field. Ordnance included: rockets, projectiles, grenades, mines and mortars. Cluster Munitions were also covered. An LSA booklet for reference on the most common types of ammunition located in South Sudan is also issued to each TPM.
- **Explosive Ordnance Disposal.** This covered the discovery, movement and disposal procedures of ordnance located in the field or on Quick Response Tasks within Juba or other major towns. This could be in an open space, built up area or within a compound, embassy or church/mosque. Disposal includes a single item, bulk demolitions and White Phosphorous. UNMAS staff developed a useful guide entitled 'Demolition Order Decision Tool' and an excel sheet containing the AUW and NEQ of each type of ordnance in South Sudan. Disposal procedures for air delivered weapons is also covered.
- Demolition safety distances are covered using a Demolition Order sheet also developed by UNMAS staff that assists personnel in calculating explosives and safety distances. When items are identified for demolition, the quantity, AUW and NEQ of the ordnance are inserted into their relevant boxes and this automatically calculates the total AUW and NEQ that in turn produces the safety distances. Depending on the quantity of what was being destroyed, the number of sandbags (NATO standard) required for Protective Works needs calculating or the depth and width of trenches used for disposal needs designing.
- If completing Bulk Demolitions, a stacking system is designed and included in the Demolition Order. No Bulk Demolitions or White Phosphorous disposal is conducted until approval of the Demolition Order is received from UNMAS. Additional precautions are enforced for disposal of White Phosphorous mortars as outlined in NTSGs/SOPs including post demolition procedures.
- If burning Small Arms Ammunition (SAA) then either the UNMAS designed and approved incinerator was selected, or a design of an Open Burning trench was prepared for approval by UNMAS.

A lot of effort is spent on training especially for those who had not experienced operations in South Sudan. This includes going through a blank copy of the Demolition Order and explaining in turn the requirements of each paragraph, followed by talking through a completed and previously approved copy to examine each stage in sequence. At the end of this training period each TFM had to sit an UNMAS EOD written exam and Demolition Order exam to. The latter is an open book exam to be completed within three hours.

**Implementation Plan (IP).** This is produced by the TFM/TL for each team's task and outlines the methodology of the task for completion, number of days estimated including start up and completion phases, daily output expected, resources being used and additional assets if required. Each task had its own requirements and obstacles so scenarios from previous tasks were discussed during the training with solutions identified and noted. Each manager is provided with tasks that had previously been completed in the field for homework. This would entail reading SOPs to identify the procedure/methodology required and safety distances to be implemented. The next morning the TFM presents his IP to the other managers and issues raised are discussed as to why a certain approach was adopted.

## Medical Training

Organisations have in place a robust, proven medical care capability which delivers safe, effective, immediate and prolonged care in the event of a Medical Emergency. Therefore, all personnel are trained and accredited in accordance with NTSGs/SOPs and Medical Treatment Protocols.

While management complete their training all Team Medics under the supervision of the Medical Coordinator concurrently complete their refresher training following guidelines outlined in NTSGs/SOPs. All training is monitored by UNMAS-SSD Medical Coordinator and UNMAS QA staff.

Training included:

- **Team Medics (or Immediate Care Providers).** This training covers: site safety, diagnosis, catastrophic bleeding control, airway, respiratory and circulatory management, fracture management, packaging and transportation, eye injury and burn management, wound and metabolic homeostasis management.
- **Team Medic training** consists of 60 hours training, 60% of which must be practical skills and patient management scenarios. All training is recorded in the Team-Medics Logbook that is frequently inspected and signed off during Internal and External Quality Assurance inspections.

On completion of Team Medics training and in-house testing by the Medical coordinator, the remaining team personnel complete their training.



- Demining Team Member (and other team personnel including drivers, Camp Managers). A casualty's survival is based on the coordinated and controlled, and timely reaction of a demining team that provides the immediate clearance of hazards, casualty collection, movement and supportive care (commonly known as the CASEVAC). This response is only possible with correct training, exposure, and practice. Training includes safety, recognition of catastrophic bleeding and mechanism of injury, bleeding control (pressure application (direct and indirect) and extremity tourniquet application), management of airway (casualty positioning and head-tilt, chin-lift), chest compressions, Packaging and Transportation (lifting and rolling and stretcher transport), bites and stings, hypothermia, sunstroke, heat exhaustion.
- All training is logged in the deminers Logbook, dated and signed off and retained by the deminer.
- Refresher medical training is completed at specific intervals during the project including on the return from leave of all personnel.
- Detailed site records are prepared and maintained that includes training, personnel on site, CASEVAC procedures and exercises, Quality Assurance reports, Medical Logbook in date, patient records maintained and location of HLS. The team's trauma bag is in date and regularly inspected as outlined in SOPs. A register of drugs is maintained and action with proof of requests/resupply completed.
- All teams have alternative means of effective communications in place (HF radio, SAT phone and mobile), A dedicated ambulance/safety driver is identified, whose sole responsibility is to maintain and drive the vehicle and has knowledge of the route to the HLS or nearest hospital.

### EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE RISK EDUCATION (EORE)

EORE is designed to ensure that women, girls, boys and men in affected communities are aware of the risks from Explosive Ordnance (EO) and are encouraged to behave in a way that reduces the risk to people, property and the environment. The objective is to reduce the risk to a level where people can live safely, thus contributing to an environment where economic and social development can occur free from the constraints imposed by EO contamination. This is completed through public information dissemination, education and community mine action liaison.

Training is outsourced to a national EORE provider; former UNMAS members with experience and knowledge from the field.

Training topics include Community Liaison (visiting mine/ERW communities, identifying the level of threat and detailing the type of work to be completed and time span. Other subjects are LSA recognition, IMSMA documentation and reporting, question technique (6 Ws), planning and preparation, medical training, use of EORE and UNICEF produced pamphlets (covering the topics of the EORE presentation).

EORE presentation. This is an official presentation identifying the threat, official and local signs and to encourage positive behaviour. In short the following banners are used to highlight specific topics:

- Places to avoid: This covers, abandoned buildings and bunkers, overgrown vegetation, bunkers, destroyed bridges and vehicles,
- Danger: Awareness of Landmines and ERW,
- Effects: From landmines or ERW,
- Official markings: Standard mine signs, painted stones, coloured pickets, red and white tape,
- Local Markings: Stones placed in a circle around an item, crossed sticks, high vegetation tied in a knot at the top, vegetation placed by a mine or ERW,
- What to Do: Never, pick up, do not touch, share the information, and inform local authorities and what action to take if in a mined/ERW contaminated area.

There are opportunities in the field on operations to ask questions and it is during this exchange that the threat of mines/ERW may be identified, updated or threat removed. Attendance is recorded and considers women, girls, boys and men in the group. Presentations are also given at schools and in recent years EORE has been added to the education curriculum.

During the training schedules, regular visits are made by UNMAS staff and the QA agency.

**Technical Training Mine Action.** This takes place in a known safe area and represents an official clearance/working task site and is marked in accordance with SOPs. Safety distances are enforced, signage in place, and the site consists of a Command Post (CP) parking area, medical point, admin, rest and stores areas, instrument testing area, rubbish areas, metal pit, explosives storage area, access lanes, Forward Rest and Medical area (if applicable).

Training on mechanical, manual and BAC clearance drills are completed in accordance with the prepared training programme and IP, EOD procedures on scenarios are conducted on located inert items, EORE is presented and

assessed, and teams rehearse their communication and question technique skills, medical training continues and CASEVAC procedures are continually completed.

Internal Quality Assurance and External Quality reports on all activities are completed, logged and action taken if anomalies are identified. During this phase, all personnel Logbooks are updated highlighting training completed and signed off.

At the start of the days' activities a Site and Safety Brief covering; history, threat, markings, communications and 'Actions On' is presented by the TFM, followed by a short team brief covering the activities that are to be actioned, including allocation of activities, equipment required, standards and safety requirements and 'Actions On' (location of item, unplanned detonation, movement by individuals (community) or animals into the Hazardous Area. The Site and Safety Brief is mainly reserved for site visitors.

During this training period all equipment, including medical holdings and vehicles are checked by UNMAS staff to ensure it complies with the requirements of the specific contract.

## ACCREDITATION

Accreditation takes place on the training area and is an assessment conducted by UNMAS Officers on the organisation's team assets. It is an assessment of the organisation's competency in operational planning, resourcing, managing and conducting and performing humanitarian demining activities in an operational environment.

It covers all specific mine action and associated activities undertaken by the team. It includes the competency of individuals, team support, supervision, and managerial elements in all aspects of the related activity. On arrival the UNMAS staff will brief the TFM on a scenario and he in turn formulates a plan, conducts briefing (as highlighted above), delegates tasks and responsibilities and starts the task. Each phase of the task is monitored, individual drills and 'Actions On' are observed to ensure compliance with SOPs and IP. CASEVAC drills are scrutinized to ensure the team are working together, command and control with concurrent activity is evident and that the Team Medic conducts procedures as outlined in NTSGs/SOPs.

When completed and if successful the organisation is awarded Operational Accreditation allowing it to move to its designated task site or target areas in the event of a Survey Team, EOD Team or Multitask Teams.

Medical. The accreditation process is an individual Team Medics opportunity to demonstrate their medical skills and knowledge base. Accreditation is proctored by the UNMAS-SSD Medical Coordinator and involves the following assessment process:

- Written Exam - A comprehensive exam that assesses theory knowledge in all mandatory areas of a Medical Treatment Protocol and pharmacokinetics. A score of 80% or higher on the written exam is considered passing.
- Oral Exam - Candidates are prompted to respond orally to a variety of questions with respect to those subjects and concepts where a level of understanding is best demonstrated verbally.
- On site Objectively Structured Clinical Exams (OSCEs) will be conducted for a minimum of two treatment interventions and a minimum of two practical patient exercises as outlined in NTSGs.

Candidates that successfully complete the accreditation process are notified along with their organisational representative and a record of the event produced for and filed with UNMAS.

## OPERATIONS

The teams during the training period receive their Task Orders. This contains a number of tasks in specified areas and each task has a unique ID number. Depending on location recces may be completed but if distance or weather (training usually takes place at the end of the rainy season in September/October time) prevents movement then a Desktop Assessment is completed, and IPs are prepared supported with HA reports from IMSMA.

### Survey Operations and Its Role

Non-technical survey (NTS) is typically the starting point for the assessment of land, its categorisation as a suspected or confirmed hazardous area (SHA/CHA), and the associated processes of cancelling, reducing or clearing land for productive use. It involves a thorough investigation of new information about possible EO contamination, or a previously recorded HA, generally without the use of mine action assets inside the suspected area.

Non-technical survey is usually considerably less costly than technical survey and clearance, yet it can have the greatest impact, in terms of square metres, of all the activities associated with the definition and management of contaminated land.

Following completion of NTS, the team should be in a position with the information gathered to reclassify the area into one or more Confirmed Hazardous Areas (CHA). It may be possible to move from NTS straight to clearance operations

if the information collected is reliable (from direct evidence - meaning an individual has seen mines/ERW or there has been an explosive incident in the area). Therefore, NTS has the following outputs:

- Identify, define presence and/or remove all suspicion of mines/ERW,
- Recommend the definition of the CHA, where appropriate and justified on the basis of "all reasonable effort",
- Recommend the cancellation of some or all of the area of existing SHA/CHAs where appropriate with justification,
- Recommend further NTS or technical action including, where appropriate, details of recommended asset types and methodologies.

CHAs should only be produced on completion of the NTS where there is sufficient and direct evidence of mines/ERW that require further action. It may not be possible to accurately define the boundaries of the HA, but it should not be exaggerated.

NTS Methodology. Prior to visiting the specified area, a Desk Top assessment is completed with all relevant documentation (IMSMA) examined and key personnel in the area identified.

On arriving at the village, introductions are completed, and an area identified for meetings with the community. This could be in a school or in a shaded area but away from main roads or walkways to avoid distractions during meetings and or EORE presentations.

The team discusses the information contained in the HA report and confirm its presence and location. During this process additional information may come to the fore or in some cases nothing is confirmed. Any incidents on mine/ERW involving both human and animals is identified.

The length of time land has been used that is perceived to contain mines/ERW is identified, as is the depth of excavation or ploughing and numbers of times it has been completed), type of crops and any items located. Animal grazing areas are identified. Areas that are not being used and reasons why will also be identified.

Sources of Information. These are classified as:

First-hand sources of information: people and institutions with first-hand knowledge about a specific hazard (when and where mines were laid). This information may be considered more accurate than second and third hand information. First-hand sources of information may include men, women and children in the affected communities, military, police, mine victims, local political dignitaries, and others who observed mine laying or accidents etc.

Second-hand sources of information: people and institutions that did not form part of or observed, for example, the mine laying or accidents but have been told about the EO hazard. These may also include men, women and children in the local communities, pedestrians, local authorities, farmers, hunters, hospitals etc.

Physical evidence of EO: physical observable information that indicate various degrees of evidence of EO. Physical evidence may include craters, military positions, trench lanes, local mine marking, packaging, SAA cartridges.

In the Technical Survey role, the only difference is that appropriate technical interventions are made as part of the survey process. As an example, Technical Survey may involve limited clearance using one or more technologies (manual, mechanical). Thus, depending upon the requirement, survey operations may:

- Undertake operations to identify Suspected Hazardous Areas (SHAs) as a first step,
- Undertake operations aimed at confirming SHA's as Confirmed Hazardous Areas (CHAs), or cancelling them through the evidence gathering and analysis processes, whether completely (Cancelled Land); or partially (Reduced Land)
- Expand Technical Survey into full clearance by the survey team (reinforced if necessary), resulting in Cleared Land).

Survey Operations are conducted with meticulous attention to detail and must produce clear and verifiable results if time, effort, and resources are not to be wasted. Investigative techniques and the gathering of verifiable information are key aspects and Survey Teams must be trained to work to the highest standards- including the accurate mapping and definition of SHAs and CHAs, analysing information, recording, and reporting with both accuracy and detail.

### Land Release Process.

Land Release back to the community is the overall aim of any particular mine action activity. The process may be applied to SHA, and a CHA right from the beginning of a task (in other words to hazards which are already reflected in the IMSMA database), or it may be applied to potential hazards which are not yet reflected in the IMSMA database.

The Land Release process is an evidence-based decision-making process (outlined in NTSGs/SOPs, with accompanying flow chart and pictograms) that helps determine with confidence which land requires further action and which does

not. In general, it involves; identification of HAs, cancellation of land through NTS, reduction of land through TS and clearance of land with Explosive Ordnance contamination.

Land Release describes the process of applying 'all reasonable effort' in order to identify and better define Confirmed Hazardous Area (CHA) and then removes suspicion of mines and ERW through NTS, TS and clearance.

**All Reasonable Effort.** All 'reasonable effort' in the South Sudan MAP is the process of deciding when land can be released from suspicion i.e., the level of effort required to achieve the desired level of confidence that the land is free of mines/ERW. All 'reasonable effort' at one extreme, may only be the conduct of a NTS which finds no evidence of mines/ERW. The commitment of additional resources is unlikely to justify the expected additional information about the area. However, if the NTS confirms some evidence of mines/ERW, it would be reasonable to apply additional effort to gain more confidence of areas free of mines/ERW and which are not.

In this case 'all reasonable effort' may mean that a technical survey or clearance should be conducted. All 'reasonable effort' for the release of previously suspected land (SHA/CHA/DHA) is reached at a point where sufficient and reliable information has been obtained to conclude, with confidence, that there is no evidence of mines/ERW. Varying levels of clearance is undertaken to reach this point. In relation to the achievement of confidence in mine action activities, the point at which it is unreasonable to expend more effort and resources to achieve the desired result is determined by UNMAS.

**Information Gathering.** This starts when the NTS/Survey team as stated above when the team arrive in the affected area to liaise with the local community. The process continues throughout the clearance operation which leads to the contaminated area being fully defined and confidence gained in order to decide when clearance can be assessed to cease. New information that becomes available is updated and may include the following: CHAs that are being occupied or used by the community without incident, newly cultivated areas within the CHA, new HAs identified by the community.

A CHA should be defined on the basis of direct evidence of the presence of mine/ERW contamination. Examples of direct evidence may include but is not limited to; visual observation of mine/ERW, visual of parts of ordnance, craters, detonations caused by animals, detonations caused by fire (during dry season), mine accidents and incidents where the location can be confirmed, mine signs (official or local),

The application of land release assumes a level of risk based on the verification of threat. It recognizes that because a hazard is reflected on the IMSMA database, the details may not necessarily be accurate and that all hazards reported benefit from thorough application of the land release process.

An example may be that a HA identified from a previous survey may have changed as people return from refugee camps or as IDPs. As development takes place and land is cultivated it may be identified that a threat no longer exists so with NTS being completed the conditions identified may allow the area to be cancelled. Conversely it may be identified that a threat does exist, and this may be addressed as a High Threat Area and clearance can be implemented. Similarly, an area could be assessed as a Low Threat Area and Technical Survey completed. Tech Survey is a process whereby clearance lanes at a specific width and set distance are cut into an area to determine the threat. The percentage of area to be Tech Surveyed is dictated by the quality of information received from the information gathering process.

During Tech Survey or clearance, Fade Out is completed from the last mine found. This distance (buffer) shall be included in the IP and may depend on factors such as type of minefield (nuisance - predominantly or patterned - unusual). Fade Out may be increased with UNMAS approval due to the nature of ground or how close an item is located if close to the boundary of the area or density of items being located.

Land can only be cancelled, reduced and or handed over when it is deemed safe to use after a credible and well documented evidence process has been fully implemented.

An example of a successful NTS following the guidelines and procedures laid out in NTSGs/SOPs can see a HA initially identified as being 250,000 square metres in size being cancelled (in consultation with UNMAS). Another NTS task may result in only 20,000 square metres being cleared or Tech Surveyed from an estimated 500,000 square metres with the remaining being cancelled. This then allows critical assets to be freed up to conduct operations in other areas as opposed to clearing the whole site for minimum output.

## **Mechanical Clearance**

Mechanical demining is an essential component of humanitarian mine action and part of an integrated approach with the organizational structure, logistic and administrative support to provide sustainability. Machines used in the past included the ARMTRAC 400, ARMTRAC 100, Mine Wolf 370 and the Mine Wolf 240 (commonly known as the Mini Mine Wolf). This article features only the Mini Mine Wolf (MMW).

**Mechanical Team.** This consists of a MMW that is remotely controlled from a Mine Protected Vehicle (MPV) that accommodates the MMW operator with his Control Box, Team Leader (TL) who provides guidance to the MMW operator, a MPV driver, an observer (deminer, who records any detonations and observes any mines being thrown out



by the machine) and another deminer. These two deminers will also support the TL, when required. The MPV team is equipped with PPE, demining equipment with detector, radios, a spinal board (stretcher), recovery equipment and water within the MPV.

The rest of the team includes additional deminers, Team Medic and drivers.

Mechanical demining machines do not clear ground to humanitarian standards. They are always followed up with manual deminers conducting sub-surface instrument search after the machine before handover to the community and after successfully completing External QA from UNMAS. When preparing the ground, the machine is to achieve 13cm depth minimum. This depth shall be set and maintained automatically by the machine. The 13cm depth shall first be checked outside the HA in a known safe area in a 'Test Box' as outlined in SOPs.

Depth Check. This is completed a minimum three times each day during mechanical operations. At a specific spot, the Team Leader will order the machine to stop, he will alight the MPV wearing PPE, walk along the tracks of the machine, stop, and using a trowel, gently scrape back the loosened soil until reaching undisturbed ground and records the depth to the surface of the ground. The location is recorded with GPS and coordinates which are entered into the Daily Report.

Skipped Areas. These are areas which due to thick vegetation, small trees, rocky areas and or ditches/dried stream beds prevent mechanical ground preparation. These are marked off by the deminers using red and white tape with pickets and cleared by manual assets using standard demining drills when safety distances from the machine allow. The boundaries of Skipped Areas are recorded using DGPS and overlaid onto the final Completion Report which indicates manual clearance has been completed within that area.

Use of available tools. The tiller is mainly used in HAs when the threat is known to be anti-personnel mines and the flail is the preferred option on anti-tank. The IP will list the tool to be used. There are occasions if the ground conditions consist of sub-surface rock or stony ground then irrespective of threat type a flail may be used (otherwise the loss of chisels and holders on the tiller may be time consuming to replace and also expensive). If ground conditions dictate that 13cms depth cannot be achieved on the first pass then two passes will be completed to achieve the required depth and recorded. Only the amount of square metres achieved on the first pass is recorded and accounted for.

Machines may or may not be involved in the detonation, destruction or removal of land mines, they are also used in the ground preparation role to improve the efficiency of demining operations by removing obstacles by.

- Vegetation cutting
- Removal of tripwires
- Loosening soil
- Removal of building debris, rubble, defensive wire obstacles and other such hindrances,

Mechanical operations conform to an approved IP and will start clearance from a known safe area. If the High Threat Area is known then clearance will proceed towards that area until mines are detonated and or crushed. Fade Out will be completed from these mines until the High Threat Area has been completed by both mechanical and manual.

Mechanical Tech Survey is completed in an area identified as a Low Threat Area which consists of clearance lanes being cut at a specified width and distance from each other until the threat area is reached and cleared. The IP will state the minimum of clearance per day for the machine to complete and this can range from 2500 to 7000sqm. The average is 3,000m but this depends very much on the type of ground being cleared.

Items located. All items located including parts of mines or fuses following clearance are destroyed in situ at the end of the working day. If mortars and or projectiles are located either by manual clearance or follow up instrument search and are assessed as safe to move, these are relocated to a marked EOD pit and destroyed before the site is handed over to the community. Each item located is recorded by DGPS, noted in the Daily Report and its position included in the final Completion Report map.

EOD Check Area. This is an area identified and marked with pickets and red and white tape where the MMW may have completed its daily task. A deminer wearing full PPE conducts a 360° visual search around the machine on completion of the day's mechanical preparation. He visually searches the tool asset, moving parts behind the tool, tracks and roller wheels and underneath the machine. Using a soft brush, he carefully removes all dust and any twigs that may have fallen onto the machine. The TL observes from 30m away in the MPV. This is completed to prevent any mine, fuses or part of a mine being moved on the MMW from the worked area to the maintenance area (located outside the HA). Communications are maintained using VHF Motorola's between the TL and deminer.

Vehicle Recovery Exercises. These are conducted on a monthly basis and recorded. Typically, four scenarios are considered and include MMW240 bogged in, mechanical failure, mine strike and vehicle flipping/rolling. Safety is the primary consideration and whatever scenario is completed it is conducted under strict supervision in accordance with SOPs.

Mechanical Logbook. This is the responsibility of the MMW mechanic and records, all work completed including mandated servicing at specified times, parts removed and replaced, hours worked, fuel, oil and lubricants used, square metres completed on the task site, number of detonations, mines crushed, number of chisels and holders from the tiller replaced and or hammers and chisels replaced.

## Manual Mine Clearance

Manual mine clearance is a flexible and effective element of demining operations. It also involves supporting mechanical clearance. The minimum clearance depth is 13cm, but this depth may be increased when required.

A deminer is responsible for clearing an initial 1 m wide lane and depending on SOPs to a set distance, for example 5m (may be decreased if obstacles hinder progress) before restarting and increasing the 1 m lane to 2m width and continues this procedure to a distance of 50m before restarting a new lane(s). This is to assist in CASEVAC procedures by ensuring a 2m cleared lane. Any number of deminers can be used but the distance from each other is governed by the type of mine. A deminer may use one or a combination of recognised methods; hand-held mine detector, excavation (using approved tools) and prodding. If the known threat consists of a No4 anti-personnel mine, then prodding shall not be conducted.

Manual clearance consists of visual search, detection of tripwires, vegetation clearance and use of metal detector. Each has their own specific procedures that are completed with the deminer wearing PPE.

On the indication of a signal being located with the metal detector, the source needs investigating to identify it. Excavation and or prodding procedures are used in accordance with SOPs.

On locating a mine, the deminer stops and places a mine marker a minimum 10cms before it and notifies the TFM. The lane may be cordoned off, until the mine has been destroyed, and clearance restarted in a separate area. No individual is allowed to pass a located mine/ERW in a 1 m wide lane.

All AP mines are destroyed in situ but if an anti-tank mine is located this may be pulled following procedures in SOPs before disposal.

There are separate procedures for Full Excavation (where there is heavy metal contamination i.e. around a tank/AFV, scrap pit,) and for missing mines (a mine line identified with a consistent distance between mines before one is identified as missing). This has its own separate procedure where the excavated depth is 20cms.

Action on locating a tripwire is completed on the initial technical training programme and subsequent refresher programmes (returning from leave). POMZ-2 and 2M mines were located as were Type 69 bounding fragmentation mines both of which are initiated with a tripwire. POMZ's were placed on a wooden stake, which in most cases rotted over time, were burned or the mines lifted and moved as people returned to their former homes.

## Battle Area Clearance

BAC is the systematic and controlled survey and clearance of HAs where the hazards are believed or are known not to contain mines. It can be completed in areas of offensive or defensive operations, or where artillery has been fired or air delivered ordnance dropped including sub-munitions. It may involve surface and sub-surface ERW location, marking, clearance and disposal. BAC operations can be conducted in a rural environment where cultivation or obstacles can present problems or urban conurbation where buildings and domestic waste pose different challenges. A hazard will vary according to the munitions type and variable factors associated with their release, firing or arming mechanisms.

Sub-surface search. This search procedure is the most effective method of removing the immediate threat from a hazardous area. It is strictly controlled to ensure that the complete area is systematically searched. All sites subjected to a sub-surface search shall firstly be surfaced searched (this may be completed concurrently with Ground Preparation - the careful removal of vegetation to an acceptable and approved height above ground in order that the search instruments are not impeded by dense vegetation or obstacles).

Sub-surface procedure. Each team is allocated a 50mx50m box that is sub-divided into 1.5m wide lanes to a distance of 50m. The Large Loop Detector (LLMD) is tested prior to entering the allocated boxes. It is usually set up in a 2mx1 m configuration which gives a 25cm overlap either side of each 1.5m lane. Two deminers carry the LLMD, with a third following immediately behind, who manages the control box that is connected to the search instrument. He also tests the LLMD at set intervals or when directed by the TL to ensure the equipment is functioning. The team is commanded by a TL who gives directions and who oversees the 'pin pointing' of any reading and subsequent marking of a signal. This is then investigated by a nominated deminer.

There are set procedures in the event of an unplanned mine detonation or any mine being located and the subsequent recovery of the LLMD team to a known place of safety by a nominated deminer with his detector. If a mine is located, then that task is stopped, an assessment completed, and mine clearance completed.

If ground conditions prevent the use of the LLMD then a metal detector or Schonstedt may be used. This is DGPSd and is recorded on the final completion map as cleared using a different asset.

Surface search procedure involves the team being allocated a 50m x 50m box. The team is spread 2m apart and advance under the instructions of the TL. On reaching 50m they will dress across and continue the search in the opposite direction and the procedure continues until that box is complete. Any deminer that sees an item, shouts 'STOP', the team dresses back a set distance while the TL investigates followed by placing a marker a set distance from the item. Similar to sub-surface search there are procedures in place in an unplanned detonation or of a mine being spotted. A nominated deminer with detector and demining is on standby with communications to the TL in the event of an incident.

All items located if assessed as safe to move (less sub-munitions) are relocated to a selected UXO pit and destroyed at a later date (once Demolition Order has been approved by UNMAS and local authorities and community are notified). Items assessed as unsafe to move are destroyed in situ ensuring protective works if required are in place, the security organs and community informed.

Fade Out on a BAC is conducted to a minimum of 50m from the last located item and this often results in the site of the task being enlarged. Fade Out can increase also due to the density of items located or if items are located close to the original boundary after agreement with UNMAS.

Safety Distances. There are set distances in SOPs for additional teams working on a site and for deminers investigating a signal when instrument searching is ongoing.

In locations around the world, mine clearance operations continue.

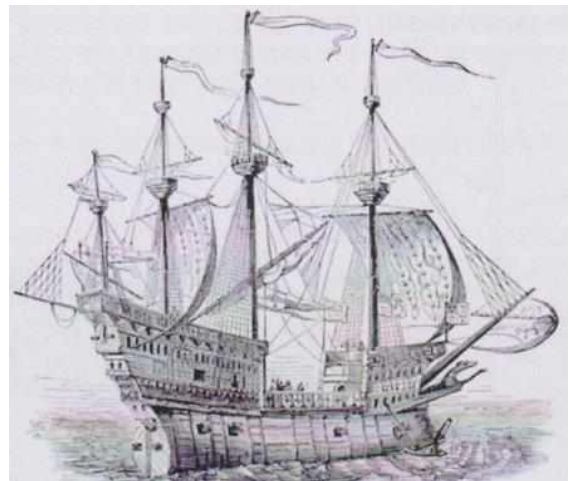
## The Mary Rose... My Part in its Salvage

### Mike Robertson

It all started in summer of 1982; no wait! it all started in the summer of 1545 when King Henry VIII's flagship sunk in the Solent whilst attempting to engage the French fleet. So, before I go into how I was involved; a bit of history...



For 34 years the *Mary Rose* was Henry VIII's flagship. Faced with the threat of the French navy and a strong Scottish fleet, Henry started building up his naval firepower as soon as he became king. Built in Portsmouth, the *Mary Rose* was launched in 1511.



The *Mary Rose* first saw battle in 1512 in a naval operation with the Spanish against the French. The English attacked the French and Breton fleets in the English Channel, while the Spanish attacked them in the Bay of Biscay. The ship also helped escort English troops over to France when, in 1522, the countries went head-to-head once more.

The *Mary Rose* sank in July 1545 in the battle of the Solent, as Henry VIII looked on. In July 1545, Henry VIII, his Army and his fleet were at Portsmouth and had taken up a defensive position against a formidable French fleet - larger than the Spanish Armada of 1588 - which was at anchor off the Isle of Wight. The *Mary Rose* was caught in a French attack on another vessel and began to sink. Hundreds of men aboard the ship drowned, and only around 25 survived. There could be several reasons why she sank while turning: gun ports open, earlier modifications, overloading, a gust of wind that made the ship unstable, poor seamanship and leadership, or a cannonball fired by the French. In my view it was probably a combination of all the above; although not sure about the French ability to hit a barn, door never mind the *Mary Rose*.

The ship was again discovered in May 1971 and raised in 1982; from whence my story continues.

It was July 1981; I had just been informed that I was to be posted from the Sqn to 28 Amphibious Engineer Regt. Despite all my protestations I was due to join my new unit in Hameln in the August.

I was 3 Troop G1098 storeman handing over to Spr Julius Unsing (Jugsy) when the diving officer (name escapes me) put his head around the G1098 store door and said there is a place on the diving aptitude next week do either of you want it? I immediately put up my mitt and said yes. He returned and said great, you're on it and if you pass you will be on the basic course the following week. Jugsy was not at all happy, this was because he had been trying to get on a course for ages without any luck. Anyway, he did eventually get on the next course.




I passed the aptitude and joined ACAD 225 with Mick Jones (Jonah). It is where I met Tom Bridges for the first time, later to join the Sqn and then onto SBS. Tom also joined us on the Mary Rose in July 82 from 33 Sqn (Antrim). A bit more on that later.

On passing the course, I went back to the “Shot” packed my kit and headed to Hameln. I was not alone though, as a few of my 3 Tp friends including Eddie Chalmers and Mick Mathis was also post there at similar times. None of us were happy there, and in May 1992 after a weekend on the lash, lamenting about the fact we missed the trip down south, both Eddie and I decided to sign off and try something different. It was probably the beer talking as we didn’t sign off in the end. This was probably due Eddie finding out that his Sqn was to start preparing for a search tour in NI As Eddie had already done two such tours with the Sqn, he was very keen to go again.

That same week, I got summoned to the RSM’s office as he wanted a chat! I made my way to his office trying to remember what we had got up to at the weekend that I was going to be hauled over the coals for. It turned out that the RSM was WO1 Larry Inge (later got to know him well- a great guy) and he was the also Regimental Diving Officer. He asked me if I wanted to go and work on the Mary Rose for a few weeks. I jumped at the chance and was on my way the very next day.

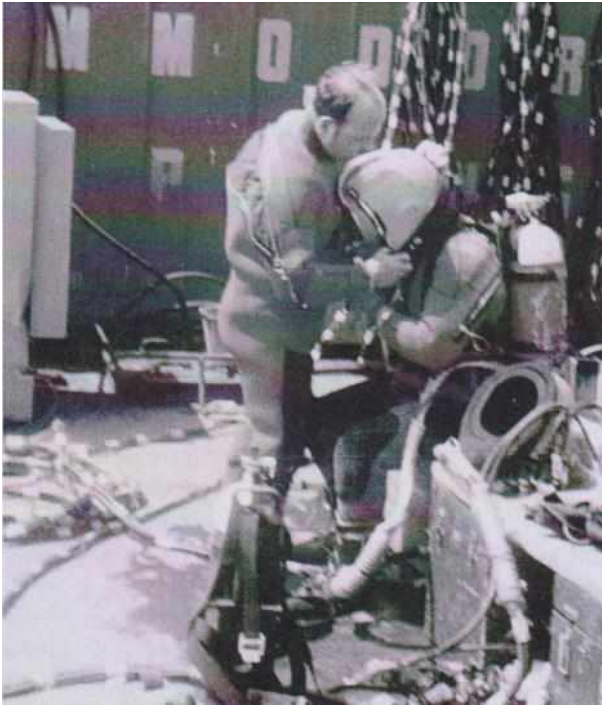
On arriving in the UK, I went straight to Marchwood the home of the Royal Engineers Diving Establishment (REDE) also just known as “The School” by many RE Divers, was taken through a bit of pre-Mary Rose Training. My Logbook entries for 21/22 June 82 included: *“familiarisation with KMB bandmask, surface demand equipment and airlifting”*, along with a compression chamber run. The basic diving course did not include surface demand, so it was a new experience for me.

We were then on our way to HMS Nelson in Portsmouth where we were billeted during our time in Pompey. After the obligatory “run ashore”, the next morning we were taken down to Old Portsmouth slipway where we embarked a civvy fishing boat (Butchers Boats) and take for the first time to the main diving support vessel the Sleipner (a former RN recovery vessel).

	<p><b>Sleipner – Our workplace</b> <b>The Portacabin is the Diving Supervisor control cabin</b> <b>The container housed the compression chamber.</b> <b>Changing area and galley is below</b></p> <p>Once we got sorted with our new surroundings, I got my kit on and was soon involved in my first Mary Rose dive.</p> <p>For the rest of June, all of July and the first week of August all my logbook entries included airlifting mud and silt from around the Hull of the Mary Rose, so a great deal of the excavating work was in nil viz.</p>
	<p><b>One of the early dives, June 1992</b></p> 



Sometime in June we were split into shifts. I was on the early shift generally starting at about 07.00. Although the work was OK, the airlifting became rather monotonous and I was not a great fan of hanging on the shot line doing wet decompression which was rather chilly even in a dry suit in the summer, so I learnt very quick that as the first divers on the early shift, we could use the only



compression chamber on board at the time, which was owned and operated by the Mary Rose Trust civvy team, who didn't start work until later in the day. So, as we were out most nights usually ending up in Joanna's in Southsea until two in the morning, there were not many volunteers for the first dive of the day. However, despite the hangover, I got into the routine of doing the first dive and being able to undergo decompression in the warmth of the chamber with hot tea and bacon butties being passed through the lock and the ability to empty my bladder without swamping my woolly bear (one piece under suit) and dry bag.

#### **Mary Rose Trust divers**

For many months, I did not get a glimpse of the whole wreck structure, rather just the outside of the hull whilst airlifting mud. However, one day I was tasked to undertake a survey of the vessel on scuba. After many months on the job, I was able to get around the whole of the Mary Rose in situ, with no tide running and great vis. I can still picture that scene today.

In early August things started to get more interesting, we were also involved in the installation of the Universal Lifting Frame (ULF) and the transoms, installing bolts using the Tornado UW bolt gin (Similar to Ramset). Installing Tirfor Jacks and associated strops/SWR and generally getting more involved in the engineering aspects of the project.

In September, a small number of us also commenced the excavation of two tunnels under the hull, this we did using airlifts and water jets. Looking back, it was a bit hairy with a 4" airlift, water jet with associated, umbilical's and other hoses all around me in a very confined tunnel in nil vis.

In August, we were joined by more basic divers who were students on the next Army Advanced Diving (AAD) course, they were to spend half of the course on the Mary Rose getting real surface demand experience, prior to undertaking the rest of the course syllabus back at Marchwood. Many of which were guys from 59 Commando RE who had just returned from the Falklands, this included Al Grace, later to join the Sqn. Also with us was Phil Taylor also later to join the Sqn. I have already mentioned Tom Bridges. He had a hairy moment when his 6" airlift got blocked and took him to the surface at a great rate of knots. We had become firm friends on our basic course in 1981. He was none the worse for wear after his uncontrolled ascent.

I took many of the advanced course lads on their familiarisation dives around the wreck. I was also later fortunate to be selected to join the course, despite me only having done my basic course the year before. So once the Mary Rose up and safely tucked up in Portsmouth Harbour, we were back to Marchwood on the course (AAD 44) proper, with advance diving theory being embedded into our skulls, then off Plymouth for the deep dives.

So back to the lift; Tog Mor the largest floating crane in the world at the time, then came on station. We were reorganised into two teams, one to continue working off the Sleipner and the other working off Tog Mor. I was on the Tog Mor team, which was great, as it was like living in a hotel with great food and facilities. Not that we had much time to enjoy it.

One morning, as we were being taken to work on a CSB as was the routine at that stage, to seeing the whole dive site surrounded by boats of all types and sizes. Only then did it dawn on me what history was being made there at the time. As we boarded Tog Mor we were lined up on deck and introduced to Prince Charles. As you see from the press cutting, I was caught off guard in rag order, mixed dress, diver woolly jumper and Peter Storm, no beret and in need of a haircut.

During the first phase of the lift, the organisation was not that great with the Mary Rose Trust running the show, so it was all a bit disjointed to say the least.





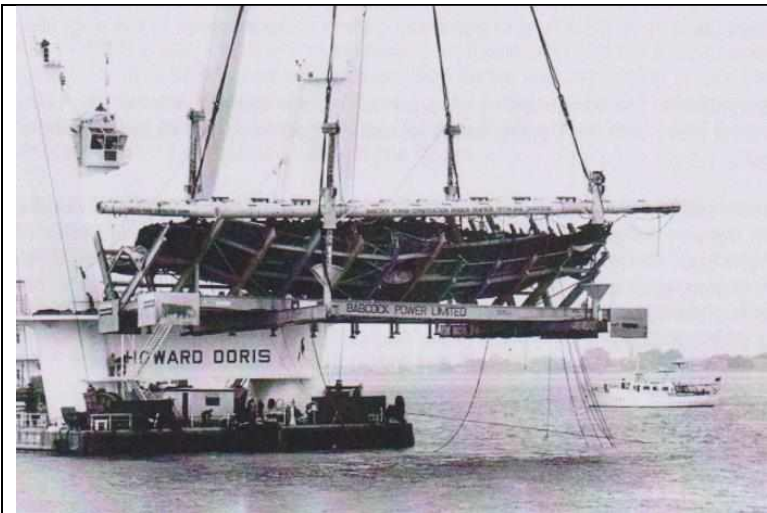
As many are aware, that during the lift, one of the legs of the lifting frame collapsed which was caught on the live TV coverage that created a great deal of alarm at the time. It seems to be that case, that instead of a high tensile steel pin being installed in the leg, somehow it was only supported by a scaffold pole, so when the weight was taken, it sheared the pole.

I learnt many years later that with Prince Charlie's intervention, the control of the lift was then given over to the Royal Engineers. To this day, the Sappers contribution has always been downplayed. It is my view that without Sappers involvement, the Mary Rose would never have seen the light of day again.

One of my last dive (120 mins, at a max depth 11m using Kerby Morgan Bandmask 18b/surface demand on 11<sup>th</sup>

October 1982) was to open the valves that inflated the airbags that supported the weight of the hull in the cradle. This was also a last-minute task that should have been done earlier and before the hull was lowered into the cradle. I was still in the water doing this task when the hull, cradle and ULF broke surface, albeit very slowly under control of the Tog Mor crane operator. The picture below was taken a few hours after that dive.

Back to the leg, the Army team were tasked to remove the damaged leg. This we did with oxy-arc cutting equipment called Kerrie-Cable which uses the same principle a thermic lancing and came in the form of a flexible cable, a bit like SWR coated in plastic. Although the kit was very effective in cutting steel both on the surface and underwater, it was very hazardous to use. The clipping from the Soldier magazine of that year indicated that I was the diver who undertook this task. (An extract from the Soldier magazine is included below that gives a great description about the Sapper involvement in the raising of the Mary Rose).



Although I was part of the team operating out of a Gemini as the tender and operating the Kerrie-Cable panel, I was not the diver that actually cut the leg off.

On 11<sup>th</sup> October 1982 the Mary Rose was successfully salvaged and towed to [Portsmouth Historic Dockyard](#), where it was placed in passive storage until active conservation began in 1994. It now sits in a purpose build facility in Portsmouth Dockyard.



**Mike returning on the deck of Tog Mor after opening the air bag valves - not cutting bent leg from the lifting frame**

So I spent nearly six months full time diving with almost diving 150 hours, all within less than 18 months of volunteering for the diving aptitude course.

It was a great experience and privilege, working with a great team of guys from across the Corp. Job done, course done, back to Hameln blowing bubbles in the Weser and being a Rig Commander until posted to REDE in 1984.

## A Passage to Vanuatu.

### Alec (Froth) Beer

The recent passing of Prince Philip brought to mind a sailing trip undertaken in 1998 by crew member Lindsey Watson and me on our sailboat 'Gladys May.' We had crossed the Pacific the year before and were moored in Sydney Harbour but wanted another voyage into the Big Blue.

The idea was to sail to Vanuatu and dive the wreck of the SS President Coolidge. It was in Vanuatu that the US decided to stop the Japanese advance on Australia and built up a huge military presence there. The President Coolidge sailed from America loaded with 5,000 marines, their equipment and a year's supply of anti-malarial drugs. Entering the vast natural harbour at Espiritu Santo she struck a mine, an American mine at that, and sank. So off we set and within days met the biggest storm of my sailing career. I don't go in for 'Great storms I have survived stories' I hate bad weather at sea and do all I can to avoid it. The anxiety is awful, the discomfort horrid and if you'll excuse the indelicacy going to the heads a nightmare. The storm lasted for four gut wrenching days but things settled down and we reached Noumea in New Caledonia in eighteen days. Then on to Tanna the southernmost island of Vanuatu where we dropped anchor in Sulphur Bay.

The water in Sulphur bay is a slate grey colour from the ash emitted by Mount Yasur an active volcano. I've always been wary of swimming in the tropics especially when the viz is bad. If I was attacked by a shark and lost my other leg but survived how would I explain it to my limb fitter? To paraphrase Oscar Wilde to lose one leg is tragic to lose two is careless. Nevertheless I was persuaded but stayed very close to the bottom of the boarding ladder. Lindsey on the other hand was some distance from the boat splashing and kicking for all she was worth. The sun was out, Gladys was securely anchored and we were going ashore for a lobster dinner that evening. Musing thus Lindsey was suddenly thrust vertically almost completely out of the water. The next instance she was hurtling back to the boat flapping her arms like a swan shouting "Get up the f\*\*\*ing ladder" no need I was already aboard. I don't think she went more than ankle deep before joining me on board unharmed. Obviously the opening scenes of Jaws flashed through my mind. What the hell was that? A little while later we were paid a visit by a chap on a canoe and the culprit showed up it was a dugong which loved swimming with people.

Eighty odd islands comprise Vanuatu with over a hundred languages. The lingua franca is Bislama or pijin for instance an aeroplane is a schooner blong Jesus Christ. Numba wan pickaninny blong kween is Prince Charles and big buggarup blong jeep means the car has broken down. It was in Tanna that the cargo cult and John Frum took root and where Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh or Numba Wun Big Fella is revered as a God. The belief goes something like this:-

One day an English Man of War visited Tanna and Philip, who was born on Tanna, went on-board and while attending a dance met a young woman called Elizabeth who immediately fell madly in love with him. The dastardly English having none of this gave Philip a severe beating and cast him ashore. Sometime later in London Elizabeth decided she needed a husband and lined up all her soldiers and sailors to choose one. Meanwhile Philip on hearing this changed into a bird flew to London and joined the line-up. The rest is history. I must make it clear that I'm not prepared to discuss any of this as disagreement can only lead to schism. Look what happened to Christianity with Catholics and Protestants, the Sunni and Shiite and of course the popular front of Judaea and the Judaeans popular front.

There is also a belief that Prince Philip will one day return to Tanna and paradise will ensue. It's interesting that many religions and folklore hold the promise of eventual return. Here in Wales it is said that King Arthur will arise in an hour of need. No doubt somewhere in the lunatic fringes of the Labour Party preparations are being made for the second coming of Magic Grandpa. I would also like to make clear that I'm not poking fun at any of this well perhaps with the exception of the Magic Grandpa bit. The religious beliefs of the people of Tanna seem to me as valid as any other. Sailing north we anchored off Erromango where I fell into conversation with a local who warned me about the people of Espiritu Santo when I asked why he said they changed themselves into birds and caused mischief.

We dived the Coolidge accompanied by a dive operator as it was way beyond my limited experience and for me very deep indeed. But it was as an American might say totally awesome. The water was gin clear the Coolidge perfectly visible an unforgettable experience. Lindsey also dived million dollar point where the US dumped so much equipment at the end of WW2. After an uneventful passage we arrived back in Sydney and started to prepare Gladys for the trip up the barrier reef and across the top of Australia to Darwin prior to the crossing of the Indian Ocean to South Africa and that's another story.

**The National Anthem of Vanuatu**  
Yumi, Yumi Yumi I glad blong talem se  
Yumi, Yumi Yumi I man blong Vanuatu  
God I givem pies long Yumi  
Yumi glad tumas long hem  
Yumi strong mo Yumi free long him Yumi brata evriwan



## 23 Para Engr Regt - Update

### Capt Matthew Mellish - 23 ENGR-Trg Wing-Trg Offr

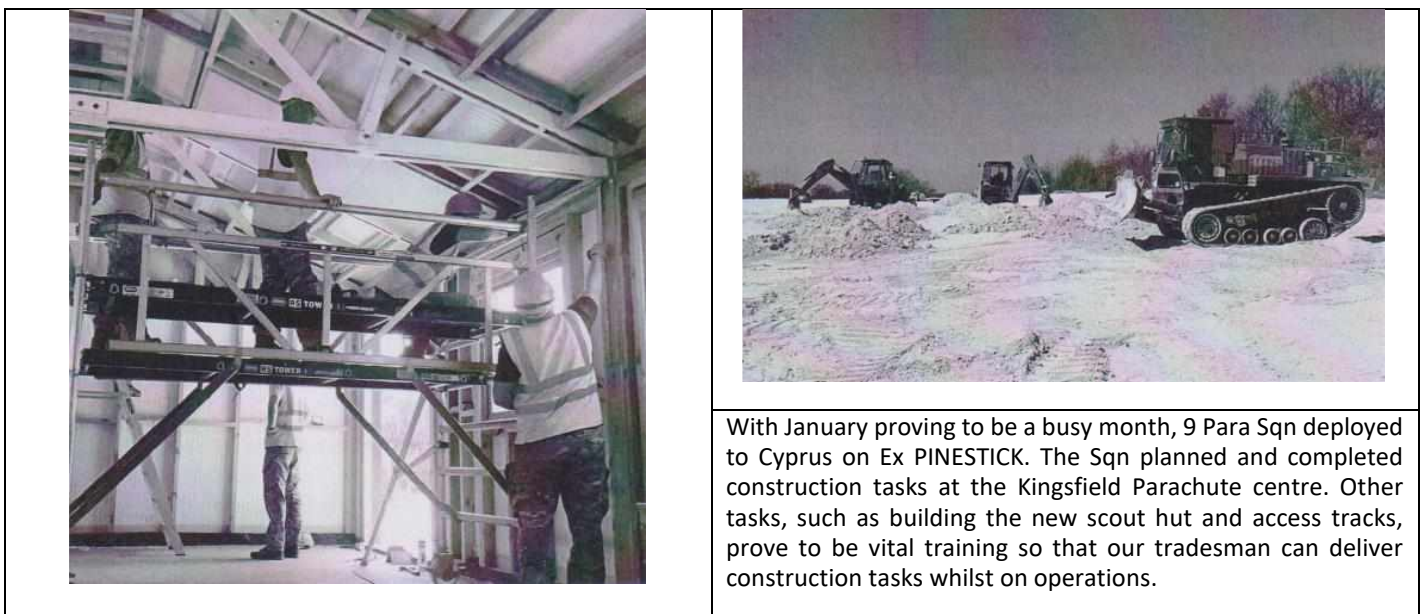
2021 has carried on with the same traits as 2020, coronavirus has continued to have a significant impact on life at 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment. The re-instated national lockdown has continued to halt the scale of our training, but as the grip of lockdown loosens, our planned activities are gathering pace and we are making up for lost time.

The year began in with Live Fire Tactical Training in challenging conditions on Warcop Ranges, which saw soldiers from across the Regiment master the basics in preparation for the readiness commitments and deployments that lay ahead.



In January, 23 members of the Regiment travelled to Wathgill Camp, Catterick, to start All Arms Pre-Parachute Selection. Due to the effect of coronavirus and the cancellation of the previous course, all members were gated on camp for the six-week duration. The gruelling snow and conditions that Catterick presented at this time of the year saw the Sappers mental strength, as well as physical, put to the wire. Thanks to the hard work of the Pegasus Pathway to prepare our personnel, the Regiment boasted an impressive sixteen passes, two Officers and fourteen Sappers. Next stop is the Basic Parachuting Course.

In 2021 the next iteration of the Pegasus pathway commenced. Over sixty Sappers sit within Arnhem troop where they will progress their training through the Foundation course before starting the next Airborne Fundamentals Cadre. March saw another successful cadre in which the Sappers have embodied the Airborne ethos and have proved that they can become valuable assets to the Regiment. May sees the next batch of Sappers prepared for P Coy, 21 Sappers will travel up the road after successful completion of the Pegasus Pathway Conditioning course. This final phase has seen the Sappers progressively develop their physical and mental robustness. We aspire to produce well rounded Sappers and this has resulted in our personnel completing numerous courses such as team medics, basic signal users and receive driver theory qualifications.



With January proving to be a busy month, 9 Para Sqn deployed to Cyprus on Ex PINESTICK. The Sqn planned and completed construction tasks at the Kingsfield Parachute centre. Other tasks, such as building the new scout hut and access tracks, prove to be vital training so that our tradesman can deliver construction tasks whilst on operations.



Always keen to assist in any way they could, members of the Regt took it upon themselves to raise money for various charitable causes. Highlights included Sgt Aschettino and Sgt Jones leopard crawling 10km and raising just under £10000 on behalf of the Lauren Glove, who is being treated for breast cancer. The event took place on Rock Barracks where they both leopard crawled around the perimeter fence over both concrete and grass. Spr Rourke-Porter raised just under £1000 by running 10km every day for the month of February in the aid of PTSD UK



In April, 51 Para Sqn deployed to Salisbury Plain in support of 3 Para Battlegroup on Ex JOINT WARRIOR. A six week exercise where our Sappers are tested in challenging circumstances with training ranging from LFTT to conducting missions where they have enabled the mobility of the Battlegroup. This 51 Para Sqn's final exercise before handing over readiness commitments to 9 Para Sqn.

The annual RE excellence awards were announced and presented in April. The Regt proudly highlighting the work of our Sappers which was recognised at the event. LCpl Coar won the Vailly award for best JNCO on the Junior Command course. Spr Heath won the Dennison award for the best new Specialist Engineer for his efforts in support of overseas Exercises and Operations.

Sport with restrictions lifting the Regt can now look to incorporating sport and adventurous training back into its schedule. The summer sees the Regt competing in the Inter Unit Rugby League and Union competitions.

It has been a start to the year where we have started to return back to some normality. As restrictions continue to lift, the Regt is geared up for an exciting remainder of the year. The following months see the return of Ex EAGLES BUILD and Ex EAGLES SAPPER, in July and September respectively. Skydiving and Snowsport AT expeditions are in the planning stages for winter which will follow Ex FALCONS AMERANTE, an exercise where the Regt will work alongside French Airborne forces to develop our interoperability. Always maintaining the highest standards of training and readiness, the Regiment is ready for whatever comes our way this year.



## Remembrance



On Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2020 at the Wolverhampton Commonwealth War Graves, Dutch Section, the chairman of the AEA Birmingham Branch, Nev Collins on behalf of the Priases Irene Brigade (Dutch spelling) Read from the roll of honour the names of the Dutch soldiers who died in England. Nev then gave the exhalation.

On Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> November an Armistice Day ceremony took place at the Wolverhampton cenotaph.

Once again, Nev Collins gave the exaltation, 'Kohi- ma Epitaph' prior to taking the salute.

Each of these ceremonies were conducted in accordance with the Government Corvid regulations.

# Travelling Full Time: Planning a (Gray) Nomadic Lifestyle

Nick Gray



Since migrating to Australia in 2005 our family have enjoyed camping and travelling in this vast country. We started with tents progressing to a camper trailer and then to a caravan. Work often got in the way of extended trips so we were restricted to destinations that were doable over the school holidays.

## G'Day one and each from Nick & Carol Gray 'Down Under'

As retirement loomed we started looking at travelling on the road full 4,^8 time around Australia living in a caravan. A couple of our adult children were still living at home so we gave them a move out warning order and the planning began.

The questions keep coming. What type of caravan for the conditions, a suitable tow vehicle, where to go? What do we do regarding a postal address etc.

The choice of caravan for us was given great consideration, given the lack of facilities between remote towns and being able to cook your own meals certainly saves money. Having access to our own kitchen whenever we stopped enabled a much better diet than the pies and sausage rolls that are still the standard fare in outback Australia. Nothing wrong with a pie every now and then mind you but not daily! Change is coming, Indian migrants have taken over some remote roadhouses offering very good curries. (Not quite up to Johnny Ghurkas in the 'Shot mind you).



We visited a short list of suitable caravan manufacturers and settled on a company in Queensland who built a lightweight strong off road model with an independent suspension, lithium battery, 840 watt solar set up, 3 x 100 litre water tanks and a diesel maritime oven. Oh and an AC unit for those hot days. We fitted a composting toilet called "Natures Head". Look it up, great for fertilising the land!

The tow vehicle was an easy decision, the Toyota Landcruiser! Plenty of grunt under the bonnet with a V8 turbo diesel engine, parts readily available throughout Australia and plenty of bush mechanics in the outback who know this vehicle. Equip it with "Roo bars", under vehicle protection, UHF radio, roof racks, sand tracks and a rear fridge for those important "coldies".

Travelling interstate covers long distances over trying conditions, often without a mobile phone signal and in some areas limited water. Medical care is sparse with the Royal Flying Doctor Service sometimes being your only saviour.

A comprehensive first aid kit is a must, we have some of the most deadly snakes in the world that delight in such names as Tiger-snake, Taipan, Death Adder and King Brown to name a few. Not forgetting poisonous spiders such as Funnel Web and Redback and that's just on land!

The three P's are more important than ever as a sticky end could eventuate. Every year travellers perish in the outback due to lack of preparation and not being correctly equipped for the conditions.



We have an emergency pack consisting of a couple of 24 hr ration packs, water, compass and an EPIRB (Emergency Positioning Indicating Radio Beacon).

Navigation and route planning needs careful thought. It can be hundreds of miles between service stations (roadhouses) and sometimes you get there and they are out of fuel! We carry two jerricans of fuel as a get out of jail card.

On one occasion we came across a family who had run out of fuel in the bush. It's an unwritten rule you always offer assistance. As we stopped I noticed the front of their car was covered in what looked like green slime. A quick explanation he had hit an emu, their guts are lime green! A quick top up from our jerrycan and they were on their way.



Navigation is a mix of old school road atlas, in car sat nav and Google maps. There are various apps that help with camping sites some with facilities others with nothing. One of our favourites is Wiki camps. Some country communities have a basic overnight camp area. This encourages visitors who in most cases put money back into the community through fuel purchase, shopping or eating out.

The bush is one big camping area but vast areas are privately owned by sheep and cattle stations that in some cases are the size of a small country. Owners are diversifying and allow camping stays on their land for a small fee. It's a great experience watching the work on these stations. Most have access to plenty of water as they are situated above the Great Artesian Basin, the largest and deepest artesian basin in the world covering 1,700,000 square kilometres. Bores are driven down to provide fresh water. So outdoor showers heated by wood burners are the norm.

We've stayed on several there's always a warm welcome and happy hour around the campfire is a chance to get to know these tough country folk.



Talking about meeting people I've bumped into several Squadron men on our travels, Bud Grocock on the Eyre Peninsula and Yon Whitely in Darwin. Yon from Yorkshire was one of the first National servicemen to serve in the Squadron in the fifties. Most of you know Bud, when I met him he was travelling from Perth to Adelaide in a panel van!

The decision about when and where to go is largely governed by seasonal weather patterns but changes to our climate add a layer of complexity as summer temperatures soar and large areas of our national parks become dangerous tinderboxes. Winter means the tropical north of Australia becomes more accessible after the wet, so expect to be joined on the road by other travellers from all over the world in this window of opportunity. A key learning over our 45,000 km around Australia, is that many people go to the same places. The Gibb River road in the Kimberley for instance maybe "Australia's last great wilderness" but in high season everyone is on the same road at the same time!

Planning how to best escape the crowds needs to be a part of the pre-trip research and that means planning to avoid school holidays.



For instance, we looked for and found a house sitting opportunity in this last summer holiday period. This includes looking after the animals horses, cattle and sheep.

Animals in the bush are always a consideration when driving. An adult kangaroo jumping into your path weighing in at 100kg is one to be avoided. They are pretty dim and will suddenly divert into your path rather than move away. Another concern is wild camels. It's estimated there are one million camels in Australia. They cause massive damage to waterholes and native plants. They were brought here between 1840 and 1907 to help develop arid areas. Culling has helped, they have even exported them back to the Middle East as Australian camels are a better pedigree.

Another consideration are road trains weighing as much as 146 tonnes and up to 53.5m in length travelling at speeds of 100 kph and they don't like to slow down! One of those overtaking you in your caravan on a dirt road is an experience. I've found it best to get comms with the driver and keep over as far as possible.

We are sometimes asked about personal security when travelling in remote areas. I can honestly say we haven't had a problem but common sense comes into it. We let family members know where we are. Often we'll camp near to other travellers or we'll pull off the road out of sight of passing traffic.

One morning in the bush I was enjoying a morning brew when I heard footsteps creeping up behind me. I braced for action and turned to be confronted by an inquisitive emu walking towards me. He soon made off after my shout of relief.





Another occasion in the north of Western Australia I was enjoying the sea view across a sand dune when I heard a rustling from a nearby bush. A large lizard over a metre long came shuffling towards me. The thing was huge and I beat a hasty retreat to the caravan. It went on its way with not a look towards me. I later found out it was a Perentie a relative of the Komodo dragon. Not to be messed with.



It's a great lifestyle but it came to halt last year with Covid raising its head. We were in Tasmania and ended up staying there for 6 months until we could get back to Adelaide where our children live.

For the time being we are back in a house as interstate travel is restricted. We get itchy feet and have been away several times locally.

Having travelled through most of Australia and only touching the surface of this vast country we will be off again when we can.

We travel back to the UK regularly, it was great catching up with old and new friends at the Banbury AGM/ dinner. All the best in these challenging times.

**Check out the registration number!**

With careful planning and common sense travelling in the outback is a rewarding and special experience. See you on the road!

## Every Day is Different

**Reviewed by Alec Beer**

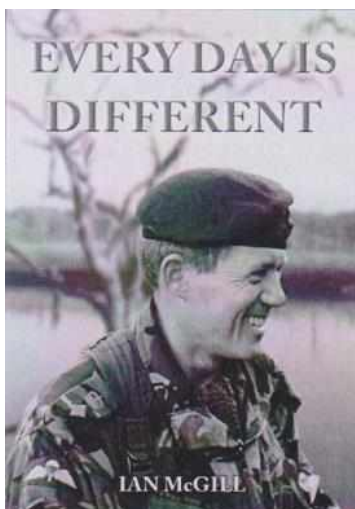
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Available on Kindle from:

Amazon ePub: [Every Day is Different eBook: McGill, Ian: Amazon.co.uk: Kindle Store](#)

It says much for the Officers of the Corps of Royal Engineers that during a Court Martial of two 9 Squadron worthies, one wanted to duff up the Presiding Officer for a perceived slight against the Prosecuting Officer. "No one speaks to a 9 Squadron officer like that" snarled one of the accused. The Prosecuting Officer was of course Ian McGill. What it says for the two gentlemen of the Corps in the dock is a moot point.



Ian McGill's latest book *Every Day is Different* charts his life from an idyllic childhood in what was then Rhodesia, before UDI, where fields were still ploughed by oxen, to become Chief Royal Engineer. No mean achievement. He served in parachute, commando and amphibious roles in the Corps and seems to have revelled in all and any form of discomfort that came his way. Yet Ian comes through every trial, whether military or personal, with the same good-natured approach. The determination to give of his best shines through.

The scope of the book covers the period at the height of the Cold War. It covers the whole of Operation Banner where Ian served in the infantry and sapper role, through to the chaos in Kuwait. Then on to the bloodshed caused by the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. It also gives an insight into the life of a Sapper Officer from Troop Commander to the politics of higher rank. The book sheds light on the casualties sustained after hostilities have ceased, especially in Kuwait and also the need for planning the peace. This book is half autobiography, half history of the Royal Engineers and half description of the trouble spots during the last third of the twentieth century.

Never mind the arithmetic, whether you are a Sapper or not it's a cracking read.

The author has generously donated all proceeds to BLESMA



# Minutes of an Airborne Engineers Association National Ordinary General Meeting

Held by 'ZOOM' on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2021

1. Chairman's Welcome and Opening Remarks: The Chairman opened the meeting at 10:18 hrs and welcomed those present.

There were 9 Members present. Apologies were received from Gil Nichol and the Scotland Branch.

The Kohima Epitaph was recited, and a minute's silence was observed in memory of HRH Prince Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh, and Fallen Comrades.

2. Minutes of the previous AGM and PGM: The minutes of the last National Meeting held by 'Zoom' on Sat 17<sup>th</sup> October had been previously circulated. The Chairman asked for a proposer and seconder that the minutes as recorded were a true and accurate record of what had taken place:

Proposer: Billy Morris - Secunder: Dick Brown Carried.

3. Treasurers Report: The treasurer's report was presented by Lt Col (Retd) Dick Brown

Assets - Cash in Hand £0, Cash at Bank £9421.59, Deposit account £14831.49 giving total assets of £24,253.08.

Liabilities - Journal £2577.76

Giving a total working Capital (Assets - Liabilities) of £21775.32

The Chairman asked for a Proposer and Secunder that the Treasure's Report as presented be accepted.

Proposer: John Lee - Secunder: Dave Rutter Carried.

4. Shop Report: On behalf of the Shop Manager Mrs Jeannette Rutter, Dave Rutter presented the shop report: The shop has had a slow turn over due to the current Pandemic. There was nothing further to report.

The Chairman asked for a Proposer and Secunder that the Shop Report as presented be accepted and to record a vote of thanks to both Dave & Jeannette Rutter.

Proposer: Dick Brown - Secunder: Billy Morris Carried.

5. Journal - Editor's Report: The report was presented by the Journal Editor Dave Rutter.

Dave asked for articles for the upcoming publication stressing that he did not want it to be left to the last minute. The next issue will include many obituaries.

The Chairman advised the meeting that he had contacted the Regiment to ask for an article and was waiting for a response.

The Chairman asked those present if there are any comments on how our journal is produced? There were none, therefore a vote of thanks was asked for on behalf of our Association to the Editor, Dave Rutter.

There were no further comments.

6. Membership Report: The membership report was presented by Billy Morris.

Total membership since conception 1,527

Members who have since departed to another DZ in the sky, 397.

Living membership now stands at 1,130.

There have been no new members so far in 2021 and we had a total of 8 new members in 2020.

The Chairman thanked Billy and Dave on behalf of the Association.

7. Welfare Liaison Officer's Report: The Chairman stated that we had no requests at National level for assistance in the last 12 months, which is good news and as such there was nothing to report on behalf of Mrs Issy Leather.

8. Archivists/Historian Report: The Association archives are stored at the RE museum at Brompton Barracks. The museum is closed due to the Covid Pandemic and no report was provided.

9. Sports Club Report: Billy Morris advised the meeting that Mick Leather was organising a golf tournament for the 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> May at the Telford Golf and Spa resort. 13 Airborne Engineers and 3 Guests will be taking part.

The South Coast Ramblers continue to meet under the guidance of Nat Hague.

10. Propositions: There were no Propositions for the meeting to consider.

11. Remembrance Events and Services: The following major events will be/were attended by members of our Association this year:

Falkland Islands.

\* Falklands Memorial Service at Pangbourne. Cancelled\*

Falklands Memorial Service at Aldershot 12<sup>th</sup> June 2021 will go ahead as planned. Timings are 10:45 for 11:00 start.\*

Hardwick Hall Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> May - Cancelled.

Double Hills memorial service will take place on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> September.

Cromwell Lock Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> Sept at Cromwell Lock, 18<sup>th</sup> Sept at Zetland Park Grangemouth (TBC)

1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Squadron Memorial at Donington Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> Sept

National Service of Remembrance at the Cenotaph 14<sup>th</sup> November - We are awaiting details from the RBL for this year's event.

## **12. Any Other Business at National Level: 12.1 Constitution Amendments - Breach of Rules Procedure.**

The procedure for dealing with breaches of the Association Rules has been amended. A copy of the Amended version of the constitution will be posted on the Association Website.

Neville Collins thanked the committee for their support in arranging for this to be done.

**12.2 Rededication Cpl Scotty Wilson's Headstone:** The works to renovate Cpl Scotty Wilson's headstone are now complete. It is planned that a rededication service will take place on the 31<sup>st</sup> of July to coincide with the 'Airborne Riders' ride of respect 2021. The Scotland Branch have kindly offered to organise the event and to liaise with the REA Airborne Branch and 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment.

Following the rededication service, the Scotland Branch will host a 'Pie and Pint' event at the local British Legion at which the Presidents commendation will be awarded to Maj (Retd) Paul Moore and Charlie McColgan of the 'Airborne Riders'

**12.3 Wales Weekend:** Lt Col (Retd) Baz Bassett informed the meeting that he was organising the gathering in Wales for 'Old and Bold' mountaineering club on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> October. Details will be published on the Facebook site for anyone interested in attending.

**12.4 Tim Robertson:** Dave Rutter spoke of the death of Tim Robertson who had been a former OC of 9 Parachute Squadron. To date Dave has not been able to obtain an obituary for Tim to place in the Journal. The Chairman said that he would contact Mike Beazley to see if he was able to provide anything and also suggested Gerry Taggart as a possible contributor.

**13. AGM and Gala Ball:** The GM and Gala Ball will be held at the Cedar Court Hotel Harrogate over the weekend 15<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> October. Booking forms will be included with the June edition of the AEA Journal and will be posted on the AEA website. The event will be hosted by the Yorkshire Branch.

**14. National Presidents Points:** The president informed the meeting that, due to the lack of activity within the Association during lockdown, it was unlikely that there would be any Presidents Commendations this year.

## **15. National Chairman's Points**

The Chairman expressed the hope that the next National meeting would be face to face, however the 'Zoom' subscription would be maintained as it is a useful tool for organising meetings at short notice should the need arise.

**16. Next National Meeting:** The next National meeting will be the AGM on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2021 at the Cedar Court Hotel Harrogate.

## **17. Chairman's Closing Remarks**

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and there being no further business at National Level the meeting was closed at 11:18 Hours.

Steve Wallis  
National Chairman

Amendments to the AEA Constitution to incorporate the new 'Breach of Rules' Procedure.

1. Delete Para 17 'Breach of Rules' and para 18 'Appeals' in their entirety.
2. Insert new para 17 entitled 'Breach of Rules' Procedure.
3. Insert following text into new para 17
  - a. The Association, at National and Branch level, shall have the power to investigate suspected cases of a breach of AEA rules by a Member of whatever category i.e., Ordinary Member, Branch Honorary Member, Honorary Life Member, Life Vice President, Vice President, or the President, who is in breach of the Rules.
  - b. In the event of a suspected breach of the rules, the procedure set out in Annex C is to be followed.
  - c. In the event of a senior member of the AEA being in breach of the Association rules, this will be dealt with by the Executive Council.
  - d. Where a member in breach of the rules is not a member of a branch, the situation will be dealt with by the Executive Council.
4. Renumber remaining paragraphs.

## Appendix C - AEA Procedure to be followed by all Branches in the event of a Breach of AEA rules by a member.

1. The following procedure is to be followed by all branches where a breach of the AEA rules by a member is suspected.
2. If the member concerned is not a member of a recognised Branch of the AEA, the matter will be investigated by the Executive Council.

### Establishing the facts.

3. Immediately the Branch Committee identifies that there is a situation that may constitute a breach of AEA rules by a member, they will carry out necessary investigations without unreasonable delay to establish the facts, this may require the holding of an investigatory meeting with the member before proceeding to any formal meeting, or the collation of evidence by the Branch Committee for use at any formal meeting.
4. In misconduct cases, where practicable, different people will carry out the investigation and the formal meeting.
5. If there is an investigatory meeting this will not by itself result in any disciplinary action, the member may be accompanied at any Investigatory meeting.

### Inform the member of the problem

6. If it is decided that there is a potential breach of AEA rules, the member will be notified of this in writing. This notification will contain sufficient information about the alleged misconduct and its possible consequences to enable the member to prepare to answer at a formal meeting.
7. The notification will also give details of the time and venue for the formal meeting and advise the member that they may be accompanied at the meeting.
8. The meeting will be held without unreasonable delay whilst allowing the member reasonable time to prepare their response.
9. At the formal meeting, the Branch Committee will explain the complaint against the member and go through the evidence that has been gathered. The member will be allowed to set out their case and answer any allegations that have been made.
10. The member will be given a reasonable opportunity to ask questions, present evidence and call relevant witnesses. They will also be given an opportunity to raise points about any information provided by witnesses. Where the Branch Committee or member intends to call relevant witnesses, they should give advance notice that they intend to do this.

### Right to be accompanied at the Formal Meeting.

11. Members will have the right to be accompanied by a companion where the formal meeting could result in:
  - a. a formal warning being issued; or
  - b. the taking of some other disciplinary action
  - c. the confirmation of a warning or some other disciplinary action (appeal hearings)
12. The Branch Committee must agree to a member's request to be accompanied. Members may alter their choice of companion if they wish.
13. A request to be accompanied does not have to be in writing or within a certain timeframe; however, a member should provide enough time for the committee to deal with the companion's attendance at the meeting.
14. If a member's chosen companion will not be available at the time proposed for the meeting by the Branch Committee, the committee must postpone the meeting to a time proposed by the member provided that the alternative time is both reasonable and not more than five days after the date originally proposed.
15. The companion should be allowed to address the meeting to put and sum up the member's case, respond on behalf of the member to any views expressed at the meeting and confer with the member during the meeting. The companion does not, however, have the right to answer questions on the member's behalf, address the committee if the member does not wish it or prevent the Branch committee from explaining their case.

### The decision of the Formal Meeting

16. After the meeting, the Branch Committee will decide whether disciplinary or any other action is justified and inform the member accordingly in writing.
17. Where misconduct is confirmed, the Branch Committee may issue a written warning. A further act of misconduct may result in a final written warning.
18. If a member's misconduct is sufficiently serious, it may be appropriate to move directly to a final written warning.
19. A first or final written warning will set out the nature of the misconduct and the change in behaviour required. The member should be told how long the warning will remain current. The member will be informed of the consequences of further misconduct within the set period following a final warning.
20. Acts of gross misconduct are so serious in themselves that they may call for exclusion from the Branch for a first offence. But a fair disciplinary process will always be followed, before excluding a member.

21. The following list gives examples of actions that may be considered as gross misconduct.
  - a. theft or fraud,
  - b. physical violence,
  - c. Actions that Bring the AEA into disrepute.
22. Where a member is persistently unable or unwilling to attend a formal meeting without good cause the local Branch Committee will make a decision based on the evidence available.

### Right of Appeal

23. Where a member feels that disciplinary action taken against them is wrong or unjust, they have the right to appeal against the decision. Appeals will be heard without unreasonable delay at an agreed time and place. The member should let Branch Committee know the grounds for their appeal in writing.
24. The appeal will be dealt with impartially and, wherever possible, by a person who was not previously been involved in the earlier meeting.
25. Members have a right to be accompanied at appeal hearings.
26. Members will be informed in writing of the results of the appeal hearing as soon as possible.

## The World's Oldest Sky Diver



Readers of the Mufti, the RSL (Returning Serviceman's League) magazine that list all ex-service members deaths, we were shocked to see the name Jim Brierley part of the list.

Jim was Ex 9 Sqn and a member of the Airborne Engineers Association. Serving in WW2. His name to fame however that he is was listed as the oldest sky diver at 88 years of age. It's believed he still continued into his early 90s.

At 89, Jim Brierley has jumped out of a plane not once, not thrice, but 3247 times.

"You can add another 20 to that figure including army jumps (as a paratrooper in World War II)," says the octogenarian who completed his most recent jump in September 2019 on his 89th birthday.

The impressive record is not his only boast. When he was 88, Jim, who lived on Phillip Island, held the title of world's oldest skydiver. It is a claim he has been forced to cede in the past year once he started tandem skydiving, rather than jumping solo.

"My reactions are OK but landings aren't as good as they could be," Jim says.

The largest group of people he has jumped with is 21, the highest altitude was 25,500ft (which required oxygen). He has jumped in such exotic locales as Jordan, Bali and Canada.

Such highs have not come with serious lows. Jim has broken many bones, including his back, cracked his skull, which caused a blood clot, and once even jumped with a fractured back.

"Accidents happen with the weather, misjudging wind strengths, self-delusion over whether you can make a manoeuvre, or sheer overconfidence," says the father of one.

"There's a global group, based in America, called JOEs - Jumpers over Eighty. I asked the organiser if there's a JON - Jumpers over Ninety. She said I'd be the first!



### Eric Blenkinsop and the John Rock Bust

The suggestion of procuring a bronze bust of Lt Col John Rock was first mooted at the AEA OGM in Southampton 2006 and after being endorsed, the Chatham Branch was given the responsibility to carry out the project.

A small committee led by Eric was formed to raise the necessary funds, estimated at £7,500 + VAT for the cast bust alone. Initial lottery and other bids for assistance were unsuccessful but eventually enough funds were available and in December 2007 an order was placed with Vivien Mallock ARBS to create the bust.

**Eric Blenkinsop after 2 years of endeavour, bears witness to the unveiling of the Lt Col John Rock bust at Rock Barracks on Friday 21 November 2008**

Discussions were held with 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Assault) to provide a pedestal and base to be located in a Garden of Reflection they were currently designing at the barracks.

At this time several benefactors promised funds with the AEA branches contributing as well, and finally, a substantial cheque from the REA via the Regiment completed the financial side of things.

During this period Eric worked extremely hard keeping the project on course and gave the Association members regular updates on progress. At times it must have been not only a very frustrating business but also worrying until the financial aspects had been finalised.

The formal unveiling of the bust was held on the 21<sup>st</sup> November 2008 after a Medals Parade for the Regiment which had just returned from Afghanistan and takes pride of place in the Garden of reflection at Rock Barracks.

We all owe a deep debt of gratitude to Eric for all his hard work and enthusiasm for getting this project completed, and despite many obstacles, his perseverance prevailed and he saw the job through.

Who knows, without Eric's input into this project there may not even be a Barracks named after our founder.

## AEA Journal Online

### Dave Pace - AEA Web Master

The December 2021 issue of the AEA Journal will be the last printed issue, thereafter all Journal content will be available in the Members Only section of our website, click on "Members Only" on any of the site navigation bars

### Existing Journal Content on AEA Website:

A lot of Journal content is already in place on our site, site admin will continue to add old Journal content, however, some assistance will be required regarding the provision of Journal issues prior to 2003, which are not in the possession of site admin

## AEA Website General Overview

Website addresses: <https://www.airbornesappers.org.uk/> and <https://www.aea.org.uk/>

The AEA owns both of the above addresses, whichever one you use you'll be taken to the same content.

### Navigating the website

There are three types of navigation bar:

1. Top navigation bar - Available on every site page
2. Left navigation bar - Available on the Home page and a few other site pages
3. Bottom navigation bar - Available on every site page

### Contacting Site Admin

By email: [contactaeawebmaster@gmail.com](mailto:contactaeawebmaster@gmail.com) or via website Contact page - <https://www.aea.org.uk/contact.htm>

The site Contact page includes an email link (as shown above) and also a web form

By telephone: Mobile 07977 282 620 or Landline [REDACTED] or by post: 169, College Road, Deal, Kent CT14 6BX

Please note: Site Admin is not of a generation where his mobile has been grafted onto his ear so if you get no reply please leave a message, including your name and contact details and he will get back to you. The Landline number has a call screening process before you can speak to anyone or leave a message so please be patient with it, again if you get no reply leave a message

Please provide your AEA membership number as a proof of identity on any contact

Future Journal Content on AEA Website: It is yet to be decided if the role of Journal Editor will continue when we move to online only content. From January 2022, unless notified otherwise, please plan on sending any content to site admin as shown above.

### Access to Members Only Content

Access to the Members Only content is password protected. If you do not have or have forgotten your username and password please get in touch with Dave Pace by the means shown above.

### Site Updates

A relatively new feature of our site is to show site updates as follows:

1. A date for the last site content update will be included in the Home page welcome text
2. All updates within a three to four month period will be listed in the Site News page

Our aim is to provide an interesting web site to our members and to site visitors. The printed version of the Journal has always been a popular publication, let's keep that going in the online version.

If you have any questions, concerns or comments about any of the above please get in touch.



## Obituaries

**Bill Shield 28<sup>th</sup> February 1937-14<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

By Ray Ogden



Bill was a founder member of the AEA Chatham Branch and remained a very active, enthusiastic, member ever since.

His father was serving with the army in Egypt where Bill was born, and the family returned to England when he was 3 years old. After school, Bill started his career as a Plummer, and on completion of his apprenticeship, was drafted into National service where we first met in the same intake during March 1958 at Malvern. This was the "Teddy boy era" and we were just getting to know each other, when we were asked to go for a haircut after which we had a good laugh trying to learn who was who again!

From Malvern we completed our basic training at Cove. Bill then joined 9 Para. Sqn. RE. And I joined 36 Eng. Regt. Following our National service, we met again when we both joined 131 Para Eng. Reg. (TA) and during this time we went to Aden. It was the first time since the war that a TA unit was posted to active service. After 44 Para Bde. disbanded, we were transferred to 395 Para Air Dispatch RCT, where Bill and I served 6 wonderful years as we had RAF food

instead of the usual 24 hour ration packs!

In the next defence review we all transferred to 562 Para. Sqn. RCT who ran the minor units pre Para. Selection a job that Bill thoroughly enjoyed. Bill was always an outstanding, example of what a fit, smart, disciplined paratrooper should look like and everyone respected and enjoyed his company. He had a barrel chest and whenever we did a right dress all our chins and feet would line up, but Bill's chest was proudly way out in front.

Bill met his wife Sylvia when they were sixteen years old and they married in 1960. He was the only one with a girlfriend during our basic training and was the envy of the rest of us because he received letters from her. I, my wife and children enjoyed a memorable camping holiday together with Bill, Sylvia and their 3 boys on the Isle of Wight, which before we had set up camp one of their boys ran into a barbed wire fence and had to be taken to hospital to be stitched!

He was a very keen and regular member of the Chatham branch, where he and Sylvia made many friends. Bill will be fondly remembered and sadly missed by all who were fortunate to know him.

### **Major Robin McGregor Ward**



Robin was born in Glasgow on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1929 to his parents John (Pop) and Ketron (Gat). He was the eldest of two children to his sister Zeyla. He was raised in Glasgow and educated at Kelvinside Academy, Glen Almond, and Glasgow University. Like many men of his generation Robin took part in his National Service, being in the military gave him an enormous amount of satisfaction, that and the fact he loved jumping out of planes. So, when his National Service was complete, he was inspired to sign up with the TA, rising to the rank of Major. Major Robin Ward was OC 300 Parachute Squadron, Royal Engineers in the late 1950's and early 60's this was one of the highlights of his life.

Robin was a keen sailor all his life, from the early years racing Dragons on the Firth of Clyde to more relaxed cruising on the West Coast. Together Kit & Robin started what his family believe to be the first Yacht Charter Company on the Clyde: Yacht Charter Clyde Ltd. Sport was also part of his life, Robin was a very fit young man. He was a runner, as was his father before him, so he always enjoyed athletics. Robin was Scottish sprint champion and a member of the British athletics team.

Robin was a member of many Learned Societies including the Royal Society of Chemistry and the Royal Historical Society. He was also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry and had been a member for over 60 years. He was tremendously proud of his PhD, achieved at a time in life when most others have put their feet up. He also developed a passion for medieval history, which led to his interest in early Merchant Shipping, culminating with the publication of his book 'The World of the Medieval Shipmaster'. He was rightly proud of his many achievements, they included being a published author a bachelor's degree in chemistry, master's in history, Doctorate in Medieval Maritime History and RYA Yacht Master Offshore. Robin was at his happiest, sitting in the sunshine with a good book or the TLS and a glass of Laphroaig. Preferably on a boat with Kit by his side.

### **Major Peter George Wade**

Peter was born on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1924 in Twickenham, the only son of Ernest Wentworth & Winifred Wade. He had two elder sisters, Doreen Winifred & Betty Aurielle. His father was a surgeon in the RAMC, serving in both World Wars, was awarded the OSO in 1918 and retired as a Brigadier in 1946. Because his father was stationed in India, once Peter reached school age he was sent to boarding school in England, first in Eastbourne and then at Sherborne School in Dorset.

In October 1939, while Peter was at school in Sherborne, his father, mother and two sisters were returning from India on the SS Yorkshire, when it was torpedoed and sunk by a German U-boat off the coast of Spain. Of the 281 passengers and crew, 58 were lost, including Peter's mother and two sisters, but his father was rescued.

Peter left Sherborne in 1942, and went to St John's, Cambridge to study Mechanical Science, also rowing for the College 2<sup>nd</sup> VIII.

However, after only a year he left university and started Officer Training with the Royal Engineers, becoming a Lieutenant in 1944. He was posted to Europe during the last year of the war and was wounded by shrapnel in 1945. He was promoted to Captain in 1946. In 1948 he returned to St John's to finish his interrupted studies, during which time he was a member of the St John's College Rugby team that won the Cambridge University Intercollegiate cup in both 1949 & 1950. He also rowed in the College Rugby boat. Returning to the Army, he decided to join the Airborne Forces. He applied to take a parachute course but was told there were no vacancies. Refusing to accept this, on his next leave he drove to the Regimental barracks in Aldershot and asked if they could fit him in, which, of course they did.

By 1952, he had transferred to the 9<sup>th</sup> Independent Airborne Squadron, Royal Engineers, with whom he was deployed to the Suez Canal Zone between about 1952 and 1954. In 1956 he was in Cyprus as Officer Commanding 2 Troop, attached to 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, the Parachute Regiment, for the EOKA Emergency, before heading by sea for Egypt during the Suez Crisis.

He was promoted to Major in 1958 and became, we believe, the first non-Parachute Regiment Officer to command 'P' Coy (Pegasus Company), the notorious Pre-Parachute Selection course, which he ran for 2 years. In 1960 he transferred fully into the Parachute Regiment with 2 Para.

Peter died peacefully at home in his sleep, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 2020.

#### Alex McLintock



My father is now laid to rest and I've now got round to providing some information for his obituary in the AEA journal.

My father Alex McLintock served as a Sapper in 1Tp 9 Indep Para Sqn from 1956:1960. He was a trained bricklayer and the Squadron was the obvious choice. He was a keen footballer and was in the squadron football team who were runners up in the Aldershot District Athletics Association Minor Units KO Competition 1957-58. (He still had the medal the team members were presented with, which I now have) He also appears in the Sqn football team photograph published in Fred Gray's book.

He saw active service with the squadron in Cyprus during the EOKA conflict and was awarded the GSM with Cyprus Bar (which I also now have).

He left the squadron in 1960 and returned to civilian life continuing as a bricklayer and master builder and was still laying bricks at the age of 70! He was extremely proud of his service in 9 Squadron and was over the moon when his son Alex (myself) also went to 9 Para Sqn. After a short illness he passed away peacefully in 9<sup>th</sup> February 2021 aged 83 years.

He remained a proud squadron man until the day he died. I know how proud he would be to know his obituary would be featured in the Airborne Engineers Journal for any surviving friends to see.

As his son and as a proud ex member of 9 Para Sqn, I greatly appreciate you as the editor doing this for me.

Many thanks from me and the family for publishing his obituary in the Airborne Engineers Journal.

#### Chris Green 30th April 1947 - 10th January 2021



Chris was born on the 30<sup>th</sup> April 1947 the youngest child of 7, in Sheldon, Birmingham. On leaving school he became an apprentice Painter and Decorator and later worked for Wimbush Bakery maintaining their premises, later working at Lucas, Land Rover Jaguar and the NHS as a chef.

Chris enlisted into 301 Squadron of 131 Parachute Engineer Regiment of 44 Brigade on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 1966 along with Tom Smith and John Phillips. Chris, Tom and John successfully completed basic training at Cove under Harry Ashurst and Joe Mally, pre-Para and then their Parachute course together in 1967. "Abingdon seemed like a holiday camp after Cove". On completion of their wings course they returned to the troop for continuation training and went into sections within 301 Squadron as combat engineers before Chris sort of migrated into the ACC, later RLC, as a chef but stayed with 131 Parachute Engineer Regiment.

Chris remained with 131 until 1999 when he was discharged after completing 33 years' service finishing as a Staff Sergeant. During this service he saw many changes with 131, with the Regiment being reduced to a Squadron and then being re-rolled to a Commando Squadron in

the late seventies. As you can imagine While serving a total of 33 years with 131, Chris saw service in Germany, Cyprus, Persian Gulf, Holland and Belgium.

His funeral was held on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 at Yardley Cemetery, Birmingham. Due to the current restrictions only 4 members of the AEA Birmingham Branch were in attendance. Members of that party carried the standards of the AEA Birmingham and the Royal British Legion.

**Lt Col Tim Robertson**  
By Lt Col Sam Hesketh



Unfortunately, I would have to say that I'm not in a position to write a full obit for Tim. I know several facts about him but hardly saw him after I left the Squadron in 1978 until his untimely death due to a fall from a ladder at his home in April. The facts I 'm able to recall are:

Tim was born in May 1945. He went to Wellington school in Berkshire and later on to Sandhurst RMA. At Wellington, he was one of a number of boys who joined the Para Regt TA in London and qualified as a parachutist. He had his wings as a cadet at Sandhurst, which was very rare. Completing his Sandhurst training, he joined the Corps, his father had been a full Colonel in the Sappers. Tim had an elder brother called Mike who was in the RGJ.

Tim first joined the Squadron sometime in the late 1960s, after he had attended RMCS, as the troop commander of 2 Troop.

He married Liz at roughly the same time and they had two children but their names and dates of birth are not known. I remember Liz was pregnant when I left in September 1971.

Tim returned as OC in January 1978 which was 18 months into my tour as 2iC. My next contact with Tim was when he was the Regimental 2iC at Nienburg. He was picked up for Lt-Colonel in 1984/85 and was promoted in 1985/86.

PB7 mishandled his career and he wasn't promoted again. I can't remember the details but it caused a bit of a stir at the time. I left the Army in 1990 and then saw him a couple of times at AEA gatherings/functions. That is my total knowledge of Tim, I'm afraid. He was a nice bloke and I really liked him. He was my boss twice and was very good at it.

**24179388 WO1 Gerry Bonner**  
By Pat Neal



In the Summer of 69 a fresh faced 16 year old travelled down from Clydebank to Dover to join the Junior Leaders Regiment. It was the start of a 30 year career serving his Queen and country with loyalty and pride.

In 1971 he, with other JLs, like Jim Harrower, Brian Spivey, Lofty Bourne and his room Lance Jack in Dover, Danny Gallagher, joined 9 Indep Para Sqn RE. Just a little matter of Pre-Para, P Coy and Abingdon to get through first.

On passing successfully, he entered the Sqn and was sent out to join them in NI where he became a member of 3 Tp.

Gerry went with the Sqn to Canada, Cyprus, a Tp job in Italy and many tours in NI. Gerry actually spent time every year from 1971 until the early 80s in the Province. In 1975 he went with the Sqn to Germany to do the German wings course.

Much to his annoyance we left him behind when the Sqn went to Hong Kong. He, instead, had to go to Chatham to learn to become a P & D. He had a good friend and fellow Glaswegian as company, Mr Louis Gallagher.

In 1977 Gerry together with Angus Morrison, John Sparham and Dave Knowles volunteered for Selection at 22 SAS, which all three passed and became members of the elite Regt, and Gerry still at the tender age of 22 years.

He spent most of his time in in the Regt in B Sqn. They asked him to stay a while longer and he actually served 23 years in the SAS. He was de-mobbed as a WO1 in 2000. For the next decade or so Gerry was in the security business, mostly in Gaza but also various other locations.

Gerry was married twice, firstly to Anne, they had 2 children in Patrick and Louise and secondly to Pauline , 2 more children came along in Gerry and Sarah. Gerry doted on his grandson Finlay whose little body was ravaged by that awful Meningitis. They had great fun together when Gerry cared for him whilst Sarah was working.

Gerry, with Gus Hayles and Mick Leather were the instigators in forming the new Wales and Southwest Branch of the AEA. He was looking forward to kick starting the branch again after lockdown period.

On Sunday morning of 3 April Pauline came down to find Gerry on the sofa with the TV on. His hands were in his pockets and legs crossed. He had died of heart problems. He was just over 3 weeks short of his 68th Birthday.

In recent years we had been in touch quite a bit, we were having great fun re - connecting with old Sqn friends. He was a quiet man and would let me rabbit on and then he would come out with pearls of wisdom. He was an intensely loyal man and extremely proud of his Sqn roots. I do believe he may be wearing his Sqn beret on his next journey.

God Speed Gerry, you were a good friend to me and many others.

**Chris Davies:** "The first time I met Gerry. I had just arrived in Canada (Sqn construction project) to take over 3 Tp (from John Moss). I walked along the front rank asking chaps their names and I couldn't understand Gerry's muttered response. It was only on the third time of asking, when I asked him to open his mouth that the man next to him said "he can't open his mouth. It's wired up." Another Sapper (Adge lies) had broken Gerry's jaw in a punch up a couple of days before. It wasn't a surprise to learn later that they were good mates! I have no idea what the punch up was about and I don't think they could remember either. Alcohol had been taken!! Gerry was a quiet, private man of few words - but tough as they come. A good man to have at your back in a spot of bother as he could be relied upon to be rock solid. Such a pity he has left us early. RIP"



### **Gerry Hicks**



A rather reserved gentleman, who despite being a member of the Aldershot branch for many years, rarely spoke of his previous military service. He is understood to have served in other units prior to joining 131 Para Engr Regt (TA) over the period 1955-63 where his troop was initially based in Guildford and later in Farnham, Surrey. His service days with 131 took him on exercises to Germany, Holland and numerous training areas around the UK.

He maintained his fitness by regular attendance at the gym from his late 70s into his early 80s,

Accompanied by his wife Nicole they rarely missed a branch meeting or function/BBQ and also joined other members of the branch on a pilgrimage to Normandy, organised by the late John Smith.

Gerry passed away at his home on 18<sup>th</sup> January and his cremation service was held at Guildford on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021 RIP Gerry

### **Eric Blenkinsop**

Eric sadly passed away aged 94 years on Thursday the 29<sup>th</sup> April 2021 in hospital, with his Daughter Anne, by his side.



Eric was born on the 6<sup>th</sup> May 1927.

He enlisted into the Army in 1942 aged 15 years, walking through the gates of the Army Technical School (Boys), Beachley Barracks, Chepstow as an aspiring Apprentice Bricklayer. During this time Eric, rose through the Ranks to become a Boy Company SSM.

On completion of his Apprentice training, he was then posted to Elgin, Scotland to continue with his Royal Engineer Training.

Eric, volunteered for Airborne Forces in 1947 and eventually arrived at the RE Airborne Increment at Barton Stacey in early 1948, then onto Parachute Training at Upper Heyford. On his successful completion of his Parachute Training Eric, went onto join 3 Airborne Sqn RE (1947 - 1948) in Neumunster, then part of 2<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Brigade Group.

During his time in Airborne Forces Eric, also served in 9 Airborne Sqn RE (1949 - 1956) & 301 Para Sqn RE TA (1956 - 1958), as a PSI.

Due to a knee injury sustained playing Rugby Eric's days in Airborne Forces came to an untimely end, he was persuaded to do a Clerk of Works (Construction) Course. Whilst on the Course, he met his much beloved Beccy, at the Pavilion Dance Hall, Gillingham.

Eric became a staunch member of both the AEA & AEA Chatham Branch. During his membership of the AEA Chatham Branch, held both positions as Branch President and Branch Chairman.

What must be for Eric, a truly memorable occasion and a tremendous achievement, was the procurement of a Bronze Bust of Lt Col John Rock. The Bust was unveiled in November 2002 (with Eric in attendance), and has pride of place in the Garden of Reflection, at Rock barracks, home of 23 Parachute Engineer Regiment RE.

Without Eric's hard work, perseverance and enthusiasm for the seeing the project through to its fruition; there may not have been either a Bronze Bust or a Royal Engineer Airborne Barracks, named after our founder.

Eric will be greatly missed by all who served with him or had the pleasure of his company over the years. Both the AEA & AEA Chatham Branch have lost a 'Fine Airborne Sapper' from within its Ranks.

He is survived by his daughter Anne, son Steven and their families.

These photos were on the inside rear cover of the original printed version

## Those Were The Days!



Eye spy -Jim Doubtfire, our beloved Louis, Brian Lacey & Willy Laurence with other reprobates of the Sqn



Officers on Parade - Haig Lines 1966/7  
Capt Roger Christie, Maj Paul Dickson & Capt Geoff Holder

### 3 Troop 9 Indep Para Sqn RE - Egypt 1954



1st Row: With little or no elbow room, (centre) Troop officer, Donald Spiers, Eric Blenkinsop Troop Sgt sitting on Donald Spiers Right - Tom Thornton Recce Sgt on Donald Spiers Left Side - on Right Side is Cpl Tom Smith - on his right is Cpl Hegerty - on his right is Cpl Brummy Parkes - to the left of Tom Thornton MT Cpl Peter Myatt, who finished up in the Army Air Corp as a Captain AFM

2<sup>nd</sup> Row: first of left is Don Lay, 7<sup>th</sup> from the left is Bob Wooley

3<sup>rd</sup> Row: 3<sup>rd</sup> from left is George Heard





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